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Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs

Estimates

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Office of the Premier
Cabinet Office

1st Session
43rd Parliament

Wednesday 13 September 2023

Comité permanent des finances et des affaires économiques

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Mercredi 13 septembre 2023

Chair: Ernie Hardeman
Clerk: Vanessa Kattar

Président : Ernie Hardeman
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CONTENTS

Wednesday 13 September 2023

Estimates	F-791
Treasury Board Secretariat.....	F-791
Hon. Caroline Mulroney	
Ms. Shannon Fenton	
Mr. Chris Gonsalves	
Ms. Beili Wong	
Mr. Sanjeev Batra	
Mr. Bernie Derible	
Office of the Premier.....	F-801
Hon. Paul Calandra	
Mr. Robert Foster	
Mr. Don Fawcett	
Cabinet Office	F-820
Hon. Paul Calandra	
Hon. Parm Gill	
Mr. Robert Foster	

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON
FINANCE AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS**

Wednesday 13 September 2023

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

**COMITÉ PERMANENT DES FINANCES
ET DES AFFAIRES ÉCONOMIQUES**

Mercredi 13 septembre 2023

The committee met at 0900 in committee room 1.

ESTIMATES

TREASURY BOARD SECRETARIAT

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Good morning, everyone. I call the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs to order.

The committee will now resume consideration of estimates of the Treasury Board Secretariat, vote 3401. There is now a total of one hour and six minutes remaining for review of these estimates. When the committee last adjourned, the independent members had three minutes and 57 seconds remaining, so that's where we'll start. MPP Bowman.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Good morning, Minister. My question is about Supply Ontario and Supply Chain Ontario. In January 2021, the government created Supply Ontario, with a promise to centralize public sector procurement, resulting in millions of dollars of savings and also reducing red tape. But, to date, Supply Ontario has spent millions of dollars on consultants, has its third CEO since its inception, is now under a second ministry, has expanded its staffing and organization structure through multiple external hires and is now re-creating what was there before by integrating the very organization that it criticized.

Initially, Supply Ontario was to be fully operational by November 2023, but with some successes and savings along the way. With the millions of dollars that have been spent every year since its inception, and no reported savings to date, could the minister please talk about when Supply Ontario can commit to a return on investment for the millions of dollars that it has spent so far?

Hon. Caroline Mulroney: Thank you very much, MPP Bowman, for the question—very topical today, as the Ontario Chamber of Commerce has released a report, which I look forward to reviewing and working with our partners on how to improve supply chain processes here in Ontario.

The pandemic really showed the need to enhance supply chain management and the procurement process across the public sector. Our government, now through Supply Ontario, will be working with more than 6,000 different public sector entities to try to consolidate and collaborate so that we can improve outcomes for Ontarians on the procurement side.

In terms of the history of this work, we started early on in our first mandate, but the pandemic really showed the

need to redouble our efforts. And so, the first stages of establishing this new sector within the government, within Treasury Board, really was to build out the organizational structure and capacity that's required to be able to deliver these kinds of savings for Ontarians.

With that, I'm going to turn it over to officials to talk a little bit more in detail about what that first phase was. But now we're moving into really working within that organization to identify those opportunities to harmonize contracts and to consolidate government spending, so that we can deliver better value for Ontario taxpayers.

Ms. Shannon Fenton: Thank you, Minister, and thank you, member, for the question. I'm Shannon Fenton, acting deputy minister for the Treasury Board Secretariat. Before I turn it over to my colleague ADM Chris Gonsalves, I just want to really thank you for the opportunity to speak to the importance of procurement and the efforts to modernize procurement through the Supply Ontario agency—

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Just because I only have one minute, I'd really like you to focus on the savings to date and how you're going to get more, because my point, I think, is that you spent about \$20 million last year, you're upping the budget this year, and I don't think there have been reported savings to date. I guess I'm trying to say, how much confidence can we have that there will be reported savings from the work in this next phase?

Ms. Shannon Fenton: Understood. Thank you. I'll hand it over to my colleague Chris.

Mr. Chris Gonsalves: Thank you. Chris Gonsalves, ADM of the supply chain policy and oversight division. I want to thank the member for the question, and thank the minister and Associate Deputy Minister Fenton for passing it to me.

Just building on the comments that have been made: As the minister said yesterday in her opening—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): That's a really good answer, but the time is up. Thank you very much.

We'll now go to the government side. MPP Crawford.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Good morning to the witnesses here. Welcome to our committee. I appreciate, Minister Mulroney, that you've obviously been in the role a very short time. Congratulations on your new role.

My question really starts with fiscal responsibility. I wanted to get a sense as to how the Treasury Board is ensuring public dollars are managed responsibly with respect to taxpayers. Taxpayers expect this from government. We have approximately a \$200-billion budget for the province of

Ontario, which is by far the largest provincial budget in the province. You did mention yesterday, as well, the fiscal best practices that the Treasury Board ensures to respecting taxpayer money, so I wonder if you could elaborate on that.

Hon. Caroline Mulroney: Thank you very much for the great question. You're correct, we need to have robust processes in place to ensure that taxpayer dollars are fully accounted for and approved of, and I'm happy to add that that process is transparent. The estimates that we provide are the government's formal request, as you know, to the Legislature for legal authority to incur expenditures during the fiscal year, and that really is a pillar of our system, that the Legislature approves all spending by the government. I can tell you that, as a member of Treasury Board, I know, as I have for many years, that the people at Treasury Board Secretariat do a tremendous job of ensuring that those processes are as transparent as possible, and that was a big theme yesterday.

I just want to illustrate the process using the most recent example, which is the expenditure estimates that provide a detailed public record of government ministries' and offices' budgets in alignment with the spending plans that are outlined in the 2023 budget. Upon tabling, the estimates, as you know, are referred to the relevant standing committees of the Legislature, which leads us here today, where members of this standing committee are studying our Treasury Board estimates. And once these are approved by the Legislature in what is called the Supply Act, the estimates become the legal spending authority for government ministries, offices and the legislative offices.

Now, I will turn it over to my officials to speak more.

Ms. Shannon Fenton: Thank you, Minister. Just to reiterate what the minister had to say about the estimates process the Treasury Board Secretariat has responsibility for guiding. Ministries produce those documents for the Legislature for review for committees like this to be able to ask questions before they are approved and confirmed and released to the public. It's a very important element of the transparency of the expenditure management process and part of the overall fiscal planning. Thank you for the question.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Okay, thanks. The government has made a very ambitious plan to build infrastructure in the province of Ontario. We have 500,000 people that came to the province in the last year from other parts of Canada and other parts of the world, so this obviously puts pressures on infrastructure, highways, transit, schools, hospitals, and I wanted to get a sense as to how the Treasury Board helps ensure that the government delivers on these commitments to build this infrastructure. What role does Treasury Board play in that sense?

Hon. Caroline Mulroney: Well, Treasury Board's role is expenditure management. Our government sets the priorities, which we put to the people of Ontario back in 2018 and then again in 2022, when we were elected with a larger majority because the people of Ontario want us to deliver on the commitments that we made to them during that cam-

paign. And as members will recall, delivering on infrastructure was a key pillar that our Premier put forward and, I believe, that people expect us to deliver on.

Obviously, highways, roads, bridges, hospitals, schools: We need to have the infrastructure in place, not only for the people who are here today but for all the people who will be coming to Ontario. I think no one is surprised that people want to move here, but I think even the volume that we've been seeing over the last few years has been surprising, so we need to make sure that our infrastructure is keeping pace with these growing demands.

In my previous role as Minister of Transportation, I had the honour of leading some of the work on that file to ensure that we had the transit, the roads and highways to keep our transportation network efficient and resilient, making sure that it was growing to meet those needs. And today, in this new role, we want to make sure that we're in a fiscal position to be able to deliver on those commitments to Ontarians. So we are looking through the different processes, and I'm going to turn it over to the officials to speak in technical detail about what we do, making sure that we have the fiscal room, that we have the processes in place to challenge the ministries when they come forward with some of their plans to make sure that we really are delivering the best value for money for taxpayers. We work closely with, for instance, Infrastructure Ontario to understand the projects that they're bringing forward and understand the recommendations they make so that we can put them in the larger fiscal context of our government's commitments to the people of Ontario—not just on roads, highways, transit, but also with respect to schools and hospitals. We want to make sure that we can deliver on those commitments in the most effective and efficient way possible for Ontarians.

0910

Ms. Shannon Fenton: Thank you, Minister, and thank you for the question. I will ask my colleague the comptroller general to come and speak in a moment to the enterprise risk-management approach. I think assessing risk to the plan and being able to dedicate resources appropriately and in alignment with government priorities is a really key part of the answer to your question, member. But more generally, Treasury Board Secretariat provides support to Treasury Board and Management Board of Cabinet in making sure that there is sufficient due diligence on request that resources are aligned with priorities and, as we move through the fiscal year, that spending is accountable, transparent and that resources are used as efficiently as possible.

So perhaps if I may ask my colleague the comptroller general to come and speak more in particular to the approach to addressing risks and assessing risks and ensuring those are dealt with in relation to infrastructure and then any other issues within the fiscal plan.

Ms. Beili Wong: Good morning. My name is Beili Wong. I'm the comptroller general and the associate deputy minister.

The Office of the Comptroller General is responsible for enterprise-wide direction and leadership for provincial comptrollership, enterprise risk management and oversight with respect to the internal audit function. With respect to

infrastructure investments, one of the things we have started doing is, within the Treasury Board submission process and also within the strategic planning process, we've embedded enterprise risk management into that. So risks were identified, risks were managed and risks were mitigated throughout the submission process and the planning process as well.

In addition, within the public accounts, on an annual basis we're also reporting on the infrastructure and the capital expanding. Those public accounts are in accordance with the public sector accounting standards and are audited by the Office of the Auditor General as well to ensure transparency of financial reporting.

Hon. Caroline Mulroney: I'll just add that our government, under the leadership of the now Minister of Finance—when he was President of Treasury Board, he established a new audit and accountability committee within Treasury Board. The comptroller general was closely involved with establishing that committee—it was just a different committee of Treasury Board—to provide an internal audit program of all the programs that we do have within different ministries to make sure that we're delivering value for money for Ontarians but also ensuring that those programs are delivering quality services, as they are meant to do. Perhaps the comptroller general can speak a little bit more on that point.

Ms. Beili Wong: Thank you, Minister. Within the Ontario internal audit division, it independently identifies audit priorities that are strategy-aligned, risk-based, process-focused and also stakeholder-inclusive, and the internal audit planning process is based on industry best practice and in line with the Institute of Internal Auditors professional practice standards and also code of ethics as well. Priorities are identified based on cost-cutting risks, trends, competing ministry priorities and other external audit activities and in consultation with key stakeholders. It can be assurance in nature and can be advisory in nature as well.

As the minister mentioned, infrastructure capital spending is one of the key priorities and is also being considered by the Ontario internal audit division in its audit plan and audit execution.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Okay. And, Ms. Wong, if I could just ask one more question before I pass it off: In your capacity, in what you do in the Treasury Board, have you seen processes and controls improve over the last number of years? Everyone is always looking for improvements and better controls in any organization or government, obviously. Have you seen that, and could you maybe give me an example of where things have improved in terms of accountability?

Ms. Beili Wong: On an annual basis, the Ontario internal audit division does a number of audits, and they also issue audit recommendations as well. One of the key processes that OIAD—that's the Ontario internal audit division—has put in is very rigorous follow-up steps in terms of audit recommendations, so making sure not only that there are audit findings, there are areas for improvement and there are all the recommendations; there is follow-up and implementation of those other recommendations, as well.

I'm going to also ask our chief internal auditor, Sanjeev Batra—I believe he is online—to probably speak in a little bit more detail with respect to the specifics in your question. Thank you, Sanjeev.

Mr. Sanjeev Batra: Sanjeev Batra, assistant deputy minister and chief internal auditor. Good morning. I hope everyone is doing well. Thank you, Associate Deputy Minister, for passing that over to me.

Absolutely, the internal audit function does monitor progress of recommendations that are made in our reports. We do see that the recommendations are taken very seriously by ministries and the recipients of our audit reports, and we do monitor areas where we feel that closure is not tracking as per expected timelines and do report that to the respective audit committees.

But to answer your question, yes, we certainly do see progress, and over time a new risk may emerge, which may result in new recommendations, and we continue to add that into our process and communicate any risks or concerns that we may have to both the ministries and to the respective audit committees.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): MPP Byers?

Mr. Rick Byers: Thank you, Minister and team, for this discussion. In fact, I'd like to just have a quick continuation of this.

You've answered a lot, in great form, describing the process and the controls in place. I know you interact with other ministries in various projects, be they hospitals or schools. Just to do a random pick, in the town of Markdale, which happens to be in the beautiful riding of Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound, there's actually a ribbon cutting tomorrow for the new Markdale Hospital, which is very exciting. That would have been a project managed by the Ministry of Health. Just to elaborate: How do you interact with the ministries in terms of their projects on an ongoing basis? Because you want to make sure they're fully responsible, but also that you have eyes on what they're doing. I'm just curious. It's a little bit of a continuation of this questioning, if you will.

Hon. Caroline Mulroney: Well, thank you for the question. I hope you'll be able to make it tomorrow for the ribbon cutting.

Mr. Rick Byers: I'll be there for sure.

Hon. Caroline Mulroney: It's a big day for your riding.

Before I turn it over to officials, what I will say is that the Ministry of Health will bring forward their capital plans for new infrastructure or redeveloped infrastructure—any kind of renovations on existing infrastructure—and they'll bring that through to Treasury Board. The capital division within Treasury Board will do an analysis of that. Infrastructure Ontario, especially for a new hospital, will also be involved. It might be a joint submission between the Ministries of Infrastructure and Health, but it will be a Ministry of Health lead, and that will be within the Ministry of Health's long-term capital plan. So the Ministry of Health will bring that forward, and the Office of the Comptroller General will work closely with them on their submission to make sure that we are delivering the project in an efficient

way, one that respects taxpayer dollars and any of the complexities of the market at the time in terms of the procurement of it, labour market needs and issues like that.

I'll turn it over to officials, and maybe they have some specifics on your particular project.

Ms. Shannon Fenton: Thank you, Minister, and thank you for the question, member. There are a number of ways that TBS as a ministry and the minister will have worked with ministries, including the Ministry of Health, in relation to a number of projects, including those tied to infrastructure.

I would say it starts, first and foremost, with the idea, the notion for the initiative or the build, where a ministry might put a submission forward to Treasury Board/Management Board of Cabinet to request resources for that project. That would be where—starting with officials and then through briefing processes, ensuring rigorous due diligence and following of rules—it would lead to the request and providing advice to TB/MBC to make a determination on that request in relation to other priorities and in the context of the fiscal plan.

Assuming approval, TBS also has responsibility for a number of corporate directives and rules. This would be where we would work closely with ministries to ensure that procurement rules are followed with relation to major public infrastructure or other sorts of procurements. So there's an opportunity to provide oversight and ensure checks and balances are followed by the ministries as they execute on their responsibilities.

0920

And then I would say, on an annual basis, TBS—also in close partnership with the Ministry of Finance—has responsibility for multi-year planning, the business planning process. That would be where we continue to review ministries' plans, their intended use of resources, their budgets. A particular outcome would be their estimates on an annual basis, but it's an opportunity for TBS and also informing the board—Treasury Board/Management Board of Cabinet—about the ongoing alignment with priorities and staying within efficiencies and the fiscal plan.

And then I would say, the comptroller general earlier talked to the function of audits, and that would be another opportunity and role for Treasury Board Secretariat to provide some oversight and ensure guardrails are maintained and the checks and balances against ministries' intentions and projects are followed to successful ribbon cutting and execution on projects like the hospital in your riding.

Mr. Rick Byers: That's great. Thank you very much; I appreciate it. Interacting on these important projects with many ministries is a challenge, and it really feels like you've got a great process in place to make sure that things are well managed, so thank you.

One more quick question: I want to understand a little bit about Emergency Management Ontario and this part of your mandate. We've all seen, particularly this summer, the wildfire activity and these things that you can't plan. Last year there were hardly any in the province, and this year there were a lot. I appreciate, Minister, that you're still drinking from a firehose, so to speak, but I want to understand, relatedly, how you look at this area, how you can

manage expenditures in a clearly volatile area and what processes you have in place to, frankly, be able to both react quickly to things as needed but, as well, manage the process and expenditures. I'm curious about that.

Hon. Caroline Mulroney: Thank you very much for the question. It's a great opportunity to talk about—not a new initiative, but some important work that's being done within the Treasury Board Secretariat.

Emergency Management Ontario had been within the purview of the Solicitor General's ministry and then was moved to Treasury Board Secretariat because, as a central agency, it is believed that this new placement will allow for a more nimble response to this growing number of emergencies that we see across the province. It was important to do so, because the safety and well-being of Ontarians is, of course, all of our top priority.

Before I turn it over to Deputy Minister Derible, what I will say is that in February of this year we released the Provincial Emergency Management Strategy and Action Plan to move emergency management forward. For the first time anywhere in Canada, the government of Ontario will now be required to report publicly and annually on our emergency management services.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Hon. Caroline Mulroney: This past year alone, we conducted 35 emergency exercises and drills to test those emergency plans and procedures. There was funding in the budget as well—\$110 million—to create the new emergency management preparedness grant as well as establish a commissioner.

Now I'll turn it over to said commissioner.

Mr. Bernie Derible: With what time is left, thank you, Minister, Chair, members. My name is Bernie Derible, and I'm the commissioner and deputy minister of Emergency Management Ontario. It's a real honour to be able to be here today. With the time left: A safe, practised and prepared Ontario is where we're going—a proactive approach. It resonates with people to be looked after, prepared, practised and safe, and that's what we intend to do. We have the allocations. We have money that has been assigned. There's a great volume of work that shows a 13- to 15-time return on investment.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much for that. We'll now go to the official opposition: MPP Fife.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I'm going to continue on the Supply Ontario line of questioning, (1) because the report is coming out today, of course, and (2) because I did bring a private member's bill before the Legislature in 2021. I had met with the staff from Supply Ontario at that time to try to gain a better understanding of any alignment between diversifying the supply chain, supporting local businesses, becoming more resilient as a province by securing our own products. These are lessons that we should be learning—the learning should be ongoing—following the pandemic.

It was described to me at the time as one-stop shopping, if you will, a portal that businesses could apply for to provide the government as a whole services, products and goods, and any number of issues, like HVAC units for

classrooms, personal protective equipment, and even catering services that the government has used for years and years. Even at that meeting that I had, it was fairly opaque as to how this was going to proceed. I definitely got the sense that it was a work in motion and that there was no rudder to this particular vehicle, Supply Ontario. So it is not that surprising that a couple of years later, we are seeing the reinvention of Supply Ontario.

Of course, procurement has great economic value for the province, and government can be supporting diverse vendors and supporting local businesses. These are laudable goals, right? The Ontario Chamber of Commerce actually endorsed my private member's bill because this concept is long overdue. Even though the government voted it down, I still have been following Supply Ontario, and I can tell you, it has not been easy to track the funding. I think that you have your work cut out for you, Minister, with regards to this particular file.

The question remains, though—after, now, \$20 million; the reinvention of who has responsibility, what their mandate is, even what the goals are—where are the cost savings? Because that streamlined perspective was the sell point on Supply Ontario. So, without thanking everybody, can you please identify where the savings are and if there are any, indeed, savings?

Hon. Caroline Mulroney: I'd like to thank MPP Fife for the question. I'm happy to hear that we're aligned on the importance of delivering these cost savings for Ontarians. The imperative, I think, is very clear. The government of Ontario procures \$30 billion of goods and services annually. We saw, during the pandemic, the importance of being able to procure these goods, especially PPE, quickly and in a way that's cost-effective. Our efforts were really focused on delivering those goods and services during the pandemic, and there was a lot of learning that occurred and that's being integrated into the work that Supply Ontario is now doing—

Ms. Catherine Fife: I'm just trying to get an update, Minister, on where they are right now, specifically with savings, if there are any.

Hon. Caroline Mulroney: I will turn it over to officials, but I will say, as I indicated, the first phase in setting up this kind of an agency, which does such important work across thousands of entities, is to build up that organizational capacity and make sure we set up the right framework to do the work. Because purchasing is not just about price, and that was reported today. I thought it was well highlighted that, really, we're looking for value for money, but the evaluation of value for money also considers other costs and benefits, including social—

Ms. Catherine Fife: So are you concerned by the lack of progress, then, Minister, on—

Hon. Caroline Mulroney: No. Actually, in my new role, I'm looking forward to sitting down with members of Supply Ontario to understand the framework that they've been working on, that they will be guided by as they move forward on this important file.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Okay. Now, let's get to the savings, if there are any.

Hon. Caroline Mulroney: I'll turn it over to officials.

Mr. Chris Gonsalves: Thank you for the question.

Building on the minister's remarks: She touched on the number of entities that are involved and the magnitude of the spending. It's important to recognize that supply chain transformation is and always was going to be a multi-year transformation journey in the complex landscape that Supply Ontario, with this mandate, involves. As the minister said, the focus of the agency is on getting more value for the province's procurement spend, which isn't just about savings, which is about value for money—

Ms. Catherine Fife: Yes, I got that.

Mr. Chris Gonsalves: —which is about resilience, which is about economic development. We recently launched the Building Ontario Business Initiative, so we're actually looking at using procurement spend to support Ontario businesses and level the playing field for Ontario businesses.

0930

I think in the current climate, with what has happened with prices over the past couple of years, it's really important for an agency like Supply Ontario to be able to increasingly have line-of-sight and management of provincial spend, to deliver on those benefits. As was previously noted—

Ms. Catherine Fife: Do you have a figure for me, please? Because I have limited time.

Mr. Chris Gonsalves: Yes, so I think we'd just state that we've recently transitioned significant operations, including the government's pandemic stockpile and our vendor-of-record program, from government into the agency, which they are now accountable for managing. Those programs have historically benefited government entities that have purchased from them, and Supply Ontario will have stewardship of this going forward.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Okay. I—

Hon. Caroline Mulroney: Could I just add, because it might be relevant to you: Chris just mentioned the Building Ontario Businesses Initiative Act, which came into effect just this month, September 1, for the OPS, and will in January for the broader public service. When we're looking at value for money for Ontarians, it's not just savings, but also, as I said, the social and economic benefits. One of the examples that the ministry uses, which is guiding its work on this file, is a tech start-up in Waterloo—

Ms. Catherine Fife: That's who I heard from, actually, around the transparency of the process.

Hon. Caroline Mulroney: I'll just tell you: Obviously the tech start-up pays fair wages for its employees, which may result in higher costs to develop software, higher than some of its overseas competitors. But with this act, BOBI, in place, when bidding for government procurement contracts, the socio-economic factors will also be taken into consideration, giving that company a chance to bid on Ontario procurement contracts. I think it will help level the playing field and deliver value for Ontarians.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you very much for that, Minister. I mean, we're in agreement: Queen's Park needs more Waterloo, without a doubt, and there are solutions there that government can tap into. But what I have heard loud and clear from companies across the province is that there

is a lack of transparency around the process. So I'm going to leave that with you, because that's a key part to reducing barriers to access those goods and services across the province.

I am going to move over to Emergency Measures Ontario. Really, the minister highlighted this: your responsibility, as outlined in the estimates that we received. Obviously, the first thing that you think about is wildfires, because this has been a very painful summer for so many communities. The minister referenced all the communities that had to be evacuated.

It is worth noting that Ontario is 50 fire crews short because there was a reduction in this budget item by 67% for wildfire management programs. I did review the plan that was released for the first time in February of this past year, and I note that the five pillars are prevention, mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery.

There is a long-standing issue with regard to getting ahead or planning for potential natural disasters, especially in this current stage of climate change. I did want to note that certainly the people on the ground, who are in these communities, who are doing this very important and often life-saving work, have noted that there are 660 workers, they have fought 695 fires to date, and due to low staffing, they needed help to do that, so we've had to call in resources. I'm putting this on the record because this is obviously a health and safety issue, and it isn't going away anywhere. So I'm trying to make the case for investment in mitigation and in prevention, because that's where the smart money is.

But Emergency Measures Ontario is also responsible for cyber security threats, pandemics or natural disasters, right? Looking at the estimates and evaluating some of the challenges that your ministry is going to be facing around, certainly, the resurgence of COVID-19—and I think that we can all agree that COVID-19 was the single largest provincial emergency in decades; important lessons need to be learned from that experience. And based on the plan that the ministry has put out, the emergency measures response plan, it also cites that it “outlines initiatives to augment and support municipal and First Nations emergency strategies,” which really sounds good. Municipalities are so important, obviously, in that first response and on the ground, and often we look to our municipal leaders to address these issues. And certainly public health is a major factor in that, especially with the pandemic.

Having learned how prevention actually saves money, but also saves lives, more importantly, I wanted to get a sense of where you are on the public health funding, because while the small increase of 5% was announced at AMO this last year—how is your ministry looking at streamlining that investment to public health, especially ahead of a very scary fall that we have before us with regard to COVID rates and disease prevention?

Hon. Caroline Mulroney: Thank you for the question. You raised the issue of mitigation, and I think your question about public health funding obviously goes directly to that. We are working to support the Ministry of Health as well as the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation

and Parks on their environmental mitigation measures. They are so important given the increase in emergencies that we've seen. I'm very proud of the work that our government has done to respond to these emergencies and working collaboratively with different partners in this space, including municipalities, to make sure that the people on the ground are well supported. That's why in the budget of last year, we announced \$110 million to create a new emergency management preparedness grant so that we can coordinate those activities on the ground better and collaborate with those who are delivering these emergency management services.

I'll turn it over to the commissioner to speak in more detail about some of the great work that we've been doing at EMO.

Mr. Bernie Derible: Thank you, Minister, and again, good morning, members and Chair. I'll just again say, MPP Fife, thank you for highlighting the five pillars. Very few people actually understand those five pillars and the first three are the most critical—preparedness, planning and mitigation—and that's why it's wonderful to be able to speak today, first of all, about the Provincial Emergency Management Strategy and Action Plan that actually highlights that. It highlights the proactive measures, and I'll give some really interesting examples of that.

Our teams, led by myself, have spoken to over 200 municipalities and mayors directly. There's chief administration officers; there are community emergency management coordinators. I wanted to hear from them: What do they need in those communities? What do they need in, particularly, the smaller municipalities, the rural municipalities? I made a point of getting that information before we drafted the action plan. There were 37 different exercises across Ontario to include the largest nuclear preparedness exercise in North America that happened in the last year. Additionally, over 7,000 members of Ontario communities have received training directly from Emergency Management Ontario. This speaks to the prevention piece, the preparedness piece—

Ms. Catherine Fife: And I really do appreciate that. Honestly, I think that all MPPs actually should get a briefing on those goals, those five pillars, because I do agree with you.

But on the public health piece, the reason I raised this is because you can have the best plan in the world, but it does need to be resourced and the money needs to be very clearly invested. When we did look at last year's budget—I want you to have that money, by the way; I want Emergency Measures Ontario to be well resourced, as does the official opposition. But when we examine the interim total expenses from the previous budget year and the amount that this government has allocated for, say, municipalities—who you, quite rightly, consulted with. I'm sure that you heard from those municipalities and they said, “Listen, you resource us. We'll be prepared and we will plan. We will plan for what, sometimes, you can't plan for.” In the last year, Municipal Affairs received \$124.4 million less, so that's my concern. My concern is that we are not resourcing it. And then in the 2022 budget, the province had to cover portions of Toronto's budget by \$700 million.

0940

What I'm trying to identify here is the disconnect between having a good plan to deal with emergency measures and then the funding piece. I know that you have an internal audit process within the estimates; it's on page 12. How does the minister in her new role make the case for strategic investment around prevention? I'm particularly focused on public health because municipalities are on the front line for those public health dollars. So do you want to address public health?

Hon. Caroline Mulroney: Well, our government has been focused on supporting our municipalities, especially through the challenges that we all experienced during the pandemic. We have been a great partner to municipalities—you mentioned the city of Toronto—in making them whole, as their revenues have declined, certainly, as I saw, on transit, making sure that they had the resources they needed. And on public health, we have been great partners and I know we will continue to be.

So what we will do is continue to work with municipalities to hear directly from them, as the commissioner said. Part of the work that TBS did to understand the needs for emergency preparedness involved consulting with municipalities and hearing from them about their challenges. So if they're raising challenges related to public health, then we will certainly work with the Ministry of Health and share that information with them to make sure that they have the same information that we do so that we can ensure that Ontario is on the best footing to deal with these growing number of emergencies.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you, Minister. I'm glad that you raised the issue of making municipalities whole, because Bill 23 obviously removed a funding mechanism for municipalities to pay for infrastructure, and this infrastructure will relate to emergencies—flooding that is happening, for instance. Toronto saw it; Ottawa saw it. This is why the municipal funding needs to get to them. So I'm just trying to understand the barriers of why that hasn't happened.

We've seen a number of instances of this government promising funding in their budget or various announcements and then later heard from agencies that the money never came, and it was a delay impacting services. So instead of us being reactive—that's why I mentioned those five pillars—it makes sense to fund municipalities in an open and transparent way and make sure that that money—even envelope it, allocate it specifically for those initiatives.

So I need to better understand why there's such a delay in the way that funding flows. Perhaps the comptroller can explain why the money doesn't get to the municipalities. Who in the Treasury Board made the assessment that municipalities would receive \$124 million less last year? Can you—

Hon. Caroline Mulroney: Well, if I can go to your point about funding, our government has, as I said, been great partners with municipalities. We've reached historic agreements in various sectors to fund municipal priorities. Funding is an important component, obviously, but so is collaboration.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Hon. Caroline Mulroney: As I've been in this role for about a week now, I've realized the extent to which collaboration has really underpinned the important work that EMO has been doing, because you can direct \$110 million, but if you're not working closely with your partners on the ground, you won't be able to help Ontarians who need to be evacuated, municipalities that need to be cleaned up, make sure that we're prepared for—

Ms. Catherine Fife: Well, municipalities have said that Bill 23 will cost them \$1 billion a year in lost revenue. That's a huge deficit. So I think that those will be some of the challenges that you face as the minister.

Right now, municipalities are not feeling respected in Ontario. They're feeling almost patronized, and that's been made very clear by the Association of Municipalities of Ontario. Now that the facilitators were brought in and now that the facilitators are going to be brought out to do their audits on their books, my concern, as we go into a very dangerous fall, is that if we're not prepared, if we're not focused on prevention, then public health will suffer—

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Thank you very much. That concludes the time.

We now go to the independent. MPP Bowman.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: I have a background in finance. I'm a former auditor. I have some experience in supply chain and procurement, and it really is troubling to me what we're seeing from Supply Ontario. Again, I think it's fair to say that spending of approximately \$50 million in the last couple of years has resulted in zero reported savings. That was very clear: There are no reported savings. And now, we have that very agency that was created to obtain savings now in charge of—as you pointed out, Minister—\$30 billion of spend, which is, again, taxpayer money.

I appreciate your comments around value for money. I think we all want value for money. I understand it's not just about savings, and I absolutely support initiatives that can enhance and support Ontario's economy. But I think the government needs to face up to the fact that we have not seen savings from this agency, and that there will be a very significant challenge in doing so.

We also have a lack of transparency. We've had the \$8.3-billion greenbelt giveaway. We now have a CEO of Supply Ontario—again, overseeing \$30 billion of spend—who's a former chief of staff to the Premier. We have an agency that is procuring medical hospital equipment etc. where the CEO is the husband to the secretary of cabinet. So there is a lot of opportunity for interference, and again, given what we've seen lately with the Auditor General report around the greenbelt, the Integrity Commissioner report, I'm having some doubts about the ability of your government to achieve these savings and to provide transparency around that \$30 billion of spending. So I'm wondering what you can say to assure me and other taxpayers that that \$30 billion will not be subject to political interference, and that we will see some savings.

Hon. Caroline Mulroney: Thank you very much for the question. I can tell you that our government is committed to transparency. Part of the process here today is for members of the government and the opposition to ask questions

of the ministry officials about the detailed estimates that are provided to Ontarians, and that's part of the rigour of our government and our democracy: to make sure that people have the chance to challenge it. So we're here today to answer those questions, committed to transparency.

Supply Ontario is a big part of the mandate at Treasury Board Secretariat, one that I look forward to working on, because I know how important it is to ensure that those \$30 billion of goods and services are procured in the most effective way possible, but also one that delivers real value for Ontarians—and we can define value in different ways, depending on what those goods and services are. We saw the importance of it during the pandemic, but as we move forward, we need to make sure that we're able to navigate the complexities of the different procurement processes.

You indicated you're an expert in this, and so I can tell you I'm not yet, but I hope to become very soon. I will turn it over to the expert, Chris, to speak in more detail about some of the work that we've been doing to ensure that that transparency is there and that value is delivered.

Mr. Chris Gonsalves: Thank you, Minister, and thank you for the question.

Building on some of your comments and putting it in the context of the mandate of Supply Ontario—with a mandate to transform how the entire public sector does supply chain and procurement, and thinking about the thousands of entities that are conducting procurements for themselves today and the complexity associated with transforming how that works so that it is under Supply Ontario. I think that is an opportunity to bring a greater level of excellence and transparency around the process.

Public procurement, as you know, is built on principles of openness, fairness and transparency. We're accountable in legislation, we're accountable in trade agreements, to hold to that. Supply Ontario is held to those same standards and, as I mentioned, we've transitioned some mature businesses to them, and so with that comes the expertise.

There's lots of expertise in these other entities in the province that are doing work, and the time and the mission of Supply Ontario is to work with all of these entities, to partner and collaborate with them—picking up on a comment that the minister said—to transform how the whole system works, to deliver on the different benefits that we talked about: value for money, resilience and economic development.

0950

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Thank you. I think that having a sole-source partnership with Mohawk Medbuy recently, in late 2021, is an example of, again, I would say, a bit of a lack of transparency and fair process. I would encourage the minister—sorry, to clarify, I'm not an expert; I have some experience, I said, in strategic sourcing—that there do need to be competitive bids and processes. We now have a situation where one organization, Mohawk Medbuy, which, to my understanding—I would certainly be delighted to be corrected—is not subject to any public audits, is now spending a great deal of government money, taxpayer money, on supplies. I understand the nature of a centralized agency or organization to procure and the value

that that could create, but I don't think there's a lot of transparency around that organization. I would encourage the minister to look at that.

I just want to, again, highlight that I think that having spent two and a half years now with Supply Ontario being established and no reported savings—the mandate letter that went to the chair, in November 2022, basically gives the exact same mandate that was given when it was created. Again, acknowledging that there is some room for improvement—three CEOs in three years. I think there is a lot of room for improvement here, and I certainly am very interested and will be continuing to watch this file.

My second question goes to the contingency fund. We have \$3.9 billion in the contingency fund in the estimate this year. I would like to ask the minister her view on, again, how that serves the government's principles around transparency when that is relatively high and much higher than a typical contingency fund of about a billion dollars.

Hon. Caroline Mulroney: Well, thank you very much for the question. I think it's self-evident that the contingency fund exists on the province's books to help mitigate expense risks that may come up: cases where health and safety may be compromised—we saw that often during the pandemic—but also, more recently, for things like contingent liabilities associated with claims by Indigenous communities, making sure that we have the fiscal room to be able to respond to those liabilities as they come, as well as to other unforeseen events. So that's the purpose of having it.

We certainly are committed to transparency around all of our spending, which is why we provide our quarterly reporting. As you know, in a few weeks, the Minister of Finance and I will be presenting the province's public accounts.

Overall, I would just say that the province's books are audited regularly and annually by the Auditor General. That includes the use of the contingency fund. These are the audited numbers that I said will be released in the fall. We've had five so far—we've had five clean audits from the Auditor General. I salute the work of the people at Treasury Board who have been working closely with the Auditor General to make sure that we get those clean audits. But that does include the use and the size of the contingency fund.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Thank you. Certainly, I understand the nature of the contingency fund. I think what Ontarians are looking for is why they are of the size they are. We have a significant surplus. We've had record contingency funds. While we know there are things that can be unexpected, there's been a pattern of higher-than-expected contingency funds. I think that's really showing that lack of transparency around what is to come in terms of the spending. That's really what I'm highlighting here.

Again, the FAO has talked about this several times. While I appreciate the clean audit opinions, that's really just the bar we need to set for ourselves. There are other offices who have pointed out the risks and the lack of transparency around contingency funds, and it's just something that I will be watching, and I know Ontarians are too. Thank you, Minister.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much. That concludes the time.

We now go to the government. MPP Anand.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Welcome, Minister. My question is going to be on Supply Ontario. First of all—give me a second—you have started this role in a week, and I have started using my glasses for about a week, so I'm still struggling, but you seem to be doing well.

Minister, the government doesn't make money; we are the custodian for Ontario's money. We know that, every year, Ontario spends about \$30 billion in products and services, and Ontarians have an expectation that the money the government spends should directly benefit both the health and safety of Ontarians and, absolutely, our Ontario economy as well.

With that in mind, I would like to ask you what exactly Supply Ontario is and, more importantly, to the deputy minister—he was talking about how the government and Supply Ontario can support our local Ontario businesses—if you can elaborate so that those who are listening, those businesses from Ontario listening right now—or maybe we can clip it and we can take it back to them—how they can get the benefit of the province they're living in and thriving in.

Hon. Caroline Mulroney: Thank you very much, MPP Anand. Before I turn it over to the expert, I want to say I certainly agree with the premise: Serving taxpayers in this province is exactly why Supply Ontario was created. The goal of Supply Ontario is to transform and modernize public sector procurement in Ontario so that we can drive innovation and also deliver better value and outcomes for taxpayers.

One of the lessons of the pandemic was that the province needed to enhance supply chain management and the procurement process across the public sector. Frankly, as you'll recall, in the early days of the pandemic, there were too many supply chain disruptions that adversely affected the people of this province. So there just had to be a better way, and that was the motivation for establishing Supply Ontario, whose mandate from our government is to enhance supply chain management and procurement across the public sector, including government, provincial agencies, hospitals and school boards.

Modernizing and centralizing the provincial supply chain will allow us to seize opportunities to consolidate spending, increase bulk purchasing practices and find the best value for the people of Ontario. The idea behind Supply Ontario is to centralize the provincial supply chain, with the goal of delivering better value for taxpayers. This centralization will also ensure that hospitals, schools and the entire public sector will continue to have the vital supplies and equipment needed to keep Ontario safe and secure.

Now, one of the key pillars of Supply Ontario is to increase the efforts to source more products locally. As you know, Ontario is the proud home of many businesses that manufacture the very best supplies that we need. With an emphasis on centralization and coordination, we will now be able to better access these products while at the same time supporting homegrown businesses who supply them.

So this really is a win-win situation. No longer will our public sector be overly reliant on increasingly vulnerable and unstable global supply chains for critical goods and products that we actually make right here in Ontario.

So I'm happy to report that our early efforts have been rewarded. As I've said, when Supply Ontario was established as a centralized supply chain agency, there was a focus on building and sustaining a high-quality supply of critical products including personal protective equipment. Currently, Supply Ontario is managing the provincial stockpile of PPE and critical supplies and equipment, handling the management, oversight, outsourcing, sourcing and distribution of PPE and CSE to thousands of public sector organizations. So 93% of the forecasted PPE spent for the next 18 months will be with Ontario- or Canada-based manufacturers. I think this is something that our government can be very proud of.

It goes without saying that the government could not transform the supply chain alone. We always value collaboration, and we understand that those closest to the manufacturing will have invaluable insight on how best to proceed. That's why, this summer, Supply Ontario and Treasury Board Secretariat began leading a series of supply chain round tables across the province. While we're pleased with the progress so far, I'm looking forward to continuing this engagement and leveraging all the information that we have gathered to inform the next steps for Supply Ontario in the future.

With that, I'll turn it over to Assistant Deputy Gonsalves.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Deputy, because I have to pass it on to my colleague as well—straight to the point: How can Ontario businesses register?

And thank you, Minister. That was amazing.

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Mr. Chris Gonsalves: I will add something brief to it. The minister talked about supporting Ontario businesses. We recently launched policy changes to level the playing field for Ontario businesses, which will lower barriers for them in selling to the public sector, and put them on a stronger footing in competing with global competitors so that we are not only using our procurement spend to be more resilient and have local access to supply that we need, but also using our procurement spend to support economic development.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): MPP Cuzzetto.

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: Thank you, Minister, for being here.

I just want to touch on the emergency management here. To be honest, this morning at 5 o'clock, I got back from the Yukon, so I'm a bit jet-lagged from that trip. We all know that the Yukon had one of the worst forest fires. We know that forest fires are happening all across Canada, not just here in Ontario.

I want to know what we're doing to keep our people safe. As well, what was the investment in our last budget for emergency management here in the province of Ontario?

Hon. Caroline Mulroney: Thank you very much for that important question.

As I indicated earlier, we committed \$110 million in our last budget for emergency management preparedness. That also involves establishing the first-ever commissioner of emergency management in Ontario. I'm pleased that he's here and I'll ask him to provide more detail on your questions. But a lot of the work has been, over the last year, to really focus on preparedness and making sure we're ready to commit to the five pillars in the action plan, which is the first one in Ontario to require annual public reporting of the work that we're doing in our Emergency Management Services. With that, I'll ask the commissioner to speak to your question.

Mr. Bernie Derible: Thank you, Minister, and thank you for the question.

The proactive nature of what we're doing—and it was really important. We saw—west coast, east coast, in the north—wildland fires that reached historic proportions. Here in Ontario, yes, we had them, but I'd like to share that, months ahead, we did those table talks. We prepared and moved equipment, working with our colleagues at MNRF on proactive approaches. Even the communications approaches that we took this year—banning fires in campgrounds; robust measures—were the reason we did not end up like other jurisdictions.

So that level of ability, to think of those three pillars—and I'm, again, thrilled. I've been in this game for a long time and have done it globally. I'm thrilled that folks are prepared to speak, elected members speaking, to those first three pillars. In the Indigenous communities, I walked the ground with the leaders, the elders of Peawanuck, Kashechewan, Attawapiskat, Fort Albany well before the flooding, well before the fire. For the first time in a long time—I've been told by my team, over 20 years—Indigenous communities led their evacuations. They led them. They decided. They manifested their people. They decided where to go. That's historic and that was the result of these proactive measures to think ahead—not unlike wedding planning—to what we're doing.

I think that is a real measure—we're a leader in this. We're now moving emergency management to the Treasury Board. It's being copied by other jurisdictions, having this proactive approach. Our provincial emergency-management strategic action plan is being asked to be emulated in other jurisdictions. We are becoming a leader in this area. So I really believe that proactivity, coordination on the ground, doubling our field officers who are out there working daily to enable folks to be resilient—and then, in time, with these investments that this government has put forward, we'll be able to rapidly, in 12 to 24 hours, reinforce the resiliency that we're developing through these proactive measures.

Thank you again for those questions.

Hon. Caroline Mulroney: If I can just add, because your question was also about the funding. I mentioned the \$110 million, which is a grant over three years, which will, as I said, allow us to invest in a new Emergency Response Fund and to expand a new, comprehensive emergency preparedness program. So, this three-year commitment will help support the doubling of Emergency Management Ontario's regional field services staff, which is so important, to provide

ongoing and cohesive emergency management support and guidance right across the province.

But throughout the year, EMO has also facilitated the delivery of courses related to emergency management for external partners and stakeholders. In 2022-23, there were more than 4,000 enrolments in emergency-management training courses in the province, with more than 300 courses run over the year. I'll ask the commissioner maybe to speak to that in a moment. But to give a better understanding of what EMO does and its plans, I also want to highlight our first-ever Provincial Emergency Management Strategy and Action Plan, which was released just this February, because, as I said, it's the first of its kind in Canada and I know that, as a result of the work that we're doing, the people of Ontario are safer.

Mr. Bernie Derible: Thank you, Minister, Chair. To highlight some of that, I heard this morning about—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Mr. Bernie Derible: —concerns on what we are doing to prepare for the respiratory. We were hearing about it. Well, we facilitated—there's 34 public health units across Ontario. We've gone through tabletop exercises, rehearsals of concept, what to do. We then recently brought it inside and had a virtual tabletop with all the respective ministries inside the Ontario public service. That is preparedness, that is planning, that is mitigation. People are prepared to move forward.

Most recently, we had train derailments. Your 400-series roads carry dangerous goods daily, 24/7. We had tabletops that brought in the federal. We brought in the private sector. We had 27 different agencies at those derailment tabletops to prepare. A safe, prepared, practised Ontario is where we're going.

Hon. Caroline Mulroney: It's just great to see the interest in so many Ontarians who want to participate as volunteers to support the efforts. As I said, we're working, we're coordinating the efforts—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much. I hate to cut the minister off, but that concludes the time.

The time has expired for the committee's consideration of the estimates of the Treasury Board Secretariat.

Standing order 69 requires the Chair put, without further amendments or debate, every question necessary to dispose of the estimates. Are the committee members ready to vote?

Shall vote 3401, ministry administration program, carry? All those in favour? All those opposed? The motion is carried.

Shall vote 3402, labour relations and compensation, carry? All those in favour? All those opposed? The motion is carried.

Shall vote 3403, employee and pensioner benefits (employer share) program, carry? All those in favour? All those opposed? The motion is carried.

Shall 3404, Treasury Board support program, carry? All those in favour? All those opposed? The motion is carried.

Shall vote 3405, centre for people, culture and talent program, carry? All those in favour? All those opposed? The motion is carried.

Shall vote 3409, central agencies cluster program, carry? All those in favour? All those opposed? The motion is carried.

Shall vote 3411, bulk media buy program, carry? All those in favour? All those opposed? The motion is carried.

Shall vote 3412, Office of the Comptroller, carry? All those in favour? All those opposed? The motion is carried.

Shall vote 3415, Emergency Management Ontario, carry? All those in favour? All those opposed? The motion is carried.

Shall vote 3416, supply chain, carry? All those in favour? All those opposed? The motion is carried.

Shall the 2023-24 estimates of the Treasury Board Secretariat carry? All those in favour? All those opposed? The motion is carried.

Shall the Chair report the 2023-24 estimates of the Treasury Board Secretariat? All those in favour? All those opposed? The motion is carried.

With that, the time being 10:10 a.m., we shall now recess until 1 p.m., when we will begin consideration of the estimates of the Office of the Premier. With that, the committee stands recessed.

The committee recessed from 1010 to 1300.

OFFICE OF THE PREMIER

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Good afternoon, everyone. The Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs will come to order. The committee is about to begin consideration of the estimates for the Office of the Premier for a total of two hours.

As a reminder, I will allow members a wide range of questions pertaining to the estimates before the committee. However, it must be noted that the onus is on the members asking the questions to make sure the questions are relevant to the estimates under consideration.

The ministry is required to monitor the proceedings for any questions or issues that the ministry undertakes to address. If you wish, you may, at the end of the appearance, verify the questions and issues being tracked with the research officer. Are there any questions before we start?

If there are no questions, I'm now required to call vote 2401, which sets the review process in motion. We will begin with statements of not more than 20 minutes from the government House leader.

Welcome, government House leader. It's great to have you at our committee. With that comes your opportunity to state your case for 20 minutes.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and thank you for having me, colleagues. I really appreciate the opportunity to be here today. As the government House leader, I will be speaking, obviously, on behalf of the Office of the Premier.

The Office of the Premier provides essential support for the Premier of Ontario in his role of the head of the executive council and the head of government. The Office of the Premier provides leadership to ministers' offices and the government to support people, families, businesses and workers across the province. The Premier's office supports the Premier and cabinet to prioritize actions coordinated across the government and deliver on the government's mandate. Ultimately,

we work across government to fulfill our commitments and service to the people of Ontario as outlined in this year's budget.

I want to highlight that the Premier's office does so with a nimble and compact team of 74 people in an estimated expenditure for 2023-24 of just over \$2.4 million. This represents a zero increase from last year and is obviously money very well-spent. And, of course, the proof, colleagues, is in the results.

In March of this year, my colleague Minister Bethlenfalvy introduced the 2023 Ontario budget, Building a Strong Ontario. Amid a global cost-of-living squeeze fuelled by inflation and high interest rates, it is important to recognize that by making responsible fiscal choices today the people of Ontario will see a brighter tomorrow and into the future.

With that commitment in mind, I want to share with you some impressive numbers. Thanks to robust revenue growth, prudence, disciplined planning and clear priorities, in the 2022-23 fiscal year, our government shrunk Ontario's deficit to just \$2.2 billion. In 2023-24, under the leadership of the Premier and his office, we are tracking to further reduce the deficit to \$1.3 billion, and starting next year, we will return Ontario to the black with a modest surplus of \$200 million, and we anticipate that surpluses will grow steadily into the future.

In short, despite the challenges of these unprecedented times, the people of Ontario can have confidence in the vision and in the economic growth and prosperity for years to come.

Our vision challenges us to rise to the occasion, to balance the budget without huge tax hikes or more tolls and fees or deep cuts to the services that people count on and, frankly, rely on. This government is showing it is possible to balance a budget while investing more—investing more in health care, housing, highways, transit, skilled trades, new manufacturing and unleashing the potential of the north. That is what the Premier and his office promised to the people of Ontario in the last election. The Premier and his office are ensuring that the government is delivering on that promise.

To achieve our vision, the Office of the Premier is supported by Cabinet Office as the Premier's ministry. Cabinet Office coordinates and facilitates programs and services, successfully implements government priorities. These programs and services include managing the government's executive offices, coordinating legislative affairs and freedom-of-information requests, policy advice and support, legislative agenda and planning, cabinet committee agenda planning, strategic communication services, media relations and related services, public appointments, human resources and events management.

Because of this multi-faceted work, the Premier's office has positioned Ontario to remain prosperous in uncertainty. Ontario is part of the global economy, and it is not immune to the impact of global forces, from geopolitical tension in Europe to the United States Inflation Reduction Act.

Supply chains have been disrupted. The post-COVID-19-pandemic environment has been defined by elevated inflation

that puts pressure on the wallets of families and businesses. People are finding it harder to afford housing, groceries and basic household goods. This is why we are working to deliver greater peace of mind and more security to workers, businesses, families and individuals by building Ontario's economy for today and tomorrow by:

- seizing the opportunities in Ontario-made manufacturing, critical minerals, batteries, electric and hybrid vehicle manufacturing;

- working for workers and their families by helping to deliver better jobs, bigger paycheques and making it easier for high school students to enter into the skilled trades;

- building highways, transit and key infrastructure such as hospitals, schools and daycare spaces;

- keeping costs down for Ontarians and their families;

- better services for Ontarians that help more students become doctors;

- supporting mental health and addictions services;

- investing in youth leaving the child welfare system; and

- protecting Ontarians and their families by building safer communities and improving the province's emergency preparedness system.

We are continuing to make strategic investments in key sectors which include increasing our self-sufficiency in reducing our dependence on imports from unreliable trading partners. A critical part of this plan is investing in the Ring of Fire. It's one of the most promising mineral deposits in the province, including the critical minerals that are essential to batteries of electronics, electric vehicles and other clean tech.

The Ring of Fire is key to reducing our dependency on unstable or unreliable trading partners, but tapping into the Ring of Fire isn't easy. These critical minerals remain locked away for years. They remain locked away for years because the work of developing the resources was difficult. Now, we're not afraid of hard work, and we have found strong partners in Marten Falls First Nation and Webequie First Nation, and we have the skills, the determination and willingness to build relationships needed to get the job done. We are working with the communities of Webequie and Marten Falls to build partnerships that ensure that First Nations closely located to the prosperous mines will benefit socially and economically from developments in the region. We're also exploring other partnerships designed to provide training, employment opportunities and economic benefits more broadly to Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities across the north.

As we strengthen these partnerships for a prosperous province, we're also ensuring that our legislative and regulatory framework keeps pace. This is why our government reopened the Mining Act for an end-to-end review through the Building More Mines Act in 2023. We will continue to ensure that the act commits to safety and environmental stewardship while focusing a competitive jurisdiction to attract investment in our minerals sector, and we have the right plan to leverage these resources to benefit the entire province.

Recognizing the unprecedented potential, the province has released its critical minerals strategy, which is a five-

year blueprint to connect mines and minerals in the north with the manufacturing might of the south. Our vision is becoming a reality. In Richmond Hill, Tesla is manufacturing the right equipment to help make batteries of the future. In Alliston, Honda is making a \$1.4-billion investment to retool its Alliston assembly plant to launch the next-generation hybrid models. In Oakville, Ford is making a \$1.8-billion investment—colleagues, that's a \$1.8-billion investment—to build electric vehicles. In Hamilton, ArcelorMittal Dofasco is making a \$1.8-billion investment to produce green steel, including steel for the auto sector. In Ingersoll, GM is retooling its CAMI assembly plant, turning it into Canada's first-ever full-scale EV manufacturing plant. Obviously, in Windsor, Stellantis and LG Energy Solution are investing \$5 billion to build Ontario's first-ever large-scale EV battery manufacturing plant, which along with it brings over 2,500 direct jobs.

1310

Ontario has become the heartland of Canada's electric vehicle revolution, having attracted over the last three years approximately \$25 billion in investments by global manufacturers of electric vehicles, suppliers of electric battery parts and battery materials.

Under the leadership of the Premier and of his office, we are going to thrive and build a strong economy for decades, and we recognize that to do that will require a clean, reliable, affordable supply of energy, which is why we are making clean, safe, reliable, emissions-free nuclear energy part of our future supply mix. It's all part of a plan that includes development of small modular reactors, which will be essential to our future energy supply. And for energy storage, we are leading in battery procurement with the largest procurement in Canada being built right here in Ontario.

We also recognize that companies are investing in jurisdictions whose energy systems help them achieve their environmental social governance goals. Once again, Ontario is poised to thrive. To help boost competitiveness, the government has launched a voluntary clean energy credit registry, and we are continuing to seize our clean energy advantage, which includes nuclear, which is a safe, reliable source of energy.

We also recognize the importance of our highways, as a prosperous economy requires a built-out transit and transportation system and a safe and efficient way of getting our goods to market. We are building Highway 413 and the Bradford Bypass. We are widening the QEW Garden City Skyway and investing over \$27 billion in highways over the next 10 years.

Under the leadership of the Premier and his office, we have also prioritized large new investments in transit. This includes increasing GO service to Niagara from Union Station and bringing back Northlander from Timmins to Toronto. In the GTA, we are making steady progress on the Ontario Line. Better highways and transit mean more livable and affordable communities, with safer and more efficient commutes.

The focus on healthy communities is very much at the heart of the government's successful plan for Ontario. Under the Premier's leadership, we are investing in new

schools, child care spaces, hospitals and long-term care. This includes building new hospitals and expanding existing ones, such as a new in-patient capacity and emergency department at Peel Memorial Hospital that will help transform Peel Memorial into a new in-patient hospital with a 24/7 emergency department; redeveloping St. Mary's General and Grand River Hospital in Kitchener-Waterloo; building a new hospital in Uxbridge and another one in Windsor; building safe, comfortable long-term-care homes across the province, including in North Bay, Almonte, Lakeshore, Tecumseh, Ottawa, Sudbury, Kingston, Fort Erie, Welland, Cobourg, Ajax, Peterborough, Brantford, Tavistock, Leamington, Toronto, Pembroke, Belleville, Greater Napanee, Athens, St. Catharines, Kitchener, Penetanguishene, Goderich, Simcoe, Temiskaming Shores, Aylmer, Mississauga and Long Sault. These spaces allow seniors to live in dignity while reducing the strain in our hospitals.

We are also taking steps to ensure people are the centre of our health care decisions, making it easier and more convenient to access care and improving in-patient resident experiences.

The Premier and his office recognize the impact the pandemic has had on people's mental health. That's why we are investing an additional \$425 million over three years in mental health and addictions support, and we are challenging the status quo by making common-sense changes to get people care faster. Now, for example, colleagues, we will be further expanding the scope of practice of pharmacists to treat more common ailments that they're eminently qualified to do. We are doing all of this through the Premier and his office's mandate of keeping costs down for the people of Ontario.

With the Premier's leadership, we are also creating a better deal for workers and their families. This is more important than ever, as we are moving forward with building Ontario while also facing a labour shortage that's nearly 300,000 jobs unfilled, colleagues. That's 300,000 jobs that are unfilled.

We have set an unwavering multi-ministry mission to recruit new skilled workers from abroad to fill gaps, to encourage more young people to enter skilled trades and to give them better protections on and off the job site. The Skills Development Fund has been an unqualified success, aiming to help almost 522,000 people find better careers in the sectors that need them. That's why cabinet has strategically decided to increase funding to the Skills Development Fund and to make it easier for high school students to pursue jobs in the trades and other sectors that need them.

Under the leadership of the Premier and his office, we are going to increase the number of skilled workers ready for very rewarding careers. Now, that includes jobs in health care. We're expanding nursing enrolment, helping internationally trained physicians and nurses get licensed in Ontario and getting 24,000 more personal support workers trained by the end of 2023. This ensures that when people in Ontario need them, well-supported doctors, nurses, personal support workers and other health care professionals will be there for them to provide quality care.

And housing, colleagues—we all know the challenges that we are having in housing. Addressing labour shortages

to meet housing needs has been very important to the Premier and his office. People in Ontario need housing that they can afford. We recognize how important this is for a sense of security and stability, especially in difficult times.

Now, unfortunately, as Ontario's population has grown, housing construction has failed to keep pace. A housing supply crisis many decades in the making cannot be fixed overnight, but under this government, there were more housing starts in 2021 than in over 30 years prior. And last year, rental housing starts in Ontario reached a record high of nearly 15,000.

We're looking forward to more success with the passing of the government's third and fourth housing supply action plans: the More Homes Built Faster Act, which received royal assent on November 28, 2022, and the Helping Homebuyers, Protecting Tenants Act, which received royal assent on June 8, 2023—this past June.

The Helping Homebuyers, Protecting Tenants Act included changes that streamlined Ontario land use planning rules and encouraged more housing. Changes under the act also strengthened protections for renters while supporting landlords. Ontario's housing supply action plans have reduced red tape and bureaucratic cost delaying construction and promoted building more homes near transit.

In short, we have a plan, and are working hard for Ontario to ensure more homes get built faster, with the ultimate goal of building 1.5 million homes by 2031.

Now, as the government moves forward on these initiatives, we've made it clear we need to be innovative. We are to be evidence-based and prioritize what's best for the people of Ontario. Recognizing the challenges posed by inflation, the government introduced strategic measures to put more money back in the pockets of the people of this province, specifically in reducing taxes on gas, on electricity. These include extending the fuel tax rebate to the end of this year, and the government continues to provide targeted electricity bill relief, including the on-bill Ontario Electricity Rebate for eligible residential customers.

The government has also made it more affordable and easier and more convenient for families and workers to travel across the greater Golden Horseshoe by eliminating double fares for most local transit when using GO train services.

The Premier has a bold vision for the province of Ontario, and he's supported by a very strong team to get it done. As ministers work to deliver, their efforts are steering us towards a unified goal. Amidst these uncertain times, the road ahead will not always be easy. But with the leadership of the Premier and his office, we know where we're going and how we will get there, and we know the future, indeed, will be a prosperous one for the people of the province of Ontario.

As announced in the spring budget, this government has created targeted measures to build the economy, address the labour shortage and help families and businesses keep costs down. The Premier's office and this government are committed to managing uncertainty and risk as the world faces high inflation and emergent economic challenges, and the numbers prove our plan is working.

Thank you for your time today, colleagues, and of course, I'm happy to take questions.

1320

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much for your presentation. We will now begin with the questions and answers in a rotation of 20 minutes for the official opposition members of the committee, 10 minutes for the independent members of the committee as a group and 20 minutes for the government members of the committee, for the remainder of the allotted time. For any staff appearing today, when you are called on to speak, please give your name and your title so that we may accurately record in Hansard who we have.

With that, we will start with the official opposition. MPP Fife.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you, Minister, for being here today. Looking through the estimates, I did review the ministry programs that fall under the Office of the Premier. Amongst them are policy advice and support, communications, public appointments. Yes or no: Do you think the Office of the Premier considers the greenbelt expansion a key policy priority?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Well, obviously, because the Premier recognized how important it was to expand the greenbelt. That is why we put significantly more land into the greenbelt than was taken out. It has included areas like the Paris-Galt moraine, which our colleague MPP Schreiner had a—

Ms. Catherine Fife: So that would be a yes.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Well, let me finish first. It's an important question, so I'll finish off.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I think you answered it; thank you.

Hon. Paul Calandra: The MPP for Guelph had a very important private member's bill with respect to the Paris-Galt moraine. We incorporated that into the lands that we put in. So to answer your question, yes, it is very important; that's why we've added land to the greenbelt.

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's interesting, because in the 2022 election platform, your government promised to expand the greenbelt by adding a series of urban rivers, valleys and protected areas. But when Minister Clark received his mandate letter on June 29 with instructions about the greenbelt—those letters, of course, haven't been made fully public at this point, but we do have some sense based on the Auditor General's investigation. Contained within that letter was, "Complete work to codify processes for swaps, expansions, contractions and policy updates for the greenbelt."

The Integrity Commissioner, in his investigation on the greenbelt expansion, goes on to say, "This was a significant policy shift since the government had spent the past four years stating that it would not open up any lands in the greenbelt for development."

Mr. Truesdell advised the Integrity Commissioner—because he was also interviewed—that "during the election campaign, he and two other members of the policy team in the Premier's office worked on developing items for inclusion in the mandate letters...."

"One of the items he and his colleagues considered was to develop a process and criteria for considering removals and additions to the greenbelt." But after the election,

Mr. Truesdell and his colleagues reviewed their work, and it went directly to the Premier's office, who approved the content of those mandate letters, and then it was sent to cabinet as well.

I'm trying to get to how much staff time was consumed in these mandate letters. Is the Premier at all concerned about the lack of fairness for taxpayers who foot the bill for his staff to prepare these mandate letters and then must also foot the bill for the legal fight to keep them secret?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Look, I can appreciate, you having not served in government, that how the processes work in terms of the public service supporting the government and how the Premier's office helps to support government—it was very clear to us right from day one, actually, from 2018, that we had to move very quickly to help change how Ontario was running. We had seen that 300,000 manufacturing jobs had left the province of Ontario; skyrocketing energy costs were forcing businesses out, and manufacturing was all but lost, so we knew that we had to move quickly on a number of fronts.

When it comes to policy—specific to your question—we knew that we had to move quickly on housing, so we worked very, very hard to ensure that each and every year there was a housing supply action plan. We knew that we had to move on long-term care because under the previous Liberal government, there were literally no long-term-care homes built—I think about 600. As I referenced in my—

Interjection.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Six hundred and eleven beds. I referenced in my speech that there is no part of this province that is not getting long-term care. That is also part of the policy development process. But when you talk more specifically about building—

Ms. Catherine Fife: Specifically the mandate letters, though.

Hon. Paul Calandra: When you talk about the mandate and building more homes, the mandate is always enunciated in the policies that we bring forward and that the Legislature supports. So housing supply action plans one and two, which—

Ms. Catherine Fife: Actually, Minister—I'm sorry; I would respectfully disagree. What was originally in the mandate letters was the promise that the Premier made to the people of this province by saying he was not going to carve out the greenbelt. He said other things in other venues that were also recorded, but the disconnect in the mandate letters is quite profound.

I will go on to say that CBC has reported that "between July 2018 and July 2021, Ontario crown lawyers dedicated 1,672 taxpayer-funded hours to the province's case to keep Premier Doug Ford's now-leaked mandate letters secret.

"That figure adds up to 209 eight-hour work days, or about 10 months of 40-hour work weeks, within three years." There's more to come, apparently, Minister.

How much is 1,672 taxpayer-funded hours in dollars, and how much has the government spent between July 2021 and today? Because you've taken this fight with the mandate letters all the way to the Supreme Court of Canada, which is precedent-setting. Suppressing these letters has

consequences for the people that we're elected to serve, and they deserve to see what's in those mandate letters. Would you agree?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Look, I think, in 2018, we had a very fulsome agenda, which culminated in an election in 2022. We built on the mandates that the ministers were given in 2018. We took that to the people in 2022, having fulfilled—whether it was our promise to build more homes, whether it was the promise to build more transit, whether it was the promise to cut taxes, eliminate red tape. We took all of that, which we brought through in legislative initiatives to the House, passed by the Legislature, and took to the people of the province of Ontario in 2022 all of those items which we passed and which were part of our mandate of the people—

Ms. Catherine Fife: But it wasn't part of your platform, Minister. It was not.

Hon. Paul Calandra: —which we took to the people in 2018, and we were re-elected in 2022 to a larger majority, with larger support from the people of the province of Ontario, to ostensibly continue the work that we were doing—

Ms. Catherine Fife: Well, then show those mandate letters. Why are you fighting the people of Ontario in court?

Hon. Paul Calandra: —to cut taxes, build long-term-care homes, build transit and transportation, eliminate red tape—

Ms. Catherine Fife: Why? You can't answer the question, so that's fine; I'm going to move on.

Hon. Paul Calandra: —so that the province of Ontario can continue to prosper.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you very much, Chair. I'm going to reclaim my time.

Hon. Paul Calandra: You know what the mandate is? It's about building a strong—

Ms. Catherine Fife: So the background under the—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you, Minister.

Ms. Catherine Fife: The people of this province still don't have the mandate letters, so there's no clarity. There's no transparency. And actually, in the estimates, Minister, transparency is highlighted, because transparency speaks to trust in government. The people of this province have the right to see what's in those mandate letters, and they shouldn't have to foot the bill for it.

I'm going to move on, Mr. Chair, because that answer was insufficient.

In the Integrity Commissioner's report—and this also relates to staffing, and it also relates to the AG report—they outline that, “following an election, the Premier decides who will be the members of his cabinet and the content of their mandate letters, his chief of staff decides who will be the chief of staff to each minister.” This actually surprised me. “Minister Clark confirmed that the Premier's chief of staff makes this decision and while he was consulted about the hiring of two of the four chiefs of staff who have worked for him, he was not consulted about the other two,” including Mr. Amato, who recently resigned.

“Mr. Amato had not previously worked as a chief of staff.” He had worked in stakeholder relations. He had “received no training upon taking this role.” He had received no training as to his legal obligations under the Public Service of Ontario Act.

He said he was “drinking from the firehose”—that's a direct quote from him—“in August 2022 ... his transition into a new ministry, the Association of Municipalities of Ontario held its conference, there was work being done on the housing supply action plan”—we've heard a lot about that—“in preparation for what became Bill 23, there was strong-mayors legislation being introduced, and there was official plans work being done.”

Why would the minister not choose his own chief of staff? Can the Office of the Premier please explain why they would choose a person with virtually no experience and subsequently provide zero training on a file as significant and politically sensitive, as their own staff state?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Look, I can only comment that I as a minister choose my own chief of staff. I do that, obviously, in consultation, not only with the Premier, but I do select a chief of staff on my own, based on the work that I want to accomplish as a minister and how I want to accomplish that work.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Okay. So by that answer, I'm only concluding that this was a more direct connection between the Premier's office and the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, because this is not common practice, to your knowledge.

1330

Hon. Paul Calandra: I'm telling you that I select my own chief of staff, and I certainly do it in consultation with the Premier's office, but more importantly, by the work that I'm assigned to do and what I want to accomplish when I'm in the role.

Ms. Catherine Fife: And that seems very reasonable; it does.

The Integrity Commissioner, as you know, has a high bar to determine what are reasonable grounds for an investigation. It must be reasonable, and it must be probable. So we have noted in the Integrity Commissioner report that it is said, “Ordinarily, there are no real consequences to being non-responsive to questions in question period, but in this case it did contribute to the reasonable and probable grounds necessary for” him “to decide to conduct an inquiry under the act.” And, of course, there are a number of complaints going forward with regard to the direct involvement of the Premier and the greenbelt.

I want to make sure that we get a lot of information on the record, Minister, so I just want to ask you, does the Office of the Premier keep track of the Premier's schedule and events, to your knowledge?

Hon. Paul Calandra: To my knowledge, they would, and that would be something that the public service would accomplish as well with them, through the Cabinet Office.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Okay. So there must be compliance around that. And we have some stark historical lessons on this as well.

So just back to the mandate letters: Then the Integrity Commissioner concluded that there were some misunderstandings on the greenbelt mandate letter, which led to a process that was “rushed, non-transparent and almost reckless.”

Throughout the report, it appears that clarity was sought from the Premier’s office several times—and you’re here on his behalf today. In fact, Mr. Amato outlines a meeting on September 15 with Premier and Mr. Clark and Mr. Sackville to seek clarity on the mandate directly. Amato texted that they were “very serious,” and left that meeting with a sense that “something needed to be done.”

The Premier, Mr. Clark and Mr. Sackville say they have no recollection of this meeting. The meeting was one day following the September 14 BILD dinner, where detailed packages for greenbelt removals were handed to the minister’s chief of staff.

The Information and Privacy Commissioner, in an August 30 letter to our leader, said, “As you are aware, records relating to government business, regardless of the medium in which they are created, sent, or received, are subject to Ontario’s access and privacy laws.” This makes a lot of sense. “The Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FIPPA) and the Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (MFIPPA) govern the handling of such records and are in place in part to safeguard the public’s right to know and to ensure transparency of government decisions and actions.”

It goes on to say, Minister Calandra, that, “Records retention is a key component of protecting the public’s right to access information and is critical to ensuring transparency and accountability of government decisions and actions.”

Does the Office of the Premier have any record of a September 15 meeting, whether for staff or for the Premier himself?

Hon. Paul Calandra: As you can appreciate, I’ve not delved into each and every aspect of the Premier’s schedule over the last number of years. I would suggest that, through the freedom of information act, you would be able to accomplish that task more easily than I would, having come here prepared to answer about estimates.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Okay. I do believe such a request has been made, Minister. There have been some roadblocks for media and for the public seeking information through the freedom of information act. So I wonder if you could make a commitment to me today to ensure that I receive those notes if they do indeed exist.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Look, you know how to use the freedom of information act, and I encourage you to continue to use the act as it has been set up and is afforded to the members.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Okay. I’ll take note of that.

We’ve seen a number of pictures of the Premier with the so-called Mr. X—honestly, you can’t make this stuff up—who the Toronto Star has identified as Mr. Mutton. Does the Office of the Premier have any record of the dates the Premier met with Mr. Mutton?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Again, through freedom of information, you can access that information. If you need help with how to undertake a freedom of information—

Ms. Catherine Fife: That’s a very kind—very kind—offer; thank you.

Hon. Paul Calandra: —then perhaps the Chair can undertake that, for the committee.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Given the statement from the IPC, why did the Premier not use his government phone between November 2020 and January and February 2021, pivotal times—key times—for the government decision and policy given the global pandemic?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Again, Ms. Fife, you have access through the freedom of information act to seek the Premier’s records. I’m here to speak on the estimates. I have not done a deep dive into who the Premier has called and when he’s called that person, but you can certainly do that with the powers afforded to you through the freedom of information act. And, again, if I can suggest that the Chair of the committee can—

Ms. Catherine Fife: Well, the taxpayers are paying for his phone. They’re footing the bill for his cellphone. I think it’s a government-issued phone and I think the Premier should use his government-issued phone. I mean, we all use our phones that are distributed to us. That is a key part of our job, obviously: communication.

The final question on this issue, Minister Calandra: Evidence obtained in the Auditor General’s report show that this government demonstrated a pervasive disregard for record-keeping and transparency. Political staff received emails from lobbyists and other external parties on their personal email accounts and emails were regularly being deleted—

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Point of order.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Point of order?

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Yes, point of order. I just think that the member opposite is veering off into another space. This particular committee is set up to go through the estimates. If you have concerns about other issues, I suggest you either take it up with the House or another committee.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Yes, I appreciate the interjection from the member opposite, but I have been speaking to staffing—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): I would just remind the member that the issue is the estimates that are presented here and as it relates, as the member is going off in different directions of what happened beyond the estimates. I would hope that you will rephrase the question to stick to the estimates.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you very much, Chair. I will point out that, in the Premier’s office, there is a human resources staffing line. Mr. Amato, obviously, was interacting with the Premier’s office. I’m simply trying to find out how much time was invested in some of these dealings. I do have a right and a responsibility, I would argue, to bring these questions to the minister. The minister, on behalf of the Premier of Ontario, has apparently the right not to answer them and share the information that he does, in fact, know.

I’m just going to go back and I’ll continue. Those international priorities, as well as democratic institutions of

government, provides administrative support to the Office of the Premier and the office of government House leader and liaises with the Lieutenant Governor. Right now, we're sort of in a situation, Minister, where Mr. Amato has resigned. There's very little paper trail around these dealings that the chief of staff had, and I guess the people of this province actually do want to know: How much overtime or mileage or expenses—

Mr. Deepak Anand: Chair?

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): We have another point of order.

Mr. Deepak Anand: I just wanted to understand: In my opinion, the estimates are forward-looking. What we're doing today is talking about the estimates, about the expenses and about the forward-looking statement of what we are going to be doing in the Premier's office. I assume we should be focused, because the people of Ontario want to know what we are working on today and what are the numbers in the estimates, rather than—

Ms. Catherine Fife: Chair, I just need to say—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): I think I just have the right wording here and I would read it to the member: "I'd like to remind all members that the questions must be related to the estimates of the Office of the Premier and the future spending of the office." I believe that the questions are going well beyond the estimates and what is happening beyond the estimates.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Okay. But the estimates do say that the Premier's office is involved in policy creation and support of those policies, and obviously there is an HR component to it.

So, Minister, I'm just trying to get to the point: Does cabinet cover legal expenses for staff or for ministers, and does the ministry have any estimation of the cost or any public funds being used to pay the legal fees to continue to suppress the mandate letters?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Again, Cabinet Office, through the Premier's office, provides a number of services for members not only of the executive but for the employees of both of those offices, similarly as it does for members of provincial Parliament and members of Parliament, how their legal fees are covered, as well. I think most members would expect, as they undertake their work, that there are supports available to them. It's no different than you as a member of provincial Parliament and your staff.

Ms. Catherine Fife: But does it not concern you, though, as the House leader? I mean, you have made significant changes to the standing orders. You are very connected to what happens in this place because of your responsibilities as a minister of the crown. The lack of record-keeping: Do you see that as an issue? Does that concern you at all?

1340

Hon. Paul Calandra: I think you seem to be more speaking to some of the issues that you might have found in a previous government, some of the challenges that they had with record-keeping and the deletion of hard drives and so on and so forth. Of course, in this government, we have been just the opposite.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Hon. Paul Calandra: We have ensured that we have continued to provide the people of the province of Ontario open and accountable government. You referenced the standing orders in your question; I think of that as a very, very important part, because what we have done here is empower the Legislative Assembly to ensure that the estimates, not only of different ministries but of the Premier's office and the Cabinet Office, are available to members of provincial Parliament to review. That has not been the case—

Ms. Catherine Fife: So just to sum up, you don't think that the people of this province have a right to know—

Hon. Paul Calandra: That has not been the case—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Order.

Ms. Catherine Fife: —why the Premier of the province, who has a legislative resource, his phone, doesn't use it at a key crisis in the history of this province.

The only way that we have this information, quite honestly, is because of freedom of information. It took a long time to get—almost a full year and a half. So the only way that I as a legislator on behalf of the official opposition—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much. That concludes your time.

We now go to the independent, MPP Bowman.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Thank you, Minister, for being here today. I want to ask you about the—I guess it might be under services; I'm not sure. That, I guess, was my first question. We know, coming out of the Auditor General's report and the Integrity Commissioner's report related to the \$8.3-billion greenbelt giveaway, that there are some shortcomings in the training provided to staff in the Premier's office and perhaps also the Cabinet Office as it relates to their obligations under the Public Service of Ontario Act, 2006, as well as regulation 382, conflict of interest rules for public servants and former public servants.

I'm wondering if you could talk about whether or not any of your resources this year will be spent—and if so, how much—on training your staff so that we make sure that the speediness and the haste which you referred to in terms of why the flawed process occurred doesn't happen again.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Yes, we actually have followed some of the very similar practices that we inherited through the previous government, following the unfortunate challenges with the gas plant scandal. As you know, additional resources were provided to ensure that staff had training following what was the very unfortunate series of circumstances that surrounded the gas plant. You will recall, at that point, hard drives were erased—and a whole number of other issues that led to necessary change in how things were handled.

I can tell you that we have not reduced that. In fact, just the opposite. Our members, people who work in our offices, including my own offices, meet with the Integrity Commissioner consistently and constantly, frankly. We have not reduced that impact. There are additional onboarding initiatives that have to happen.

If we have to expand on that, then I'm sure that we will. Not just in ministers' and the Premier's office; I think it's something that we've talked about, actually, throughout the assembly with our own staffs. We all come in contact with different things—you, in your role as a critic for finance, as well. I've heard this on a number of occasions from colleagues on all sides, that if additional training is needed both on freedom of information and with the Integrity Commissioner on how we can improve and ensure that we are always living up to the ethical standards that the people of the province want, we should do that. So it is something that we're looking at both as an assembly and, as you would expect, through ministers' and ministry offices.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Yes, I guess that's really my question. Given what's happened recently, clearly what you have been doing is not working, because people have been deleting emails, passing envelopes back and forth. There are all kinds of—this is not news to you. So would you say that the work that you've been doing has been sufficient, or do you think you need to up the ante on that in terms of the training provided to the Premier's office?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Yes, good question, because the circumstances always change. Things are always changing. I think that's why it is so important that we constantly, both as a government and as—

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Sorry, what's changing? The Public Service of Ontario Act—that's not new; the conflict-of-interest rules are not new.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Things are always changing. That is why, on a yearly basis, we update our reports to the Integrity Commissioner. We're all doing that right now.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: How do you think this happened then? If what you're saying is true and you're spending sufficient time and resources and talking to the Integrity Commissioner, how do you think this terrible scandal has occurred under this Premier's watch?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Look, you asked with respect to staff training and their ability to access resources of the Integrity Commissioner. I can tell you that, through the Legislative Assembly, through the Board of Internal Economy, resources to all of our officers of Parliament have either remained stable or have increased. That includes the Integrity Commissioner.

I think the processes we have put in place as a Legislative Assembly to ensure that not only ministers but parliamentarians have access to the best advice when they need it and how often they need it—it's there. I have found the Integrity Commissioner always open to hearing from me, always prepared to provide advice to me and my staff when it's needed. I've heard from colleagues on both sides of the House that the Integrity Commissioner is a valuable resource. Nobody has felt that they have not had access to him or his office.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Maybe I haven't been clear about the question. I'm talking about the line number here on your estimates around services of \$19,400. It's not a lot of money. I don't know what's in there. It could be some legal fees. I understand it can be transfers from other ministries as it relates to, again, accessing legal resources.

What I'm suggesting is, are you considering increasing the amount of time and money on training the staff in the Premier's office, the staff in the Cabinet Office—we'll get to that later this afternoon—to make sure that they understand these rules? Because clearly they don't. That's what we've seen in this latest scandal.

Hon. Paul Calandra: If additional training is needed, then obviously it will be there. That is why we have the Integrity Commissioner. Frankly, I met with the Integrity Commissioner yesterday just to get some advice on that. He is always prepared to meet with colleagues. He is prepared to meet with staff.

I've actually been heartened by the amount of—

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Sorry, Chair, can I just move on to the next topic? I think we've got your answer on this one.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Okay.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Thank you.

The Auditor General's report talked about there being “no process in place to transparently identify and address instances where senior public service ministry staff are not in agreement or have concerns with the direction provided by a minister.” She references four standards which the UK uses around this.

What I'm really wondering is, again, how the Premier's office will make sure that processes like the one we've seen lately with the greenbelt are not occurring, that you're not, in your haste—

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: Chair, point of order?

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): We have a point of order.

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: We're here today to talk about estimates, not about other things. I notice that the member there is moving on to other topics.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Again, I would remind the member that the questions must relate to the estimates of the Office of the Premier and future spending of the office, not reports that have been circulated since then. To have the minister speaking to that report is not the appropriate use of this committee's forces. With that, the member will, I'm sure, keep that in mind for the rest of the question.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Thank you, Chair.

Again, as it relates to the budget, we have \$19,400—that's it—related to services. “Services” normally would encompass training, communication, improvements to processes. I guess what I'm asking is, again, are there increases to that budget or to that estimate anticipated so that we make sure that we don't have the same flawed process—which I think you've accepted that finding: that the process around the greenbelt was flawed.

How do we make sure that there are sufficient resources being directed to ensure that that process is not happening as it relates to other major files in this government, for example, with Ontario Place and moving the science centre? There are all kinds of fires that you're fighting, and I'm not sure that \$19,400 is going to be sufficient to make sure that the processes are followed.

Hon. Paul Calandra: To be clear, it's the Legislative Assembly that provides resources to the Office of the Integrity Commissioner. It is the assembly, through what we vote on as an assembly, that provides those resources to the Integrity Commissioner to reach out to and to provide services to not only members but also to cabinet ministers and their staff, and also to those who may have departed and require advice as they depart or come back in or change—

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Where is that budgeted for, Minister? That's what I'm getting at, because—

Hon. Paul Calandra: Again, the votes on that come through the Legislative Assembly. You will have the opportunity to vote on that, not only the supports—

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Sorry, Chair, as we talked about, I'm talking about the estimates here for the Premier's office. I guess what I'm asking is, has the Premier's office accepted accountability that their own staff might need additional training around their responsibilities? And, therefore, will you be increasing the spending of your office, this \$19,400? Not all the other resources of the Integrity Commissioner and the Auditor General—I'm talking about how, specifically when you have deficiencies in staff behaviour, quite often there is remedial training provided, and I'm asking if there is a budget for remedial training for those senior staff.

1350

Hon. Paul Calandra: Again, those resources are provided through the Legislative Assembly, through to the officers of Parliament. The Premier's office and Cabinet Office, like you—you do not pay for the resources of the Integrity Commissioner. When you visit the Integrity Commissioner, he does not send you a bill and say you have to pay that bill. We all, through the vote of this assembly, have access to the resources—whether it's the Information and Privacy Commissioner, whether it's the Integrity Commissioner—and it is not billed back to us, the advice that we're given.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Hon. Paul Calandra: In fact, as I said, through the Board of Internal Economy, we have always maintained—frankly, in the time that I've been there, we've maintained or increased those resources, and I think, quite honestly, we've seen a larger role of the Integrity Commissioner in not only advising members, but also advising staff, whether it's in your offices, the ministers' offices or parliamentarians' offices.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Okay. With my remaining time, I'm going to turn to another topic.

We know we have a line here for transportation and communication. Typically cellphones and travel would be covered under that kind of line item. Could you talk about how much of that estimate you anticipate being related to cellphones in use in the Premier's office, including the Premier's own phone, which we understand doesn't get used for government business?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Not specifically, frankly, but—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much. That concludes the time.

We will now go to the government. MPP Crawford.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Thank you, Minister, for being here today. I appreciate your commentary and whatnot. I wanted to start out by asking if you could provide some historical context in terms of when the Premier's office was last at estimates.

Hon. Paul Calandra: To the best of my knowledge, the last time that the Premier's office has been subject to a review of its estimates by this committee was back in 2007. I think it highlights a significant change that was referenced by the opposition member with respect to many of the standing order changes that happened around this place, which were fundamentally to improve how members of Parliament—all members of Parliament—review the estimates and do the work that they need to do not only to hold government accountable, but to ensure that we are all accountable for the issues that people have sent us here to do.

So we made a change in the standing orders, as was referenced by the member for Waterloo, so that we could ensure that not only the Premier's office, but the Cabinet Office and every minister, would have to appear before committees, to ensure that you as parliamentarians, we as parliamentarians, could review those estimates. What we saw in the past was that very, very few ministries were ever brought in front of an important committee like this to account for their estimates, so that's why we as a Parliament decided that we had to make a change, that we had to improve it.

You'll know that we then moved those estimates to the responsible committees. We know that the finance committee develops an expertise in certain subject areas, so we ensured that the estimates that this committee reviews are those that you have developed an expertise in, to ensure the utmost in accountability. It's a process, I think, that has been working very, very well.

But look: Yes, it is quite remarkable that 2007 is the last time. It was before my daughter—my oldest would have been one year old there. She will be graduating from high school this year. That is a very, very long time ago. I put an offer on a house back then and it was, like, \$320,000; it's certainly not that right now. That goes to show you just how long it has been.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: It has been a long time, and that leads to my next question. You talked in your commentary about the initiatives the government has taken, whether it's transportation infrastructure, highways, health care, long-term-care homes—your previous ministry—and the changes and initiatives that we're undertaking and I think are sorely needed for the people of Ontario, especially with the huge population growth. With that context as to all the things that have happened in the last five years by the government, I think it would be nice for the committee, but also the viewers and the Ontario public at large, to get a better understanding of what we're here today talking about, which is the Premier's office. Could you give us some context as to how the Premier's office plays a role within government so we get a better understanding of that?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Look, obviously it's an important role and, in particular, when you really think about the last number of years. As I said, when we were elected in 2018, we knew that we had a number of things that we had to focus on almost immediately.

You're from Oakville, and you knew just how important it was that we started to make changes to stabilize our energy supply so that the costs weren't continuing to increase. You knew how challenging the manufacturing environment was at that time. There were some discussions of whether Ford would even continue to be there. Imagine the impact that would have had on your community had we continued the policies of the previous government which saw massive amounts of red tape, which saw out-of-control hydro prices, which saw policies that led the president of Fiat Chrysler at the time to say that this was one of the worst jurisdictions in which to do business and that they wouldn't be here.

So that is part of what the Premier's office does: It coordinates what we as parliamentarians have passed in the assembly. The government will bring initiatives forward, we'll pass it as an assembly, and the Premier's office helps coordinate across ministries to make sure that we are undertaking what it is that the assembly has given us the permission to do through bills that we've passed. It coordinates across ministries to ensure that we fulfill the mandate that we were elected on. That is work that is also done by Cabinet Office, frankly, and we'll have an opportunity later on today to talk about that. But it is a coordinating role across government that helps us undertake that.

It's even further than that, if I can say that. Look at the work that we've done in working with our federal counterparts. That is something that is done through the Office of the Prime Minister. The work that has been done with different Premiers across this country helping guide us through COVID, helping ensure that we have the tools that we need to help build a prosperous Ontario. That is all work that is done across ministries, yes, guided by the Premier's office and guided by the professional men and women of the public service who work in Cabinet Office to support the Premier's office.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: That's great; thank you. With that, obviously, the Premier's office plays a critical role. I noticed that the salaries and wages for the Premier's office are \$2,007,100. I wanted to get a sense of how that compares with the previous government.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Yes, the—

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Sorry, Chair? Just a point of order.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Point of order.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Are we talking about the current estimates before us today?

Interjection: That is an estimate—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): The member will make sure that it applies to the present one.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Yes, I referenced the current spending in the Premier's office. I just want to get a sense of historical context to current.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Yes, look, the member referenced the current spending. In comparison to previous years—I'll take 2017-18—the Premier's office is spending less on wages than the previous Premier's office did at that time.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Do you have any idea in terms of the future, meaning the next one to two years, whether that will continue to grow? And with that question, do you find it a challenge to hire good, capable people in the Premier's office in the environment we're in?

Hon. Paul Calandra: I think the Premier has made it quite clear that he wants to ensure, not only in the Premier's office and ministers' offices but across government, that we maintain or reduce spending as much as we possibly can while delivering on the important policy areas and priorities of the province of Ontario. Look, the salaries and wages and the total spending of the Premier's office has remained consistent throughout his time in office, which is a little bit less than under the previous Liberal Premiers' time in office.

I will say attracting people into the Premier's office and across government has not really been a challenge, in my experience anyway, because people are excited and motivated to want to come and work. Whether it's on the government side or on the opposition side, I think people understand that they have an opportunity to impact the lives of people for many, many years to come. So we have remained very, very competitive, not only through the Premier's office, through the public service, but even in ministers' offices and, frankly, in constituency offices. It's motivating to see just how important people find this work.

1400

Look, the results speak for themselves, right? We referenced it earlier. We were in a situation back in 2018 where this economy was fluttering. People were leaving. The economy was shrinking. Manufacturing had all but abandoned the province. We were in an energy crisis in the province of Ontario, and we had literally lost our way after years of Liberal government. We knew we had to take dramatic action to actually get things moving again. The results have been clear and people want to participate in that across government.

So it has been very, very exciting, our ability to track people, again, not only in the Premier's office and ministers' offices but the extraordinary work which is done through the public service as well. I think Ontarians are very well served by the people who are working for them both in the Premier's office and, more importantly, in the professional public service that supports us.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Thank you, I appreciate that. I'll pass to my colleague.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): MPP Anand.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Minister, it's interesting to know, as you talked about, the last time this committee fully considered the Premier's office was in 2007 in talking about estimates.

I was looking at the Premier's salary, which has remained the same as last year. In contrast, there was a mandate that once we have a surplus—this is more for the knowledge of the people of Ontario as well. The MPP salary has been

frozen for about 14 years and has not increased. I see the same pattern here. On one side, I see, inflation going on, but the MPPs' salary has been the same, the Premier's salary has been the same, and I don't see a change. And I do understand if I ask, "Why is it so?" you will talk about the debt that we have, which was accumulated in 1992-93, each year by about \$10 billion, and then further again by the Liberal government in 2009. It was \$19 billion in 2010, \$17 billion in 2011, \$15 billion in 2012, again \$10 billion in 2013, \$11 billion in 2014, \$11 billion—so there's been a pattern of borrowing from our children and grandchildren and not being fiscally prudent.

My question is simple: How important do you think it is to be fiscally prudent, which I can see in the estimates? What's your take on that, Minister?

Hon. Paul Calandra: It's a very good question. Look, the Premier's office and the estimates that we brought forward here remain remarkably consistent, despite the challenges that we have faced in this province over the last number of years.

If you really think about what we have all gone through, it's not just COVID. Think of the extraordinary work that had to be done during COVID across the country. The Premier, you often saw, was working very, very closely with the Prime Minister, other Premiers, staff in his office and in the public service literally working day and night on COVID—but think beyond that.

In my neck of the woods, including in yours, we're building transit and transportation systems, the largest build-out of transit and transportation in the province's history. My area is going to get a subway up Yonge; I know the Hazel McCallion Line is under way in your area; relief lines in Toronto; expansion of highways out in the west end; the 401 out from Pickering to Ottawa; the expansion of roads and highways in northern Ontario; the work that's being done on the Ring of Fire. All of that in the context of maintaining—we've been able to maintain the expenses at similar or less than the previous government, while delivering a climate that has brought over 700,000 jobs to the province of Ontario, over \$25 billion worth of investments in the automotive sector.

You talk about housing: the largest housing starts in over 30 years in the last couple of years, right? It just speaks to what you can do when you look at your priorities, you focus on your priorities and you eliminate red tape—as we have done, and it's no secret; almost a billion dollars of red tape eliminated and \$8 billion of costs to our small, medium and large job creators eliminated, which is part of that.

But when you think about the context of what we as a province have accomplished over that time period, guided through the Premier's office, through our ministries—and, frankly, through the Legislative Assembly, which then authorizes through votes in the assembly the work that we are doing as government—to be able to deliver that at less than previous offices, I think, is quite remarkable, frankly.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Minister, often I hear, even from the opposition, that your government—I'm part of that government as well; our government—does not spend money. I understand; I mean, we talk about the data; we

talk about how Ontario's net debt per capita is the highest in our country. It is actually \$21,000 per person, compared to—

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Point of order, Chair.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): We have a point of order.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Talking about net debt does not relate to the estimates in front of us here.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): I would caution the member to make sure we relate the question to the estimates before us.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Thank you, Chair, and thank you to the member opposite for reminding me. You're absolutely right.

What we want to talk about, the reason I was talking about the debt, is reminding the minister and Ontarians also that we are in a tough situation, and when we talk about it—sometimes even the opposition talks about that we are not spending enough. I personally think we have seen the data: In 2020, we actually took a debt of \$16 billion. The highest investments were done for the people of Ontario. Having said that, Minister, my question to you is—

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Chair, point of order.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Point of order: MPP Bowman.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: I still hear "net debt." I'm not sure where that is on the agenda today.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): The member will note that we are speaking to the estimates. If the member could make sure that the question ties to the estimates.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Thank you again, Chair, and thank you to the member opposite. Again, I want to say the reference: the province of Ontario has made historical investments—even though we're talking about estimates. It's because it is tied to the estimates.

My question is again to the minister. When we talk about how we have the highest debt, we did make the investments that were required at the time. What is your forward-looking estimate for the Premier's office, considering that we are in a situation where there is the highest debt in the whole country for our province, wherein the net debt per capita is very high? What is your opinion on how the estimates for the Premier's office are going to look for the next few years?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Look, I'll say I understand for sure your passion on this. It's in part why we all ran for office, to bring the economy back on track. But I think what you're saying, frankly, is it speaks to the priorities established through the Premier's office. How we can accomplish these things and how we've been able to accomplish—

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Point of order, Chair. The question was—could you repeat the question, please?

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): That's not a point of order.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Sorry. I think—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Make your point.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: My point is that the question related to the Premier's office budget, whether he foresees going forward—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): The member is suggesting the question is out of order. The question may have been; the answer is not.

With that, we will carry on.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Again, as I was saying, Mr. Chair and colleagues, the estimates reflect the priorities of the Premier's office. So we're able to accomplish the things that are important to you and to the people of the province of Ontario while maintaining expenses at the Premier's office at less than they were before we came into government, while still focusing on things like debt reduction, while focusing on building the economy. You asked about priorities. These are the priorities of the Premier's office.

1410

The estimates before you today reflect a continuation of that focus of the Premier's office on building an economy—a strong, stable prosperous economy. I think it highlights, again, what you can accomplish when you are focused on a goal. You talked about how the previous estimates reflect on today's estimates. Well, previously, they were spending more, for instance, and the results were dramatically less positive for the people of the province of Ontario. These estimates, historically, under this government and going forward, reflect a focus on building a strong, stable economy for the people of the province of Ontario.

You have my word and the Premier's word through me that we will continue to focus on that as a government, so long as we are given the opportunity—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Hon. Paul Calandra: —and the privilege of serving.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Thank you, Minister. Something that I understood is that the Premier's office is doing more, but still, the expenses have lowered down.

From my understanding, there are several different departments within the Premier's office that help offices across government with their work. Can you please break it down for us and for the people of Ontario and provide insight on how they help ministries in their roles?

Hon. Paul Calandra: As you can appreciate and as some of the members opposite had mentioned, policy department, communications, stakeholders' issues and media, for instance—the importance of all of these—are helping to frame the legislation we are bringing forward. When you talk about policy, you have to develop policy based on the mandate that you're given not only by the people of the province of Ontario—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much. That concludes that time.

Before we go to the official opposition, I just want to remind the members that at the opening of this session I did say I would allow the members to ask a wide range of questions pertaining to the estimates before the committee. I would like to remind the members that the questions must be related to the estimates of the Premier and future office spending. If we want to talk about policies in the past, that's called the public accounts committee, and they review them on a regular basis. That's where those questions would fit. This is not a hearing on public accounts. This is a hearing on what is before us and what the government is

proposing to spend in the coming year and the committee's concerns with that.

With that, we'll turn it over to the official opposition. MPP Fife.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I'm just going to pick up on a line of questioning from my colleague here around vote item 2401-1 that relates to the services. The minister just referenced training as being part of that, but he said in response—I just want to give you a chance to clarify, Minister Calandra—that if training is needed to address what we have learned about what's happened in the Premier's office—and I also just want to say the Premier's office actually was my choice, because clearly the Premier has his fingers in a lot of ministries and the Premier's office has been very directive, I would say, in driving the mandate of some of those ministries. He said the buck stops with him in response to this latest scandal.

The training piece as it relates to the current budget allotment: You had said in your comments that if staff want to go to the Integrity Commissioner, they can. They can go there of their own volition, and those resources and those services are there for them to use. But the question is, is this funding going to be directed to those staff to address what is a very serious lapse in ethics as it relates to the greenbelt? In fact, the Auditor General had said that the government demonstrated a pervasive disregard for record-keeping and transparency. Political staff received emails from lobbyists and other external parties in their personal emails, and emails were regularly deleted by political staff.

The question of—is this money that's currently in the estimates sufficient to address that training gap, and will the direction be coming from the Premier who, obviously, was very much connected to this issue? Do you think that this is sufficient, and do you want to correct your record in saying that staff can seek the services of the Integrity Commissioner of their own volition?

Hon. Paul Calandra: No, because staff can access the services of the Integrity Commissioner and often do. I think we have—

Ms. Catherine Fife: But you're here on behalf of the Premier's office, Mr. Calandra—

Hon. Paul Calandra: You're asking me about—

Ms. Catherine Fife: —and I'm asking you, will it happen? If the Premier were here, this is a question that I would ask him, and you're representing the Premier at this committee. I just want to know: Do you think that this \$19,400 is sufficient to address the need to actually make up for the lost trust around communication and record-keeping that's happening right now in the Premier's office?

Hon. Paul Calandra: I think if your question is, "Do I think that the Integrity Commissioner needs additional resources?" that is something that would better be brought up through—

Ms. Catherine Fife: That is not my question.

Hon. Paul Calandra: —your Board of Internal Economy representative, because all members have access to the Integrity Commissioner. I think there's a fundamental misunderstanding of how people in the government and in cabinet ministers' offices access the resources of the Integrity Commissioner.

Ms. Catherine Fife: No, I do know.

Hon. Paul Calandra: We as a Legislative Assembly—

Ms. Catherine Fife: No, no—actually, no, that line is complete fabrication in my view. As legislators, we have a responsibility for our staff. They fall under our budget. When a staff member violates the public service act or the integrity act or the privacy act, that falls on us. That's what leadership is about. Leadership takes responsibility, Minister.

So I'm asking you, as it relates to the estimates and the current funding allocation of \$19,400, do you think this is sufficient to train the Premier and his staff on how to maintain records, how to communicate and maintain those communication records, especially when it relates to lobbyists and especially when it relates to unregistered lobbyists?

Hon. Paul Calandra: I have not heard through either the Information and Privacy Commissioner nor the Integrity Commissioner that the resources made available to them are not sufficient to their needs. In fact, the Board of Internal Economy, through that estimates process, ensures that the officers of Parliament have the tools that they need to train individuals in cabinet ministers' offices, in the Premier's office—those entering and exiting—as well as members of Parliament's offices. If either of those specific officers of Parliament require additional resources, that is brought to the Board of Internal Economy to which I sit and to which Mr. Vanthof, from your party, sits. As you know, that is a consensus body. We work together and must agree on the estimates and the resources provided to those officers.

If in any of those two offices of Parliament's considerations they require more funding to do this work, then we at the Board of Internal Economy will come to a consensus and we'll either provide more resources or we won't. But that is something that is done through the Board of Internal Economy on a consensus basis. I can appreciate that—

Ms. Catherine Fife: Let me say that I fully support more money for the Premier's office to invest in training of staff, because trust has been completely compromised. We actually heard that staff were using USB keys, information was being transported in brown paper envelopes. This is actually not how government should run. You kind of chastised me at the beginning for not knowing how government runs—well, I do know how government should not run, Mr. Calandra.

We are in unprecedented territory here, and looking at these estimates right now for the Premier's office, there's insufficient funding to make up for the integrity gap that the—

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: Chair? Point of order.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): MPP Gallagher, point of order?

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: Yes, I'm just trying to find the relevancy. I know I'm new to this committee, but I'm trying to understand the relevancy.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): The member is paying very close attention to that. I believe she's speaking to the estimates.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I was actually referencing vote item 2401-1, under "services."

So I guess we're just going to have to agree to disagree on this, that this is an indefensible—

Hon. Paul Calandra: I don't think we disagree at all. I think—

Ms. Catherine Fife: The auditor has said this is an indefensible process. I'm wondering how the staff are going to learn from this.

1420

Hon. Paul Calandra: Let me just say this. I actually don't think we disagree at all—

Ms. Catherine Fife: No, actually, I have the floor. It's my floor.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I think we're actually in complete agreement that staff not only in ministers' offices but across the spectrum need additional resources—

Ms. Catherine Fife: I'm going to reclaim my time.

Hon. Paul Calandra: —but we will make sure those resources are available through the BOIE.

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's actually not—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Minister, the time belongs to the member.

Ms. Catherine Fife: It is a resource item which is insufficient. I can only speculate why you would put so little money to actually ensure that there is some appropriate training which is compliant with the Ontario public service in the Premier's office when so much is happening in the Premier's office. In fact, your own members just referenced how connected the Premier's office is to these files, including housing—very, very connected to housing.

I will move on to transportation and communication, because transportation and trying to hold the government to account on what is actually happening in the Premier's office based on this \$2.4-million budget are quite something. The number seems altogether insufficient. That item number 2401 is transportation and communications.

Which transportation would this be covering? Is this covering the Premier's travel? Is it covering his principal secretary, Amin Massoudi, who has done some extensive travelling with developers in North America? Would this number be reflective of the transportation budget for the Premier and the Premier's staff?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Day-to-day transportation of the Premier.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I'm sorry? I couldn't hear.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Day-to-day transportation of the Premier—

Ms. Catherine Fife: Day-to-day? So just back and forth between here and Queen's Park?

Hon. Paul Calandra: —which is, in my understanding, in total, less—the Premier's office expenses are less than the previous government's. But you probably wouldn't have had the opportunity to do that because previously, the Office of the Premier had not been in front of estimates since 2007.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Yes. There must have been a very important scandal happening in 2007. I can't remember what it was. But I will say that this budget then, as the estimates are presented before us, does not include the travel of the Premier's principal secretary or his staff.

Mr. Robert Foster: Hi—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): State your name.

Mr. Robert Foster: Robert Foster, director of finance and operational support services. When the Premier's offices travel with support of ministry on something with their initiatives, that funding is provided by that ministry, so this line item wouldn't include that.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Okay. So if the Premier's secretary, Mr. Massoudi, travelled to Las Vegas to have stakeholder meetings, as has been reported, would this number capture what that travel would incorporate?

Hon. Paul Calandra: I think, Ms. Fife, this number is the day-to-day transportation of the Premier. The Premier travels, as you can expect, to all different parts of the province. It is partly one of the reasons why we have been so successful as a government and why, in the last election, we increased our seat count, because this is the most available Premier that this province has ever seen. Now, of course, there are important considerations when he travels. As you know, there is security that is required with the Premier.

I can appreciate that you probably don't want him travelling to a lot of different communities across the province—

Ms. Catherine Fife: Oh, I welcome him every time. In fact, I welcomed him the other day at Ford Fest.

Hon. Paul Calandra: —because as he does, we seem to get more and more seats in the House. But ultimately, this is for the Premier's day-to-day travel. And as I said, it is actually less, as a whole—the office expenses of the Premier—than there was under the previous government.

You said that there was a scandal in 2007; I assume you're talking about the previous Liberal scandal. But again, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023—

Ms. Catherine Fife: Okay, we now know that you can count up to 2023.

Hon. Paul Calandra: —never did this committee have the opportunity to review the expenses of the Office of the Premier. I am really proud that we have brought this level of accountability and openness—

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's quite—

Hon. Paul Calandra: —and that you're getting this opportunity.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Minister, the time belongs to the member.

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's actually indicative of how flippantly the Premier's office is dealing with these very serious issues that are facing Ontario.

This Premier ran—as you said; you brought it up—in the election saying that he would never touch the greenbelt. He hid the mandate letters from 2018. We now have them—

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: Point of order.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Point of order?

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: This committee is about estimates, not about any other issue that the member is speaking about.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): The member will make sure we get back to the estimates.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Sure. However, if the minister raises an issue, I'm just not going to let it sit there. I have a responsibility to ask these questions. I know that it makes the government uncomfortable, because there's a lot of moving pieces here. But estimates is actually one of the only vehicles that we have to look at where the money is and then try to match it up to the priorities of the government.

Clearly, out of the Premier's office, this is the kind of leadership that is demonstrating that there are rules for us, for the most part, and then there are other rules for the Premier's office. And tracking the money, following the money, actually leads us to more questions in this deliberation. That's concerning for me, and I know that it's concerning for the people of this province. The fact that the Premier's office—we can't track through their communications budget what interactions this Premier has had with various stakeholders who have benefited greatly by making decisions that are not in the interest of Ontarians—

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: Point of order.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Point of order?

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: Like I said earlier on, this committee is about estimates, and the member across is not speaking about estimates at this present time.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): I'm sure that the member will get to and tie this to the estimates going forward.

Ms. Catherine Fife: How much more time do I have, Chair?

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Six.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Okay. Thank you very much.

When the government brings estimates to us as a Legislature, they're saying, "These are our priorities." Peeling back the layers on the expenditures that are listed in these estimates actually indicates that there are still some serious gaps, which can be corrected. I think that that is the goal of this committee: to make sure that the estimates reflect the true need. What I would say and what we have heard is that there are some serious concerns around communication and how communication is being dealt with in the Premier's office. So perhaps this estimate, the \$76,000, needs to be reviewed. Perhaps there is some training—actually, not "perhaps." There's definitely training that needs to happen.

And it's not a resource issue. That's what we generally disagree on. When staff are deleting emails, when they're delivering information without any record—this is what we went through with the McGuinty government. In fact, an individual ended up in prison because of that, because of destroying government records, because of destroying government email. That's a serious—

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Point of order.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): MPP Crawford, point of order?

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Yes, I think the member is not quite understanding we're here to talk about estimates.

I would, again, encourage you to focus on the topic and also be cognizant of your language. Some of the language you've used today is unparliamentary.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Oh, really? Really—

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Excuse me; I have the floor. This morning you referred to the Treasury Board, some of the contingency fund, as a “slush fund.” That’s implying bribery. I think you should retract that. And this afternoon you’ve used unparliamentary language as well. So I’d just caution the member—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Everybody will speak through the Chair.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Chair, if you could please ensure members here use appropriate parliamentary language. That’s how Parliament functions; we all have to get along in a very parliamentary way, so let’s just keep it on topic and keep the language appropriate.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): I’m sure we will get on topic. I do remind the member that, as I said in the remarks for this round, this is not about policies of the past; this is about the expenditures in the future. I would remind the member to make sure we stay to the estimates before us. With that, MPP Fife.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you. Thanks so much for the reminder of how estimates work. I had no idea. I’ve only been here for 11 years.

The fact of the matter is, the communications budget currently outlined in the estimates is concerning because there is an issue of deleting emails. That’s a fact. We have the Integrity Commissioner’s report and the Auditor General’s report to confirm it, and soon we may have a privacy commissioner’s report as well.

And so my question to the Minister is, can the Office of the Premier inform this committee what actions are being taken to ensure records are properly maintained, and if the current estimate of \$76,000 is adequate to ensure that no more emails are deleted and that staff and the Premier follow the public service expectations of transparency and trust?

1430

Hon. Paul Calandra: I believe it is, and at the same time, I know that all staff will continue to undertake a re-evaluation and a rigorous re-understanding of the rules and regulations, both with the Integrity Commissioner and the Information and Privacy Commissioner.

At the same time, I think you had referenced earlier the importance of the estimates process, and I can’t agree more. It is such an important process. That’s why I think we share—it’s why I’m so surprised that the last time the Premier’s office had actually been here was 2007. You referenced the Liberal scandal of 2007, but then no follow-up in 2008 or 2009 and 2010. It’s like it just stopped from there.

That’s why we wanted to continue to ensure the highest level of accountability. That’s why, through the Board of Internal Economy, we make sure that the Information and Privacy Commissioner and the Integrity Commissioner have the resources they need to provide services free of charge outside of what the public provides them through this Legislature to all of us, both those of us in public office, those of us as cabinet minister staff, as well as legislators in the opposition, both as you’re in government and as you leave.

But specific to communications, if it’s your suggestion that the Premier increase the budget available for communications outside of his office—

Ms. Catherine Fife: Inside his office. It’s a big difference.

Hon. Paul Calandra: —inside of his office, excuse me—I don’t think the Premier will be favourable to an increase of his budget. We saw that when budgets were increased under the Liberals that it didn’t really result in positive impacts for the people of the province of Ontario. So I think I’m on safe ground. I doubt the Premier will agree to any—

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you very much.

So within the current estimates, where would I find the legal fees, the legal costs? Is that separate from the Premier’s office? Are legal fees contained within the estimates?

Hon. Paul Calandra: With the Ministry of the Attorney General.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Okay, so how does that interaction from the Premier’s office with the Ministry of the Attorney General—for instance, if a minister requires legal counsel or if the Premier requires legal counsel—I know that he has secured it—and it’s related to government business, how does the Premier’s office request that legal cost to be paid?

Mr. Don Fawcett: My name is Don Fawcett. I’m general counsel at Cabinet Office.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Welcome. Welcome, legal counsel.

Mr. Don Fawcett: Ms. Fife, your question was specifically about—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Ms. Catherine Fife: In the estimates, where were there legal fees contained within that budget? Because I know that there are some legal costs associated with being the Premier.

Mr. Don Fawcett: Sure. Premier’s office and Cabinet Office do incur legal costs. Where we’ve paid legal accounts directly, they would generally be considered chargebacks from the Ministry of the Attorney General.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Okay. So the Premier’s office requests legal counsel, that goes to the Attorney General and then there’s a chargeback?

Mr. Don Fawcett: Correct.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Who keeps track of those? Because that would not be in the estimates. You haven’t estimated for legal fees.

Hon. Paul Calandra: You would have the opportunity, because of the changes that we’ve made to bring forward the estimates of the Attorney General—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much. That concludes the time.

We now go to the independent. MPP Bowman.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: This is fun; goodness, lots of entertainment this afternoon.

Let’s talk about salaries and wages. So we’ve—

Mr. Deepak Anand: Point of order.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): MPP Anand.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Can the member say one more time what she said—that this is fun? I didn't hear it. Is it entertainment? This is an important task—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Has the member got a point of order?

Mr. Deepak Anand: My question is—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): No, you don't get a question; you get a point of order.

Mr. Deepak Anand: So, Chair, my point of order is that this is unparliamentary language and it should not be used. I will request the member opposite use parliamentary language, through you, Chair.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): I didn't hear it, so the member will withdraw it if she said it and we'll go on with the questions.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: I'm asking a question about salaries and wages.

The minister has talked extensively about how the budget has been contained for several years and is quite proud of that. I would argue that, again, the recent deficiencies in the Office of the Premier suggest that that might need to be increased, but that aside, could you talk about how much the current chief of staff makes?

Hon. Paul Calandra: I don't have the figure, but through the sunshine list, you're able to find out what the chief of staff to the Premier makes, as well as the chief of staff to the Leader of the Opposition and to any members who are paid by the public service.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Thank you. I will tell you: The current chief of staff makes about \$187,000. The chief of staff in 2019 made \$242,000. When he finished his role, he made \$346,000. That's an increase of 42% over four years. Certainly, we don't have a challenge in attracting staff to the Premier's office, as you mentioned earlier—there was a question about that—given that kind of salary increase.

I would like to ask the minister if there are plans to provide further increases to this extent to the current chief of staff.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Look, I would have no information on that. I think the salary of the former chief of staff was consistent with the salary paid by the previous Premier.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: I don't have those numbers in front of me. I'm asking about the chief of staff to the Premier that I'm talking about now—

Hon. Paul Calandra: —in line with what Premier Wynne paid her chief of staff.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Yes, I don't know. I don't know that. I'm just asking whether or not you plan to increase it, as it has been increased under this government, because you have been talking about containing costs and containing expenses within the Premier's office.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Not just about containing costs; actually reducing the costs while providing more services to the people of the province of Ontario. It's something that we've actually been very, very successful at doing. We were able to reduce the costs of the Premier's office as a whole in comparison to what they were under the previous Liberal government, while still moving towards a balanced

budget, while providing an economy that created 700,000 jobs, while stabilizing energy costs—

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Okay, thank you. I'm not talking about that right now.

Hon. Paul Calandra: You asked me what the results of that are. I would say, when you compare this Premier's office to the previous Premier's office, it's a pretty good job on behalf of the people of the province of Ontario to return a strong, stable province of Ontario to the people of this province, with the—

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Let's get back to the estimates. With respect, Minister, let's get back to the estimates.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Sure, I would love to.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Again, the salary for the previous chief of staff increased about 42% over four years, so I would expect that that would continue.

I would like to ask about, again, communication costs. We know that the Premier has been using his personal phone for government business. Will his personal phone be covered in this communication budget?

Hon. Paul Calandra: The communication that you have here—the transportation and communication costs are those services that are provided by the government to the Premier.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Could you answer the question, please, whether or not his personal phone will be covered?

Hon. Paul Calandra: I think, like everybody else, if we have our personal devices, that you pay for your own personal—I'm not sure how it's handled in the Liberal caucus, but our expectation within our caucus is that a personal device, you pay for it yourself.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Right, but he's using it for government business, so I'm just asking whether or not—

Hon. Paul Calandra: You have access through freedom of information.

Again, Mr. Chair, perhaps there might be a need to bring resources to bear on that.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: No, I will reclaim my time; thank you.

I am curious, too, about, again, the services budget. We have heard about the transfer—I forget the phrase used; apologies—for transferring costs from the Attorney General's office. Do you anticipate that you will come in on budget related to services with only \$19,000 and that there will likely be legal costs incurred related to a number of issues that the Premier's office is facing right now?

Hon. Paul Calandra: I fully believe that we would come in on budget. We've been very consistent over the entire term of the Premier while the Premier has been in office of maintaining a consistent budget through the Premier's office.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: So you think that the Premier's office will spend no more than \$19,400 on costs, which include those allocated from the Attorney General, for any legal costs this year?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Again, costs associated with the Attorney General come through the Attorney General's

estimates. You're able to see through the public accounts, which were tabled—the year-end public accounts—what those actual costs were. I know the public accounts committee then has an opportunity to review those, so I would refer you—I think you're a member of that, no?

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: No, I'm not.
1440

Hon. Paul Calandra: You can avail yourself of the actual costs through the tabled public accounts.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: I'm just asking whether or not you believe the budget for services will be sufficient. That \$19,000, at \$500 an hour for a lawyer, is not a lot of hours. We've heard about the over 1,600 hours related to keeping the mandate letters private; that certainly would be in excess of \$19,000.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Again, those costs are accounted for in the Attorney General. If I'm not mistaken, the estimates of the Attorney General have appeared already—I could be wrong on that; I think the Attorney General has already appeared before the estimates committee, or is about to. I think he has already appeared.

I know it's somewhat confusing, because in the past most of the ministers never appeared before estimates, and the rule changes now require all ministers to appear before estimates to defend their estimates. But it is both through the tabling of the public accounts through the public accounts committee—you're able to see the costs—

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Sorry. I understand the process; I just—

Hon. Paul Calandra: —and the estimates that we put forth here—

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: I need to reclaim my time, Chair.

I think what I'm getting at is that I expect that the costs incurred by the Premier's office related to these files will be beyond the \$19,400. So whether or not this is the right process for how we allocate money to the Premier's office budget might be a question for further consultation—

Hon. Paul Calandra: Yes, that's not a bad point. I would say this: If there is a desire to do things differently, that is something that I think is maybe better a task of the public accounts committee. The process has always been that the Ministry of the Attorney General covers the costs associated with the crown in this. Similar to when a member has a legal issue, it is the Board of Internal Economy of the Legislative Assembly which will cover the legal costs on behalf of a member if those costs are in your operation of you as a member.

But honestly, the public accounts committee has an opportunity to review how we do estimates and expenditures, and if that is the will of the committee, then I would suggest that's the more appropriate place to consider that.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: I guess I'm just simply saying that I think the services, the transportation—there are some questions around those as it relates to transparency, how much the Premier's office will need to spend on items related to legal fees around the current investigations, the greenbelt scandal, and I think the taxpayers of Ontario deserve to see those numbers and will expect transparency around those things.

Hon. Paul Calandra: And again, through public accounts, when the public accounts are tabled—

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: No, I'm talking about the estimates going forward.

Hon. Paul Calandra: But it's the estimates of the Attorney General, and that has been tabled—

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: I understand. I'm talking, though, specifically to say, "Look, how much of that money is incurred by the various departments and ministries, including the Premier's office?"

Hon. Paul Calandra: Which is something that you can get through the tabled public accounts, which is something that you can get through the estimates of the Ministry of the Attorney General, which is something that—if you want a different process for doing it than was the process under 15 years of Liberal governments and, frankly, over 150 years, then bring that to the public accounts committee. If this process isn't the one that you think serves the people going forward, then I have every confidence that the public accounts committee will be able to suggest a different way of doing this. Otherwise, it is through the Attorney General that you have this, and—

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: So can you just tell me specifically—and maybe the director needs to come up here—what is in this number, the \$19,400? Could you be very specific about what's in that number for services?

Mr. Robert Foster: For services? That could be anything from cellphones or IT assets—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Name, please?

Mr. Robert Foster: Robert Foster, director of finance and operational services.

That could be anything from cellphones to IT charges—

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: No, services. "Services" is cellphones?

Mr. Robert Foster: Cellphone service, IT services—that's the kind of stuff that would be covered in that.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Sorry; cellphone is not in communications, it's in services?

Mr. Robert Foster: Business cards—it depends on how they're classified as an expense.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: But again, you come up with these numbers. You have a process, I assume, for coming up with them. I'm trying to understand what's in the \$19,400, because it's—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Perhaps, Mr. Chair, there's a fundamental misunderstanding—I suspect—as to what role cabinet and ministries play in supporting the Office of the Premier and the different accountability measures. These numbers are no different than they had been under previous governments, so when you talk about legal fees, it's handled by the Attorney General—

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: With all due respect, I don't think it's about misunderstanding. I'm an accountant; I understand numbers. What I'm asking is what's in the number—and I think only your office or the Premier's office can answer that question.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Yes, similar services—

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: In the budget.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Yes, well, similar services to you, right? When you have new staff, there's business cards that have to—

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Those are office supplies.

Hon. Paul Calandra: It's the same thing with the Premier's office, there's a whole host of services that are not handled by different ministries, in support of the 74 people—I think it's 74 people—who work in the Premier's office in undertaking their duties. These other, more specific, things that you're talking about, legal fees and communications—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much. That concludes the time.

We now go to the government's side. MPP Smith.

Mr. David Smith: Thank you, Minister, for being here this afternoon to discuss these estimates of the Premier's office. I'm humbled by your tenacity to be able to talk about transparency. I was going to tell you to stop when you started counting the number of years—none of these records that we're having here today, which should help most of us to better understand that we are trying to come above board versus the previous government that did not bring the Premier's office data to this committee. I'm humbled by that, and I'm pleased that we are doing the right thing.

In terms of looking at the expenditures in 2023-24 versus 2021-22, it's quite clear that there's a variance in there that certainly concerns me. We are going in another direction in terms of shrinking costs, which, in most cases—as you know, inflation and all the other factors that incur costs; there are so many things—we are going the other way, and I'm happy to say that the operational expenses are truly reflective of that. When I look at an area, the estimates of 2023-24 remain the same compared to last year. You will note that the actual spending in 2021-22 was actually below the estimates.

For further context, the Premier's office budget has actually declined since 2017-18. Could you explain why that has happened?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Again, as I said earlier, it's both a focus on what your deliverables are and what you want to accomplish in government, right? We have seen when a Premier's office and a government lacks that focus, the results aren't really beneficial to the people of the province of Ontario.

The Premier has made it very clear, from the beginning of his time in office, that we had to ensure that we did more for the people of the province of Ontario while maintaining costs at a very reasonable level. We are able to undertake everything that we've accomplished over the last five years—and very, very difficult circumstances in which we have found ourselves—whether it's through the pandemic or the extraordinary amount of negotiations between provinces and our municipal partners, the investments that we're making, we've been able to ensure that we can accomplish that while maintaining costs at or below what previous governments did and were able to accomplish in that time frame. And, look, we're quite proud of that in the context of what we have accomplished, but I take it to heart that

some of the members of the opposition would like to see increases in certain things in the Premier's office, whether it's communications or increases in services.

But, again, in the budget, on services, that's not something that I think that we're looking at. I think we've shown that we can accomplish incredible things for the people of the province of Ontario while maintaining realistic costs, both in the Premier's office and, frankly, across government, right? We are in a much different situation than we were a number of years ago and we've been able to do that while reducing costs, and I think the Premier's office has to lead the way.

When you talk about leadership, that has to come from the Premier. When he said to us in 2018—when he said to all parliamentarians in the throne speech that was passed by this Legislative Assembly back in 2018, that people should expect more from their government, that we could do more for less and that we could accomplish great things for the people of the province of Ontario and restore our economy—that leadership has to come from the Premier's office. I think these estimates reflect that, notwithstanding the fact that the opposition would like to see more money spent in the Premier's office. I think that we have shown that we can maintain fiscal responsibility while providing more and accomplishing more.

1450

Sorry, I know that's a long-winded answer, but I'm actually quite proud of this and what both the government and this assembly have been able to accomplish over the last number of years in terms of providing for the people of this province. I think it's something that we should all, on all sides of this House, be quite proud of.

Mr. David Smith: I want to thank you for that. I think fiscal prudence is very important. We're talking about taxpayers' dollars, and if one is looking to spend more money than we should spend, I think leadership is in the hands of Premier Ford. He's doing a great job in terms of not spending more than ought to be spent.

Could you elaborate on, in terms of estimates, how our estimates cost, because estimates are a projection of what we perceive it would cost to run any operation? How are estimates produced? If we have an answer on that, I would like to hear it so that others can get a clearer understanding as to how estimates are established and how those dollar amounts came about, so that we can share it with our colleagues so they would have a better understanding.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I think the estimates, by and large, reflect the priorities of the government. They will vary from department to department from year to year, but it is a reflection of where the government wants to go, not only in the Premier's office but across government. So you'll see estimates in priority areas, for instance, like transit and transportation, and long-term care.

I'm no longer the Minister of Long-Term Care; we have an incredible new minister in Minister Cho. But when we took over long-term care in 2018, there was not a lot of money going into long-term care. So those estimates would have been far less than what they are today. But when you look at the estimates of long-term care, for instance, they

are higher than they have ever been before. Why? Because it's a priority.

When you look at the estimates of health care, year over year over year, we've increased funding in health care.

Economic development: We're increased the estimates and the amounts that are available to that minister who has then landed \$25 billion worth of economic investments and activity in the province of Ontario, and thousands and thousands of jobs.

It has to be reflective of a government's priorities and it has to also indicate how you intend to achieve those priorities—I know that you're familiar with this; you spent many years on the school board, one of the voices of openness, transparency and fiscal accountability at the school board—and the actuals that are then presented to the House show what the final spending was.

It's a great question, though. The estimates are a reflection of a government's priorities. That's how we come out—and you will all know, especially in this committee, you will undertake a very, very rigorous pre-budget consultation process. The work that this committee did, and MPPs Crawford, Cuzzetto, Anand and Triantafilopoulos in the last Parliament, following the review that you did in how to help small businesses recover from the pandemic, the extensive, extensive public hearings—that's all what helps shape what then goes into the estimates—and, frankly, the work of the opposition as well—to help bring us to where we need to be as a province. And the results have been spectacular over the last number of years.

Mr. David Smith: Thank you very much. Congratulations in your new role. I look forward to working with you.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Thank you, sir.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): MPP Gallagher Murphy.

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: Thank you, Minister. Thank you very much for your remarks earlier. Looking at those remarks, you spoke about what our government is achieving and what we're continuing to achieve across different areas of energy, transportation, transit, health care, education—I think about all of these different areas and what it takes from the Premier's office to support all the different ministries.

Earlier, I heard the members opposite talk about the salary of a chief of staff and our line item on the Premier's office's wages. Back in 2018, in fact, the chief of staff under the previous Liberal government was earning more than \$557,000, which is a 77% increase over what the current chief of staff earns, and this is five years later.

My question to the minister is, if the previous government was busy closing 400 schools during that time period and we are building new schools, shouldn't that salary be increased?

Hon. Paul Calandra: I appreciate the question. Also, let me say this: I was a staffer here back in the 1990s under Premiers Harris and Eves, and by and large, the people who get into public service, whether it's on the opposition or the government side or in ministries, their focus is on accomplishing things for people. The same goes for the public service. I think people are worth far more in the

public service and across government, because I see the heart that they put into it, but the reality is, like all of us, we have to live within a fiscal framework that is accountable and responsive to where the people are at.

The estimates here, when you talk about salaries and wages—again, back to what MPP Smith was talking about—really go back to the priorities and where those priorities are. That's when you may see shifts, shifts in responsibilities within a Premier's office—at least with this Premier—to shift that responsibility and focus on ensuring that we get transit and transportation. We know how stressed we are in our part of the world in York region with respect to hospital capacity, for instance. Transit and transportation: We're finally getting a subway up Yonge. How long have we been desperate for that? The 404 expansion—right?

So what we are suggesting through these estimates is that we can do more while maintaining costs, and we can do that by shifting people within the Premier's office to match our priorities. I think that's why you've seen the Premier maintain a level—but like you and, I think, like most of us, it's based on a deliverable, right? My dad told me a long time ago, “Don't expect anybody to give you anything if you don't work hard to get it, and when you deliver, then you can ask to be rewarded for that.” I think we have delivered, and I think it can be very debatable what the previous government delivered.

Again, the bottom line is the estimates reflect priorities, and we shift within to ensure that our priorities are met with the overriding goal of making Ontario a stronger, safer and more prosperous economy for not only today, but for the future.

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: Beautiful. Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: How much time?

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): We have 6.5 minutes.

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: Thank you, Chair, and thank you, Minister, for being here today. In the last five years, our government's priority was to bring back the automotive industry where I worked for 31 years. When I was working there, we were worried that the plants would shut down, especially the Oakville plant. How has our government been able to attract this much investment in the automotive industry and build hospitals as well through the province? Look at the hospital that will be built in my riding in Mississauga–Lakeshore; our long-term-care facility—

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Point of order, Chair?

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Yes?

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Investment attracted is not related to the estimates.

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: They're priorities of our government, so I'd like to—

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: We're not talking about priorities of the government today.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): The member will make sure that he takes it back to the estimates.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Look, I actually think the member hits the nail on the head. When you talk about the estimates of a Premier's office, the Premier's office is the head of

government. The Premier gets a mandate from the people. The Premier then takes that mandate to the assembly in the form of a throne speech. Then, ministers undertake to pass legislation in support of that mandate. But the Premier's office is a central, coordinating body that helps us achieve that mandate.

You do hit the nail on the head. You can't accomplish what you want to accomplish, whether it's in building new hospitals, transit and transportation, if you aren't focused on doing that. So when the estimates are provided, not only in the Premier's office—it's not only the Premier's office; we're hearing a lot of chat about other ministries. It crosses ministries, but it is guided through the Premier's office.

So when you look at priorities, when you talk about—again, it builds on what MPP Smith talked about. It's about focusing the priorities. You talked about health care funding and how we've been able to increase health care spending while building extraordinary long-term care and new hospitals in your part. Well, the Premier's office has to be nimble but also has to be able to focus on those areas.

Those commitments that we make in a throne speech, those commitments that we make in an election campaign then have to be put into action. There are one or two ways you can do it. You can expand massively bureaucracy. By "bureaucracy" I mean, in this instance, a Premier's office. You can spend more out of a Premier's office and expect less, or you can focus and deliver. This Premier and this government have decided: focus and deliver. I think the results over the last number of years have been incredibly spectacular for the people of the province of Ontario, but it has shown when you bring a focus and when you drive that focus on delivering, you can accomplish great things and it doesn't have to mean a massive expansion of bureaucracy. Whether it's in the public service—which we have the best public service—or through political offices, whether it's ministers' offices or the Premier's office: focus and deliver.

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): That concludes the time at 12 seconds.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Chair?

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Point of order?

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Just a point of order. In response to MPP Gallagher's comment, the \$550,000 included severance pay, which all chiefs of staff would get when they lose government—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): That's not—

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: —the fall of government. It was \$313,000—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): That's not a point of order.

The time has expired for the committee's consideration of the estimates of the Office of the Premier. Standing order 69 requires that the Chair put, without further amendments or debate, every question necessary to dispose of the estimates. Are the members ready to vote?

If the members are ready to vote, shall vote 2401, Office of the Premier program, carry? All those in favour? All those opposed? The vote is carried.

Shall the 2023-24 estimates of the Office of the Premier carry? All those in favour? All those opposed? Motion is carried.

Shall the Chair report the 2023-24 estimates of the Office of the Premier to the House? All those in favour? All those opposed? Motion is carried.

If the committee wishes to carry right on into the next one—or would you like a break?

Interjections.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Okay. We will take a quick recess before we start the next one.

The committee recessed from 1504 to 1512.

CABINET OFFICE

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Welcome back. The Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs will now begin consideration of the estimates of the Cabinet Office for a total of two hours.

Are there any questions before we start? If not, I'm now required to call vote 401, which sets the review process in motion. We will begin with statements of not more than 20 minutes from the government House leader.

Minister, I believe you want to share your time with the minister of red tape, but the floor is now yours for 20 minutes.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I look forward, of course, to introducing how cabinet provides advice, analysis and central coordination to help the government achieve its priorities and mandate as well as sharing some specifics.

As the Premier's ministry, Ontario's Cabinet Office has an important and far-reaching mandate. Cabinet Office acts as a central agency to support the delivery of government priorities across 29 ministries. Cabinet Office does so by developing, coordinating and leading multi-ministry information-sharing for the purpose of integrated planning as well as facilitating implementation of strategic policies and communications. This includes driving key initiatives such as the adoption of lean and continuous improvement principles as well as enterprise marketing services.

Cabinet Office also includes the Ministry of Intergovernmental Affairs, which is leading intergovernmental strategies, international relations and protocol, and the digital strategy office, which is leading to the development of the OPS service strategy, an all-of-government approach to deliver seamless, integrated services to users.

Now, to make all of this happen, Cabinet Office manages the mechanisms for government decision-making; works with ministers to coordinate policy, communications and intergovernmental and international relations strategies; monitors government strategies and supports delivery of priorities; provides advice on matters of protocol and international relations priorities; liaises with the Lieutenant Governor's office; supports and monitors the implementation and delivery of the government's mandate; drives key

initiatives related to enterprise marketing services and communications; and provides administrative services to the Office of the Premier, the office of the government House leader and all ministers' offices.

Chair, now that you have a sense of the scope of Cabinet Office's responsibilities and duties, I'd like to share some of the specifics.

I will start with the head of Cabinet Office, the secretary of cabinet. As deputy minister to the Premier, the secretary of cabinet plays an important role. The secretary of cabinet provides independent, non-partisan advice to the Premier on governmental policies, priorities and public-facing communications. The secretary of the cabinet also recommends deputy ministers to lead ministries, which are selected by the Premier via order-in-council appointments. As clerk of the executive council, the secretary of cabinet's responsibilities include providing oversight of cabinet decision-making and conveying cabinet decisions to ministers and deputy ministers. As head of the public service, the secretary of cabinet leads organizational transformation so the public service can deliver more for less. The head of the OPS also fosters the development of a diverse, inclusive, collaborative, accountable and talented senior executive leadership team. Under the secretary's leadership, Cabinet Office has focused on fiscal responsibility and ensuring that programs are delivered in a financially sustainable way. Cabinet Office also continued to limit discretionary spending and has reduced duplication of services and layers of administration to drive positive change across the organization.

To achieve these successes, the secretary is supported by a strong team within the Cabinet Office. This includes policy and delivery, communications, the Ministry of Inter-governmental Affairs, and corporate planning and services.

Cabinet Office's policy and delivery division ensures that the machinery of government operates effectively by leading the coordination of the policy and results agenda. The team supports the process of cabinet decision-making, including the operation of cabinet and cabinet committees. They coordinate the development of policy and legal instruments. They do so by working with ministers to provide objective, integrated and strategic advice. The advice informs policy and fiscal decision-making, and supports the delivery of the government's mandate. Policy and delivery also assesses potential risk related to key government initiatives. They also provide direct support to ministries that seek to use innovative approaches when delivering on ministry priorities.

Policy and delivery leads continuous enterprise-wide improvement efforts aiming for more efficiency and cost-effectiveness. Those efforts ensure key government programs continuously make life better for the people of the province of Ontario, and this includes:

- providing strategic policy advice to support data-driven government decision-making;
- developing a multi-year action plan to deliver the government's policy agenda;
- developing, testing and refining innovative approaches while collaborating with ministry partners across the OPS;

- supporting the government as it reconfigures its policy agenda and program objectives to redirect and reprioritize resources to address the COVID-19 pandemic;

- facilitating the solving of complex policy programming, service delivery and strategic development challenges such as the creation of special integrated teams, which includes the vehicle sticker refund project team.

This team coordinated across multiple ministries to ensure rapid delivery of Cabinet Office policy, legislation program change and creation, communication and issue of an expected \$7.3 million in refunds to Ontarians.

I would like to highlight an important component of the policy and delivery team. Since joining Cabinet Office in 2021, the lean and continuous improvement office has successfully spread the adoption and integration of lean principles in support of government priorities. The office provides leadership on supplying lean and continuous improvement to processes across the public service. Through its work, the lean and continuous office pays for itself more than four times over. This office has trained more than 15,000 OPS staff since 2019 and helped ministries implement lean recommendations that resulted in savings of over \$23.3 million through streamlined and improved services in 2022-23 alone. A lean executive champion was also established in every ministry across the government.

I will now focus on Cabinet Office communications. I'm pleased to provide you with an overview of what these divisions do and will share some of the many accomplishments. Cabinet Office communications provides strategic and operational communications support for the Office of the Premier, the secretary of the cabinet and all ministries. Through this work, Cabinet Office communications creates integration and alignment for line ministries by providing strategic communications, issues-management advice and decision-making support. They deliver proactive and strategic advice and decision-making support that integrates information and insights across government.

1520

Leveraging Cabinet Office's unique vantage point, the communications team offers ministries the latest data and insights to help shape and deliver on their communications strategies. Cabinet Office communications builds strategic partnerships using an all-of-government view and big-picture thinking, with the ability to see what's in play across the various landscapes. That work also includes an innovative, in-house marketing agency that delivers all-paid marketing campaigns as well as key services to the public, such as receiving and responding to correspondence and freedom-of-information requests.

The marketing, enterprise services and insights division works with ministry partners to provide best-in-class marketing, creative, media-buying, and ontario.ca content for government programs and initiatives. It's a citizen-centred approach, ensuring the people of Ontario are aware of and have access to the services they need. This enables them to develop evidence-based, in-house marketing campaigns, integrating data from multiple sources to facilitate planning, development, delivery and ongoing evaluation to ensure

paid advertising is achieving our objectives and conveying integral information across multiple channels and platforms.

Cabinet Office communications also helps to build capacity with and for the communications community by developing and delivering talent strategies, learning programs, digital platforms, research services and data innovation.

I would also like to share with you Cabinet Office's corporate planning and services division, which provides corporate services and strategic support related to operations, accommodations, finance, human resources and IT services. They do so not only for Cabinet Office, but also for the Office of the Premier and ministers' offices. Additionally, for Cabinet Office and the Office of the Premier, they provide planning, budgeting, forecasting and in-year financial management, printed estimates and public accounts, quarterly expenditure reports, emergency management and Treasury Board submissions.

Among their successes, they've delivered and enhanced training and development opportunities to ministry and political staff. This has helped staff keep their skills at the highest level so they can best deliver on our commitment to the people of the province of Ontario. They ensure we have the best people in the right jobs through recruitment and selection, as well as a talent, succession and performance management and meeting senior leadership diversification targets. They also help ensure employee retention through employment engagement, recognition, the CO mental health and wellness strategy and the ministry's Anti-Racism Action Plan.

Now, I would like to briefly talk about the Ministry of Intergovernmental Affairs. It has an obviously important role within Cabinet Office, within Ontario, with other provinces and territories, the federal government and jurisdictions around the world. The Ministry of Intergovernmental Affairs provides jurisdictional intelligence, policy analysis, and intergovernmental advice to partner ministries, along with protocol and operational support for Canadian intergovernmental relations and international relations. The ministry supports the Premier at first ministers' meetings and the Council of the Federation. It also supports the Premier and ministers on international missions and works across the government on intergovernmental agreements. These include funding agreements with the federal government and opportunities that align with Ontario's strategic interests on a variety of topics, including health, social policy, the economy, justice and resources. The ministry also works with the Ministry of the Attorney General to provide policy support for the province's election legislation.

I'm pleased to report the Cabinet Office has accomplished a tremendous amount and delivered relentlessly for the people of Ontario in the past year. I look forward to what the teams will deliver in the year ahead, continuing to support the strategic advice, analysis and operational support to the Premier and cabinet and its committee.

I thank you for this opportunity today, and with that, I will transfer to the Minister of Red Tape Reduction.

Hon. Parm Gill: Thank you, Minister Calandra. Good afternoon, members of the committee. Joining me today

with me is Deputy Minister Maud Murray, along with colleagues from the Ministry of Red Tape Reduction. I appreciate the opportunity to talk about the work our ministry has done and why it is so important.

To give some background: When we formed government in 2018, Ontario had the reputation for being the most over-regulated province in the country. We all recognize regulations can be a necessary tool to achieve the types of positive results we aim for, like workplace health and safety and keeping our air and water clean, but over time, unchecked, regulations have the tendency to grow larger, more complex and more burdensome. They stray away from the original purpose, requiring people and businesses to spend an increasing amount of time and money to comply with them. So, early on, we made a commitment to the people of Ontario to ease their burden by modernizing and eliminating outdated, redundant and ineffective regulations, ones that no longer serve their original purpose. I'm proud to say that we have done this while maintaining and strengthening the important rules and regulations that keep people and the environment safe.

We know regulatory burdens are a barrier to our productivity, innovation, economic competitiveness and development, and there are high costs associated with failing to act. The Canadian Federation of Independent Business estimates red tape costs small businesses in Canada approximately \$11 billion a year. That doesn't even include larger businesses or the broader public sector. That's why, working across government and in consultation with stakeholders, we have focused on changes that improve government services and make it easier to invest and build in our great province.

Since 2018, this government has taken over 500 burden-reducing actions and reduced Ontario's total regulatory burden by more than 6%. To break that down further and focus on the impact of our changes, we have eliminated more than \$933 million in gross annual regulatory compliance costs for regulated entities since June 2018. As defined in law, these regulated entities are, of course, businesses, not-for-profit organizations, municipalities, universities and colleges, school boards and hospitals. We have achieved these savings by making practical changes that save both people and businesses time and money. Changes like:

- amending the Building Broadband Faster Act to help speed up the delivery of high-speed Internet access to every community by the end of 2025;

- strengthening occupational health and safety in the mining sector by changing regulations to reflect modern technology and better protect workers;

- enabling the next phase of carbon storage innovation by piloting technology that has a potential to store 30 years worth of carbon emissions;

- making it easier for restaurants and bars to expand their patios and include alcohol and delivery take-out orders;

- cutting costs for millions of Ontario vehicle owners by providing relief for drivers by eliminating licence plate stickers and fees and refunding any fees paid since March 1, 2020; and

—removing the unfair tolls imposed by the previous government on Highway 412 and 418.

We are incredibly proud of our progress, but work on this file is never truly done. That's why we continue to look for ways to reduce regulatory burdens, support the province's economy and encourage new investments and opportunities in Ontario. To date, this government has implemented 11 regulatory modernization packages and passed 10 high-impact pieces of red tape reduction legislation, including the recently passed Less Red Tape, Stronger Economy Act, 2023, our largest burden-reduction bill to date. This bill was part of our spring red tape reduction package, which included 42 new initiatives from across government that all contributed to a common goal of reducing red tape. And going forward, we will continue to partner with other ministries to address burden, including through our regular red tape reduction packages.

While the ministry is proud to lead Ontario's burden-reduction efforts, every minister and ministry that offers services or imposes regulations has a role to play in contributing to our whole-of-government effort. That's why, in addition to the regular bills and packages that our ministry brings forward, we work with our partner ministries to track compliance with Ontario's burden reduction directive and Modernizing Ontario for People and Businesses Act, 2020. The act requires that ministries conduct regulatory impact analyses, or RIAs, to demonstrate the impact of their policy changes on businesses, not-for-profits and the broader public sector, including costs and benefits. We are also leading the work to implement a full cross-government review of regulations as part of a mandatory 10-year regulatory review, a requirement set out under the burden reduction directive.

1530

This work is important, but it has also highlighted opportunities for us to improve our own processes within government. One of the ways we're doing this is by developing the ONReg digital platform which is currently being piloted by a small number of ministries. When fully rolled out across government, ONReg will help ministries comply with requirements set out in MOPBA and achieve our government's burden reduction target by replacing existing paper-based processes and systems used to achieve these objectives with an integrated digital tool.

The information collected through these processes allows the Ministry of Red Tape Reduction to track and report on the government's progress on burden reduction for businesses and individuals. This is done primarily through an annual burden reduction report which is released on or before September 30 of each year. The report highlights actions taken by ministries across government to modernize and streamline our regulatory system, reduce costs and improve service delivery. Publishing the report each year is an important part of our commitment to transparently report on our progress.

Our ministry also plays an important role in working with external stakeholders to advance our red tape reduction efforts. Through our ongoing partnership with businesses and industry associations, we have gained valuable

insight into challenges they face complying with regulations, particularly for small and medium-sized businesses. Over the past year, our ministry has also run consultation groups and engaged with stakeholders in several priority sectors to identify red tape. By listening to their feedback and concerns—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Hon. Parm Gill: Did you say “one minute” or “time's up”?

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): No, one more minute.

Hon. Parm Gill: —including our digital platform that helps us gather ideas and comments, we can identify areas where improvements can be made to reduce red tape and help inform priorities for our future packages. By working together and engaging in meaningful dialogue, we can help identify areas where regulations can be streamlined, simplified or eliminated altogether while still maintaining all necessary protections for Ontario.

With that, Chair, I just want to thank everybody for the opportunity, and I'm happy to take any questions.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Well, thank you very much, both ministers, for your presentations.

As a reminder, I will allow members a wide range of questions pertaining to the estimates before the committee. However, it must be noted that the onus is on the members asking the questions to make sure the question is relevant to the estimates under consideration.

The ministry is required to monitor the proceedings for any questions or issues that the ministry undertakes to address. If you wish, you may at the end of your appearance verify the questions and issues being tracked with the research officer.

For any staff appearing today, when you are called on to speak, please give your name and your title so that we may accurately record in Hansard who we have.

With that, we will start the first round with the official opposition: 20 minutes, MPP Fife.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Well, thank you very much, Chair. I started last time so I thought it was going to rotate.

Thank you very much, Minister Calandra. Nice to see you again; it was a long time. Minister Gill, thank you also for being here as well.

I was reading through the estimates for the Cabinet Office, and I did notice that in the strategic plan for cabinet, there is a direct connection around improving communication. In fact, on page 8, it says, “Communication with the public will be improved.” I wanted to ask you how you think suppressing the mandate letters for several years now—I think we're on the fifth year—all the way to the Supreme Court of Canada is a way of improving communication with Ontarians. And while you're at it, if you could speak to the legal fees that are associated with this five-year process, that would be very much appreciated.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Again, as I said in the last round, legal fees are handled through the Ministry of the Attorney General. The member, of course, will have the opportunity through the estimates of the Attorney General's ministry to review legal fees, as well as through the public accounts,

which are presented to this House and, again, reviewed by the public accounts committee.

When it comes to communication, I think the member—

Ms. Catherine Fife: Specifically on the mandate letters.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Well, with respect to that, the member will understand that communication, especially over the last number of years—certainly the member will appreciate the amount of communication that had to be done by the government and through the exceptional work of the public service when it came to helping people understand COVID, in particular. This is the type of communication that we are talking about: Government helping people understand the services and resources that are available to them. That is so incredibly important. When you look at how we entered COVID and the fact that Ontario came out better than almost any other jurisdiction in the world, it is, in part, due to the communication that was established and developed through the public service to get right to the heart to people so that they could understand what we were doing.

But even more than that, when you talk about—

Ms. Catherine Fife: Minister, I specifically asked you about the mandate letters. I don't need—we've already been through this.

Specifically, if the Cabinet Office is seeking to improve and strengthen communication with the people that we're elected to serve, why would cabinet sign off on keeping the mandate letters from the people of this province? Really, what do you have to hide? What is so terrible in those mandate letters that all of cabinet cannot tell the people of this province what you really want to get accomplished?

Hon. Paul Calandra: I'll tell you what we want to get accomplished. In 2018, we wanted to restore the economy. We wanted to improve the economy so that we could reduce red tape, eliminate burdens and bring back Ontario. We created the environment—

Ms. Catherine Fife: But we actually did see in the mandate letters that you wanted to make cuts across all ministries in the 2019 budget, which you did, which is still being felt by the people of this province.

Specifically, who made the decision? Who's actively in Cabinet Office saying, "You know, this is a good idea. Let's have these mandate letters; let's break from parliamentary protocol from across the country. Let's prevent people from actually knowing what's happening in our various ministries"? Who makes that decision in cabinet?

Hon. Paul Calandra: The decision as to what's happening in our various ministries, frankly, is done in coordination with Cabinet Office, but it is through the mandate that is given to the government through the people of the province of Ontario in an election.

Now, we probably are going to disagree on the importance of communicating to the people of the province of Ontario—

Ms. Catherine Fife: We're not going to disagree on that. We're not going to disagree on that at all.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I do think we have a disagreement. I believe that, when government makes a decision—

whether it's on skilled trades, how people can enter the skilled trades in the province of Ontario—we want to highlight and advertise that. I believe that, when we make decisions, whether it's health care decisions, whether it was during COVID, we have to communicate that to people, right? I can appreciate that that's not something you want, but I think it's important to us.

Ms. Catherine Fife: So this comes from the Premier's office, right? The Premier made the decision.

To date, though, 1,672 hours, 10 months, of legal counsel have been used in trying to suppress mandate letters. At no point does this instill confidence that the Cabinet Office is instilling trust when you're actively working against sharing your priorities. We actually heard in the last session that estimates set out the priorities, and those priorities are then communicated through the mandate letters. In the two years since the count of hours obtained via FOI—

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Point of order.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I'm referencing the estimates—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): We have a point of order: MPP Crawford.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Again, I would just carry on with the point of order from the last session we had. Let's be focused on specifically the estimates of Cabinet Office. I would ask the Chair, again, to bring the conversation back that way.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Again, I would advise the member to get to the issue of the estimates, not what happened before the estimates. This is going forward in the spending for the next year.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I would urge the member, though—I referenced the mandate and the mission of the Cabinet Office—to be more transparent and more open with the people of Ontario. Yet, the mandate letters are still being suppressed by the government at great cost to the people of this province. I mean, they've been leaked now, so we know some of what's in them, and we now know because of the investigation with the Auditor General and the Integrity Commissioner what's contained in some of the 2020 mandate letters.

I just wanted to give the minister an opportunity to explain: Why such a serious disconnect between the Cabinet Office saying, "We want to improve communication," and actively, then, suppressing mandate letters? It doesn't make sense at all.

1540

But I'll move on, because I don't really expect an answer—a clear answer, anyway.

The people of Ontario actually do have questions around these estimates, specifically around the Cabinet Office. The Cabinet Office outlines that it is a role of the office to maintain the process of cabinet decision-making and the machinery of government. So, what processes is the Cabinet Office putting in place to ensure that the decision-making process of cabinet is free from interference from outside actors of conflicts of interest?

And the reason I raise this within the context of the current allocation within estimates is that we have now a

very long pattern of people receiving preferential treatment by this government, securing employment, securing appointments, public appointments—people even received King’s Counsel designations for some unknown reason—and this compromises the trust. So the estimates that are before us should indicate how the government is going to address the issues around the appearance of conflict and direct conflict of interest that this government has with the people of this province.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Yes, again, when it comes to rules with respect to conflict of interest, it is actually the Legislative Assembly, through an act of Parliament, that sets out the rules and defines the interactions between cabinet ministers and members of provincial Parliament in the undertaking of our duties. So it is something that parliamentarians have an opportunity to make suggestions on. At the same time, it is my understanding that the public accounts committee will be undertaking a review of this. But it is the assembly, through the act, which governs the rules by which the public service undertakes—the public service does not do anything outside of what this assembly and the members elected by this assembly, all of us, give it the authority to do.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Well, that’s an interesting comment, actually, and I’d like to unpack that a little bit. We have heard reports, and you did reference this in your opening comments, around how the office of cabinet interacts with the various other ministries, supports those ministries with policy direction and legislation and priorities. There is a fine line between the public service and the very good people that are here in this room today and then the political side, which drives those decisions and drives policy, and then the OPS brings those policies into effect.

This might be a question, actually, for the secretary of the cabinet; I saw her here earlier—hi. But maybe you can decide.

We have heard from civil servants that serve the cabinet office that they were becoming frustrated that senior leadership was telling the OPS to follow the rules when it was the political side that carried out the greenbelt deals. This was the special committee that was sort of embedded in this process. This was a direct quote from the reporting of Global: “No one in the public service believes the government,” one source says.

Is it a responsible use of taxpayer funds to create a system where the OPS is not being used for its full expertise and report that they are feeling frustrated by decisions of cabinet and political staff? So this is a serious issue—

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: Point of order.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Point of order?

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: I’m failing to see which line of the estimates this question relates to, which line item in the estimates.

Ms. Catherine Fife: It relates to estimates vote 401, operations.

Do you have any comment on this discord, if you will, between the OPS, as you referenced, and the political staff that are guiding land use decisions and land swaps as they relate to the greenbelt?

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: Point of order.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Point of order: Mr. Cuzzetto.

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: This has nothing to do with estimates at this present time.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Again, I would warn the member that the events that she wants to talk about are not part of the estimates structure. The report before us is the estimates and the spending going forward, and I would hope that they can get back to that very quickly, or we’ll have to cut that question off.

Ms. Catherine Fife: It’s interesting, Chair, because I am addressing the operational funding that’s currently assigned in the estimates from Cabinet Office. The government members chose to talk about a number of issues that were not related to the estimates—basically, it turned into a public relations campaign over there—and they were not cautioned as I have been.

I have a right and I have a responsibility to ask these questions, especially as it relates to cabinet, especially as it relates to these estimates and the projected funding that’s going to be going into cabinet for this upcoming year. So my question stands. It was, in fact, Minister Calandra who introduced this concept of the OPS and the work that they do, and how important it is to stay separate from political influence, if you will, especially around the greenbelt. So I wanted to give you an opportunity to comment on how important it is to maintain that integrity.

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: Chair?

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Point of order?

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: I’m sorry. Point of order: I’m looking at spending estimates, not operations. So, again, if the member opposite could detail specifically the spending line item, that would be very helpful.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I have a question on the floor—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): I want to caution the member—first of all, to everyone at the table, all the comments are through the Chair, not to individuals.

I would also ask the member to make sure that they are addressing the estimates and the forward spending, as opposed to information we may have on things that have happened in the past. The issues that we’re talking about would be very appropriate at the public accounts committee, but not at the estimates committee.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you very much. Just as a clarification for my colleagues: In estimates, the Cabinet Office outlines that it is a role of the office to maintain the process of—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): I would call to the attention of the member that this is not an opportunity for members to explain their arguments. This is not an argument between the members. The Chair has ruled, and now the member is expected to follow the ruling of the Chair.

Ms. Catherine Fife: My question for the minister: The people of Ontario have questions. In estimates, the Cabinet Office outlines that it is a role of the office to maintain the process of cabinet decision-making and the machinery of government. What processes is the Cabinet Office putting in place to ensure that the decision-making process of cabinet

is free from interference from outside actors and respectful of the OPS?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Well, I guess you and I will have a difference of opinion on what the role of Cabinet Office and the OPS is. My experience with them has been that they have always, throughout my time being a minister of the crown, operated in the best interests of the people of the province of Ontario, without influence from anybody outside. They undertake to put in place the initiatives that have been voted upon by this Parliament, by this Legislative Assembly, and they do it in a very professional, non-partisan way.

So I guess you and I will have to disagree on the professionalism of this public service that has shown—through the last number of years that I’ve been here, anyway—that they are able to deliver on a mandate that the government has put in place, which has delivered incredible results for the people of the province of Ontario. I’m quite proud of them—

Ms. Catherine Fife: So it is not the OPS that falls under this—

Hon. Paul Calandra: We will continue to disagree, between you and I, on how effective and on the benefit to the people of the province of Ontario by a non-partisan public service that is the first class of this country when it comes to delivering services for people.

Ms. Catherine Fife: The Cabinet Office has direct responsibility and manages how the government makes decisions. It works with ministries to coordinate policy, communications and intergovernmental connections.

In paragraph 55 of the IC report, the Premier’s former deputy chief of staff, Andrew Sidnell, who finalized these mandate letters, including the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing’s, describes a back-and-forth—the back-and-forth piece is pretty important. It’s important to maintain the integrity of the OPS, but it’s also to make sure that political staff are following the rules around communication and the integrity of record-keeping.

What I’m seeing right now in the estimates, as it’s defined, is no clear line that will address going forward—because certainly this issue is not going anywhere—the needed training and modern protocols to make sure that all records are kept in the public purview, that emails are not deleted, that staff like Mr. Amato are not picking up documents. This is directly related on page 26.

1550

Mr. Deepak Anand: Point of order, Chair?

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Point of order: Mr. Anand.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Thank you, Chair. Again, I just want to remind the member opposite, through you, that this is about estimates, so let’s stay on the estimates. There will be more opportunities to debate and talk about other things, so let’s stay on the estimates, because the people of Ontario watching right now want to know what the estimates are so that we can vote on those estimates.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): The member will know to make sure to stay with the estimates.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Yes. So, within the current estimates and the vote number on operations, how much is allocated to ensure that staff are trained to maintain records, to keep records and to protect the integrity of the office of the cabinet?

Hon. Paul Calandra: As we talked about in the Premier’s office estimates process, political staff and the employees of the Legislature, who must follow the rules established by this Legislature, by all of us, and who have access to the Information and Privacy Commissioner, must follow those rules and must also follow the rules established by this Legislature through the Office of the Integrity Commissioner. When it comes to resources of both of those officers of Parliament, those are handled through the Board of Internal Economy, which functions as a consensus body with both a Conservative and an NDP member—your House leader and me—on that board.

Ms. Catherine Fife: The Cabinet Office doesn’t undertake to ensure that staff within the various offices are trained and meet the standards of communication? Because you have to remember that the Auditor General and the Integrity Commissioner said that the record-keeping violated basic OPS standards, and she called the process indefensible. I really am asking, truly, as it relates—

Hon. Paul Calandra: I think you’ve answered your own question though, right?

Ms. Catherine Fife: This is forward estimates—

Hon. Paul Calandra: I think you’ve answered your own question.

Ms. Catherine Fife: It’s land speculators’ access to protected land without a process—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One at a time.

Hon. Paul Calandra: But I think you’ve answered your own question, right? You answered your own question.

Ms. Catherine Fife: No, I didn’t, because I can’t get a—

Hon. Paul Calandra: Honestly, you did, because you referenced a report that says—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Hon. Paul Calandra: —that somebody may have violated OPS standards.

Ms. Catherine Fife: No, they found it to be true.

Hon. Paul Calandra: So separate that from the OPS. I think you’ve answered your own question.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Political staff—

Hon. Paul Calandra: Exactly.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Political staff violated the OPS—

Hon. Paul Calandra: So I think you’ve answered your own question there. The OPS had—

Ms. Catherine Fife: I’m asking: Where is the accountability? Where is the funding to address this gap in accountability and ethics?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Look, as I’m one of the representatives on the Board of Internal Economy, if you think that both the Information and Privacy Commissioner and the Integrity Commissioner require additional resources—

Ms. Catherine Fife: He has to convince you, Minister.

Hon. Paul Calandra: —then I will absolutely bring that to the board on your behalf.

Ms. Catherine Fife: And you would have to actually vote for it; otherwise it would be a stalemate at the Board of Internal Economy, because there are only two of you and we know how well those votes go.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Actually, the board has been operating very, very well, thank you very much. Mr. Vanthof and I are in alignment on many, many issues. I think you'll find—

Ms. Catherine Fife: Yes, you're very good friends.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Perhaps an outreach to your House leader might help you understand how well we are actually getting along on behalf of the Legislative Assembly.

Ms. Catherine Fife: No, I am very well aware; thank you so much.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much. That concludes that time.

We'll now go to the independent, MPP Bowman.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Thank you to both ministers for being here this afternoon.

It's very clear, according to the Auditor General's report on the greenbelt, that there is a dire need for a reset in the Cabinet Office. I'm wondering if you can speak to how you will prioritize—as you've talked about your priorities and that that is what this office is here to do: to execute the priorities of the Premier and of the government, to oversee that, to provide advice etc. Can you talk more specifically about how you will do that within the confines of this budget?

There's got to be a review of the Lobbyists Registration Act, the Members' Integrity Act and the Public Service of Ontario Act. Those are going to be extensive processes. I don't know if, again—of course, that wasn't anticipated when this was done, but I'm asking a question about how much money you think will need to be set aside to do that kind of reset and make sure that processes are followed going forward.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Again, those reviews of those acts are handled by the assembly. It is through the committees of the Legislative Assembly that reviews of those acts that you referenced are done. It is not through the public service. So members of, perhaps, this committee—I know public accounts will have the opportunity to review the Auditor General's report. I know the Integrity Commissioner has asked for a review. It is a mandated review, frankly, by the terms of the act, so the Legislature will be seized with that, because it is a mandated review of his act. He has provided—I believe it's the public accounts committee, but I could be wrong on that, or the House leaders—prior to the report that you referenced, suggestions for improving the acts. Again, it will be up to members of Parliament, through committees, to review, interview the commissioner and ultimately bring forward any legislative amendments that are required to the floor of the House and pass that. It is then the professional, non-partisan public service's job to ensure that the will of Parliament is undertaken and put into action.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Again, I understand that. I appreciate you're trying to explain the process to me. What I'm asking is whether or not resources within the

Premier's office, if this is a priority of this Premier, and within cabinet—if the resources from the cabinet will be directed to help ensure that that is done. Of course the Legislative Assembly will do its work and the OPS will support that, but there is a \$55-million budget for the Cabinet Office, which basically is staff—it's staffing mostly, salaries—and the work of those staff is directed by yourself and the Premier, I presume, around what their priorities are. I'm trying to get a sense of how much staff time will be allocated to those kinds of important exercises to do that reset.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Again, the review you're asking is—it's done by you.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: No, it's okay—

Hon. Paul Calandra: It's done by you, okay? It's not done by the public service. It is our job as parliamentarians—

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Chair, I'd like to reclaim my time.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Order.

Hon. Paul Calandra: It is our job as parliamentarians—

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: I'd like to reclaim my time. Thank you.

I wanted to talk a little bit about red tape reduction. Again, we certainly want efficiencies within our bureaucracy. We want taxpayers to feel that they're getting those efficiencies. But, as you mentioned, there still need to be some guardrails around process. Could you talk a little bit about how you will be making sure that your teams and your staff are not, in the goal of making things faster, making things less effective and in fact cutting corners, shall we say, in terms of how things get done?

Hon. Parm Gill: Absolutely. First of all and foremost, thank you for the question—great question. I would say as part of our mandate, first and foremost, we keep in mind—health and safety and the environment are at the forefront of any decision that's made in the Ministry of Red Tape Reduction. For anything that we're looking to change, modify or bring forward as part of a package, whether it's a spring or fall package, we do a very comprehensive consultation with the stakeholders, with the industry leaders and all of the relevant parties. So I can assure you that the Ministry of Red Tape Reduction is not about trying to make things faster while cutting corners. I can assure you of that. First and foremost, like I said, the priority is to maintain the health and the safety and the environment: clean air, clean water. All of those things are very, very important not just to us in the Ministry of Red Tape Reduction but also to our government.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Well, clean air and clean water are certainly what the greenbelt was created for, so—anyway, that's a conversation for another day.

The other kinds of red tape reduction that we hear about relate to small businesses and people accessing things like their driver's licence, online digitization etc., and that's important, but we also hear about significant red tape as it relates to people trying to access medical services. They're having to fill out forms; they're having to go to Trillium to get funding. You mentioned the lean program within the

cabinet. Can you talk about what kind of resources will go to help make things easier for people trying to get services and obtain direct delivery of care in those kinds of situations?

Hon. Parm Gill: Listen, I would say, obviously when we first formed government back in 2018, the Ministry of Red Tape Reduction existed as an associate ministry, part of economic development, job creation and trade. It wasn't until our last election, June 2022, this became a fully stand-alone ministry. Why? Because we recognized the work that was already being done and what we could do more. Of course, we needed a ministry that was solely dedicated.

1600

I can assure you that for some of the items that you mentioned, especially when it comes to health care and stuff, which are extremely important, there is a significant amount of red tape obviously that we could look at, our ministry and my team at the red tape ministry. In working with all of our colleagues, legislators, we're continuously looking for ideas. We're talking to stakeholders. We're out and about. We're consulting. Obviously, there were some measures that were already introduced, but we are looking at more changes, working with the Minister of Health, Minister Jones, especially on the health file.

I am also proud of the record that we have so far, honestly. When we first formed government, CFIB had done a study where Ontario was the most heavily regulated province in the country. On average, each business was spending roughly about \$33,000 a year just in terms of compliance costs. We reduced that by over 6%. In terms of the annual gross reduction in compliance costs for businesses, we brought it down by nearly \$950 million. I think we have made tremendous progress.

To your point: Is there more work that needs to be done? Absolutely. We'll be the first one to admit that. My team and I and members of the government, I can assure you, are absolutely ready to carry on that work.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: I would also like to just talk a little bit about the increase in spending in this office from about \$50 million up to \$55 million, \$56 million. Given the conversation we had earlier about the need to contain costs, can you talk a bit—through you, Chair, to the House leader—about why the increase in this particular year and in this office?

Hon. Paul Calandra: A really good question. Again, if you look at the accumulation of what happened over the last number of years with respect to COVID and the extraordinary work, frankly, of the public service and the amount of work that the Cabinet Office had to do to not only coordinate during that time period across government with other jurisdictions across the country—truly remarkable, but it goes further than that. If you look at the work that the Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade is doing in relation—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Hon. Paul Calandra: —to working with our federal partners and provincial Premiers across the country to land important investments. Whether it was St. Thomas—look, it's over \$25 billion of investments, much of which has to

be done in coordination with other levels of government. That is a lot of work that is undertaken on our behalf by the public service. It's actually remarkable what they have accomplished. The public service of Ontario is one of the leanest in the country—

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Now? For how long have they been the leanest?

Hon. Paul Calandra: When you consider the fact that the federal public service has increased by 30%, that is not the case in Ontario. We've been able to deliver more on behalf of the people of the province of Ontario than any other jurisdiction in the country. It is because of the hard work of our public service over the last number of years—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much for that.

Now, we will go to the government side. MPP Byers.

Mr. Rick Byers: Thank you to both ministers for appearing this afternoon and for your excellent work and terrific message for this committee on the estimates.

Minister Calandra, perhaps first to you: I was intrigued by your comments about how Cabinet Office is focused on fiscal responsibility and dedicated to eliminating layers of duplication in administration. I was curious on how you've been able to do this, how Cabinet Office has been able to do this, and some examples perhaps you or the officials can relate—but it's a very encouraging message for the efficiency of the operation given all the activities involved in the office.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Yes. I think, too, when you look at something the Premier undertook early on, the lean process that the Premier brought in, it's not only in Cabinet Office but led by Cabinet Office throughout every department of the government. How can we deliver more for people without increasing costs of doing so? What operations are we doing in operating government? What duplication can we do—really built on the back of the Minister of Red Tape Reduction.

Look, if we can do this across government and save \$8 billion for small, medium and large job creators, then we can do it internally as well. The Premier suggested it's not enough to ask other people to eliminate red tape; it's not enough to ask our partners, whether it's our municipal partners or beyond, to eliminate red tape, but it is also incumbent on us as ministers and government, led by the Cabinet Office and that lean process. When you look at the savings that they have been able to accomplish while increasing services to people, while helping us retain our fiscal position in a better position, while helping land billions of dollars' worth of investment and helping guide us through the COVID pandemic in the best shape of any other jurisdiction, frankly, in the world, it is a focus on doing more for less when it is needed.

Also, I will say this: Again, it strikes back to the priorities. It's an ability of the public service to be nimble and to be able to move to help address priority areas, and that has been one of the successes of our public service unlike, I would suggest, any other public service. Other jurisdictions, whether it's the federal government—they've increased the public service massively. We can argue

whether that has resulted in better services for the people of Canada or not, but what this team has been able to do is focus on priorities, focus on delivering for people, do it in an efficient, effective manner and always remembering that the taxpayer comes first, and they've been able to accomplish that on behalf of the people of the province of Ontario.

I think it is a huge success story and one that we as parliamentarians should be very, very proud of. Whether you agree with the mandate of the government or not, you should be proud of the fact that the public service of this province has helped us turn around this province and really is showing how you can do more for less by focusing on priorities that matter to the people of the province.

Mr. Rick Byers: That's excellent, and I totally agree with you. It's the kind of stuff you don't hear about day to day, but it's so important in the operation of government. So thank you very much.

Minister Gill, over to you now: I was intrigued when you were talking about—I think you had mentioned \$930 million or so of savings in some areas like broadband, mining, carbon storage etc. I'm curious about the process that you and your officials go through to identify these opportunities. How do they come up? You're interacting with so many ministries on a regular basis; are you getting ideas from them or elsewhere? I'm just curious about the process that goes into identifying these important and very, very meaningful savings opportunities for all the industries you mentioned.

Hon. Parm Gill: Well, absolutely. Thank you for that great question. First and foremost, obviously, we're blessed that we have an amazing team at the Ministry of Red Tape Reduction that does a tremendous job. I personally love getting out there and touring the province and also having the opportunity to speak to business owners, individuals, organizations face to face and hearing, "Hey, what is it that's causing you grief? What is it that the government of Ontario can do to help you become more efficient and eliminate some of the barriers that might be holding you back?"

Along with that, I know a lot of our colleagues hold their round tables at the local level to talk to their business community and other organizations. So we get a lot of ideas through that as well. We also have an online digital portal that is available to all Ontarians 24/7. That's another great way that we get a lot of feedback.

But as you mentioned, it's also working with our other partner ministries across government. This isn't just a dedicated Ministry of Red Tape Reduction that is dedicated to finding ways, but we do work across government with other partners, other ministers and colleagues to reach out to them: "Hey, what can we help you with?" Or if we have an idea that we've come across through our consultations, then we reach out to them and say, "This is an issue that has been raised. How can we work together? How can we look at ways of whether we're able to eliminate or make it better so it's more suitable and costs businesses and individuals less time and money?" Time is another one of the criteria that we've now started to measure; not just

the dollar amount but how many hours this is saving an organization or a business.

So I would say there's a whole suite of different ways how we get to the ideas that ultimately, obviously, land in our packages, or pieces of legislation, that we bring forward to the Legislature twice a year—at least one in the spring and one in the fall. We're currently working on our fall package. We're very proud of the spring package that passed and received royal assent just before summer.

1610

Mr. Rick Byers: That's great, and I would agree that time—that's a great idea, another important factor. I think I heard you say that these savings have to be demonstrated. How do you assess what the benefits are before you proceed with them? That must be a challenge for you and officials.

Hon. Parm Gill: As I mentioned in my opening remarks, not all regulations are bad. There are obviously some that are there for good reasons, that are to protect health and safety and the environment, absolutely. We always constantly have to look at those through those lenses. That's a priority for our ministry.

But at the same time, are there regulations or laws that were put in place many, many years ago, for a good reason, but that have outlived their use? Or they could have become duplicated—a provincial regulation might be duplicated at the municipal or regional level, or sometimes even federal. We obviously look for all of those opportunities.

At the end of the day, we all have a job and a duty to make sure that our province is the most competitive province, not just across the country but, I would say, North America. It's the only thing that's going to allow us to attract investments, like we are seeing in the auto sector, to the billions of dollars that are going on to create well-paying jobs—jobs of the future, I like to say.

So it's not just the efforts of the Minister of Red Tape Reduction, but it is the efforts that are put forward by each and every one of our colleagues and, ultimately, Ontarians.

Mr. Rick Byers: Great. Thank you very much.

I'm happy to pass it on.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): MPP Triantafilopoulos.

Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos: Thank you to both ministers for being here with us today. I'd like to direct some of my questions to the Minister of Red Tape Reduction. When we formed government in 2018, it's fair to say that we inherited one of the most highly regulated jurisdictions in all of North America. We saw that, in fact, it was quite a hostile business environment. Businesses were fleeing to other jurisdictions—

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Point of order, Chair.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Point of order?

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: This topic of discussion does not relate to the estimates in front of us.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): We'll just remind the member that during your questions, you do need to get to the estimates.

Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos: I was getting to that point, Chair, but let me continue.

What I was conveying was that, in fact, it was a very hostile business environment. In fact, there were something like 300,000 manufacturing jobs that had fled the province, and so what I was going to ask you was—

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Chair, excuse me, point of order.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Another point of order?

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: I would just question the language here—unparliamentary language.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): I would point out that if it's a continuation of the last point of order, it's out of order.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: No, sorry: The language was unparliamentary.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Carry on with your point of order.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: I'm suggesting that the language being used is unparliamentary. The member can repeat what she said—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): We'll caution the member and proceed.

Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos: The Ministry of Red Tape Reduction was formed, since 2018, very much with a mandate to look at how to compete with jurisdictions that were actually attracting some of our small and medium-size businesses. So what I'd like to ask our minister is if he could inform us specifically about what some of the key initiatives have been up until this point. And moving forward, what are part of the key initiatives of your legislation that you'll be bringing forward?

Hon. Parm Gill: Thank you for that question. As you mentioned, obviously, when we formed government, just before, CFIB had done a study. Ontario, unfortunately, was the heaviest regulated province in the country. On average, it was costing an average business over \$33,000 a year just in compliance costs.

What this all basically means is, at the end of the day, you couldn't fault businesses that were fleeing the province. We saw that. People were losing jobs to the tune of over 300,000 jobs that had left the province. That was obviously because the previous government was only interested in accumulating and adding more and more regulation and more and more burden on businesses, and it never looked the other way.

So when we formed government, we made it clear, and the Premier's direction was very clear, that this is something that we needed to address. We needed to make our province more competitive. We needed to attract investments. We needed to make sure that jobs are going to be coming back to the province. Obviously, we've seen all of those things work.

I'm proud of the fact that the Ministry of Red Tape Reduction has brought forward 10 different pieces of legislation that have gone through the House which have helped us reduce some of the burdens on businesses to the tune of almost \$950 million gross, on an annual basis. That is absolutely huge.

So the regulatory compliance requirement that the businesses are required to meet? We have eliminated that by just over 6%, and we've taken action. There are actually over 500 different individual actions that we have taken when it comes to reducing burden on businesses.

We have a lot of work to do. Honestly, we still have a lot of work to do. This is part of the reason why we're continuously out there talking to businesses, talking to individuals, talking to organizations and working with our partner ministries to look at what else we can do. How can we make your life easier? How can we help you become more competitive, that will ultimately attract more investment? The province continues to help our economy and continues to create well-paying jobs.

Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos: Thank you, Minister. I'll take you back, as well, to the two-plus years during COVID, during the pandemic, when we know many businesses suffered greatly. Yet, at the time, the government was able to provide some support, pivoting some of the businesses—I think specifically of the hospitality sector that suffered greatly—in terms of the government allowing for certain changes to how they did business. That at the time was really transitional or temporary, but as a result has turned into some permanent features of how they do business. Perhaps you can expand on that as well.

Hon. Parm Gill: Absolutely. One example that I can share with you is, obviously, businesses were going through a rough time during COVID—that's no secret—especially in the hospitality industry. A lot of restaurants were having a hard time making ends meet. So, at the time, our government brought forward initiatives to help those businesses—not just with financial means—but also made other changes such as to expand patios and operate them for longer hours, and also to align alcohol delivery along with food takeout and delivery services, which was very much appreciated.

Another one that I remembered off the top of my head is allowing dogs on patios. That was not allowed before. That was well received by Ontarians in general.

Some of these changes may seem very minor, but I can tell you, if you speak to a business owner, they'll tell you the value of it. They'll tell you what it means to them, what it means to their clients and what it means to their business. That's the angle we're always looking at, whether it's the hospitality industry or any other sector or any other industry out there: What is it that we can do to make your life easier and make you become more competitive so you can focus more on your business rather than spending time filling out unnecessary forms? Whether it's them or whether it's their staff—in some cases, they have to go out and hire a consultant to fill a requirement that may be completely unnecessary.

So I am obviously proud of the record of our government. I'm proud of the record of the ministry and everything that we've been able to do and continue to do.

Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos: I, for one, having a European background, can really appreciate the patio culture.

I have one more quick question for you, Minister, and that is that you mentioned a mandatory 10-year regulatory

review. Could you describe what opportunities you actually see that we'll be able to provide through further savings to SMEs in the province?

Hon. Parm Gill: Absolutely. As I mentioned in my remarks earlier, we're launching a 10-year mandatory review to look at all of the regulations that have been on the books for 10 years or longer. There are obviously regulations that might have been brought forward for a perfectly good reason, but they might have outlasted their purpose, or with changes when it comes to technology, the ways of doing things have changed. I'll use the example in the mining sector: We made changes to the health and safety act where we're now allowing drones to go into the mines rather than sending individuals to conduct some of these inspections. That's an example.

1620

So where the regulations are either outdated or duplicative or they've just outlived their purpose, we're conducting this 10-year mandatory review and looking at whether they're still relevant or not. If they're not relevant, let's either make changes or, in other words, eliminate them if we can.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Two and a half minutes, MPP Anand.

Mr. Deepak Anand: My question is to Minister Gill.

Minister, we are talking about estimates and we're talking about the \$6 million the people of Ontario are investing through your ministry. I was thinking about what you do at the Ministry of Red Tape Reduction. We invest \$6 million into the ministry. You come up with the ideas for reducing the red tape. When you reduce the red tape, more businesses come to Ontario and invest. When they invest, it creates jobs. Through those jobs, government is getting revenue, and when they spend money, the government is, again, getting the revenue. Plus, the businesses at large are organically growing; they're investing again, more jobs are being created, and they're also spending more money, investing more money, and more money is generated for the government.

So my question to you is, technically speaking, is your ministry a cost centre or a profit centre? Is the \$6 million that we're investing into you adding costs for the government or is it actually increasing the revenue of the government?

Hon. Parm Gill: Well, I'd like to say, obviously, the value the Ministry of Red Tape Reduction provides to Ontarians is absolutely tremendous. As you mentioned, for a \$6-million cost, our ministry has found savings for Ontario businesses and individuals worth nearly \$950 million that is saved on an annual basis. I know you're a smart guy; you can do the math and see what sort of benefit that's attracting.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Hon. Parm Gill: Just to provide some numbers for the benefit of the committee, out of the \$6 million, roughly 82% or \$4.9 million is spent mostly on staff and salaries, and about \$700,000 goes towards employee benefits, so that's where the majority or the bulk of the \$6 million is

really spent. I can tell you that our team at the Ministry of Red Tape Reduction does tremendous work, and I think they earn every single one of those dollars.

Mr. Deepak Anand: I don't know how much time we have, but—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): You have 22 seconds.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Perfect.

I just want to congratulate you and say keep up the good work. Through this investment, let's build a bigger, stronger Ontario, which you're already contributing to.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): With that, we'll go to the official opposition. MPP Fife.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Under Cabinet Office programs, under the main office operating expenses, it says, "The Cabinet Office is the Premier's ministry, providing essential strategic advice and analysis to support the Premier and cabinet to achieve the government's priorities." Under this table, there's "salaries and wages," and it is set at just over \$40 million. Contained within that item, obviously there's the staff who work within the Cabinet Office or across cabinet offices, and it also involves certain wages. Would travel and expenses for staff in the Cabinet Office fall under these salaries and wages?

Hon. Paul Calandra: It is my understanding that it would.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Are you just looking to legal? Okay. Is somebody else, perhaps—

Mr. Robert Foster: Again, to the last question about how it's classified, some would fall under services and some would fall under transportation. It would depend on the nature of the travel.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Introduction first?

Mr. Robert Foster: Robert Foster, director of finance and operations support services.

It would depend on the nature of the travel. If it's day-to-day, it could fall under transportation; if it's travel, like a claimed expense, that could fall under services.

Ms. Catherine Fife: This includes staff in all of Cabinet Office. Is that correct?

Mr. Robert Foster: In all of Cabinet Office, yes.

Ms. Catherine Fife: So this would include when staff drive someplace on the behalf of the minister. They can submit mileage for that, yes?

Mr. Robert Foster: They could, yes. Generally, there's a policy of taking fleet vehicles or rental cars.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Foster. And does that also include any overtime? Do you know if that estimate item includes overtime?

Mr. Robert Foster: Any overtime claim would be included in salary and wages, yes.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Okay. I'm just trying to get to when staff go above and beyond, as some staff have done in the Cabinet Office by delivering packages to developers. They could submit mileage, they could submit expenses, they could submit overtime—

Hon. Paul Calandra: I think the Cabinet Office is the public service.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Yes. But I'm asking a general question. So those would fall under—

Hon. Paul Calandra: Are you asking about employees of cabinet ministers or the public service? The independent public service—

Ms. Catherine Fife: I'm talking about the political side, which is—

Hon. Paul Calandra: This is separate.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Okay. But I just wanted to find out what that specific item actually included for the staff that are contained in there.

I just want to say, Mr. Chair, it's been an interesting afternoon.

I should ask the Minister of Red Tape Reduction one question. I don't want to let you feel left out. And I didn't want to give them another opportunity to say, "Point of order." I think there have already been 27 this meeting.

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: You're counting. Wow.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Yes, I can count. That's a really good skill for the finance critic.

But I did want to say, Minister Gill, as you have embraced the red tape reduction—we've had the occasion to meet a few times through finance—have you been addressing the pipeline to build houses and reducing some of that red tape along the way in that process?

Hon. Parm Gill: Obviously—anything and everything that makes the process more efficient, that helps the province become more competitive, that helps our businesses in the province succeed. We look at anything and everything that comes to us, whether it's through our digital portal or through other partner ministries or our stakeholders. We then work with our partner ministries to look at ways of streamlining it, making it more efficient, if we can.

Like I said, there are obviously some regulations that are there for perfectly good reasons, to protect health and safety and the environment—absolutely. But there are others that might have outlived their use or may be duplicative or burdensome. We look at them to see how we can make the process better for businesses and for Ontarians. That's our job.

Ms. Catherine Fife: That's your job. And when you engage with stakeholders, say, in the housing sector, to reduce red tape, are all of your meetings recorded and those records kept? You could clearly articulate who you've met with and what business you conducted with those developers—or stakeholders, I should say?

Hon. Parm Gill: Of course, when we meet with stakeholders, organizations, accompanied by staff, we make note in terms of what the issues are, what the concerns are raised by a particular business or an organization. And then, like I said, we take those back and we'll work with our partner ministries to look at ways, if there is a possibility, of improving the process and making it efficient.

Ms. Catherine Fife: As you've gone through that process—I've heard you speak about the importance around transparency in that process and having the appropriate checks and balances in play as you navigate the policy directives that are articulated in your undisclosed mandate

letter. Do you want to comment on why that transparency is so important when you actually are trying to reduce red tape?

1630

Hon. Parm Gill: I think anything and everything we do has to be for the good of the province and good for Ontarians in general—whether it's making businesses competitive, whether it's helping not-for-profits do their job better. I am proud of the record that the Ministry of Red Tape Reduction has achieved, like I said, through our 10 different packages that we have brought to the Legislature, that we've passed, that have helped save businesses to the tune of almost \$950 million on an annual basis, and we've been able to eliminate the regulatory compliance requirement by just over 6%. Every time I'm out there and I'm speaking to stakeholders, I'm speaking to Ontarians, they recognize that, and we're always looking for more ideas in terms of what else we can do.

Obviously, the Legislature is going to be resuming shortly, and I'm looking forward to bringing forward the next piece of legislation, our fall package, which will again go on to help Ontarians and help Ontario businesses and, obviously, the government become more efficient.

Ultimately, as I mentioned earlier, all of the investments that the province has been attracting—I'll just use the auto sector as one example—to the tune of billions of dollars, creating thousands of well-paying jobs and bringing back jobs that we had lost under the previous Liberal government—when they were in power; obviously, jobs were fleeing the province. I think we have an amazing record.

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's interesting that you bring up the former Liberal government, and it's good to hear that your office and your leadership maintain records and you ensure that those records are open and transparent for the public to use. That should be the way that government actually operates. But when that doesn't happen—I'm sure you can understand that there's a real lack of trust in that process when records are deleted, when emails are deleted and when meetings with stakeholders and lobbyists are not clearly recorded from a communications perspective.

We've been trying to get some records—the minister to your right has given me lots of advice on how to FOI lots of information today. But I do think it's very important that the integrity of the work that's happening in our various ministries is maintained and that those records are kept. So when that doesn't happen, it does give us pause, and it certainly gives the people of this province pause when we can't get access to certain meeting minutes that have happened.

I hope that, as this so-called process—at least the former Minister of Municipal Affairs has acknowledged he did try to get some clarity around the scope of what that process looked like. The Premier did not adhere to those guidelines, which is surprising. But those Cabinet Office records? There needs to be a record of them. Minister Calandra says that he keeps records of those meetings. You've said that you keep records of those meetings. It's unfortunate and concerning that when the Minister of

Municipal Affairs was meeting with stakeholders that those minutes were not kept. So it's problematic, and it certainly isn't going to be solved by the current estimates that are before us.

There's certainly less red tape for some people to access land in this province, and I don't think that that should become the norm. Do you?

Hon. Parm Gill: I think I'll defer that to minister responsible, Minister Calandra.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Look, what there should be is an availability of people to access affordable homes in the province of Ontario, and—

Ms. Catherine Fife: Yes, but that's not what we're talking about. We're not talking about houses; we're talking about the greenbelt, and we're talking about corruption, really.

Hon. Paul Calandra: You asked a question about development, and that has to include people's ability to access homes. We've been very committed since day one to build 1.5 million homes.

Ms. Catherine Fife: And that's not going to happen.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I know that that's not something that you are or your party are concerned about—

Ms. Catherine Fife: That is not going to happen—

Hon. Paul Calandra: —but it is something that I am seized with every—

Ms. Catherine Fife: —because you're embroiled in a major, major scandal.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Order. Order. If we talk through the Chair, we will not both be talking at the same time. It is the member's time.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you. Anyway, we have learned a lot this afternoon—

Mr. Deepak Anand: Chair?

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Did you have a point of order?

Mr. Deepak Anand: Yes, Chair.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): MPP Anand, on a point of order.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Chair, I just want to say, as MPP Fife talked about yesterday, her mother is watching, so this is being streamed. The people of Ontario are looking at the estimates. They want to know what is in the estimates so that we can vote. So can all parties stay on the estimates, both the minister and the member also?

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): I would say that's advice, but that's not a point of order. We will now go back to the member.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Nor is it advice. Listen, my mom is watching, and she wants answers, as do Ontarians. I'm certainly not going to take any advice about being nice. I have a job and a responsibility here. The government may not want to give the answers, but the people want me to ask the questions. That is for certain.

We did learn that it's not an issue for the Cabinet Office that records have been deleted. I've heard that very loud and clear. I asked a question about conflict of interest; this is not a huge concern. I've asked about who hires the chief of staff; I found out the Premier hired the chief of staff for municipal affairs. I found out that legal counsel for the

Premier and for Mr. Clark and Mr. Amato would be coming out of the Attorney General, if they're still employed at that time. I also learned that the 29—

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: Chair, point of order.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): We have a further point of order. Mr. Cuzzetto.

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: The member is out of order to standing order 25(b). Can she get back on the topic again, please?

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): The member will know that she should be on the estimates, and she will be getting back to that. The floor is yours.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Then I've asked a question about the future funding in the Cabinet Office program. Have you adjusted for future Integrity Commissioner investigations around legal representation? Have you built that into the estimates for the Cabinet Office?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Again, those are built into the estimates of the integrity officer—which is a job that you will do as a member of Parliament when those estimates are brought forward and voted on by the assembly.

Ms. Catherine Fife: So, no.

Also, the Premier selected Mr. Amato—

Hon. Paul Calandra: Yes, absolutely “no,” because it's not the job of the government to usurp the role of Parliament. I know that might be the NDP way of doing things but—

Ms. Catherine Fife: I've also learned that the Premier selected Mr. Amato, operationalized the greenbelt grab, and developers shopped for their own selected piece of land. That's what I've learned this afternoon.

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: Point of order. The member is out of order again. Section 25(b)—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): The members do not rule other members out of order.

The member will get back to the topic.

Ms. Catherine Fife: So that's what we learned today, Chair. We also learned that members of the government can ask any old question that they want; it doesn't have to pertain to the estimates. With that, I'm going to conclude my comments.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): You're done? Okay. We'll then go to the independent. MPP Bowman.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: I just want to compare the estimates for services compared to the Premier's office. We have \$5.6 million in services in vote number 401-1. The total budget for Cabinet Office is about 20 times that of the Premier's office, and yet 20 times the \$19,000 for services in the Premier's budget would take this cabinet services budget estimate to be about \$400,000. Instead, we have a budget of \$5.6 million here. Could you talk a little bit about what the top three items are in that estimates number?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Again, the Cabinet Office is certainly larger than that of the Premier's office. The Cabinet Office has a responsibility across government, similar to the Premier's office, but in a more holistic way, frankly. They deal directly with the deputy ministers and with each of the ministries, so one would expect that that vote would

be larger than that of the Premier's office, as it has been historically for, I think, over 150 years.

1640

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: I was talking about the relative scale, though. "Services" is quite small. So I'm asking now, what are the top three items—

Hon. Paul Calandra: You'll probably find that the scale was off when the previous government was in, when the Premier's office was higher. Again, it speaks to priorities—

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: So what are the top three categories in that \$5.6 million?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Are you referencing "services"?

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Yes.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Well, services can be any number of—

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: So I'm asking—

Hon. Paul Calandra: Services can be photocopiers; they can be—

Mr. Robert Foster: I'll answer.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Yes, please.

Mr. Robert Foster: I think Cabinet Office does a lot of procurements on behalf of, and across, the enterprise. To name a couple of large ones, we're building an ONReg platform to support red tape reduction's mandate—

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Sorry, what platform?

Mr. Robert Foster: It's an IT platform called ONReg that's being built. That's forecasted to be about \$1 million this year.

There are large procurements we do for marketing and media monitoring where we would take on contracts on behalf of all government and share the services across other ministries—

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Sorry, just to confirm, is that marketing different than the bulk media ads spend?

Mr. Robert Foster: Yes. The bulk media spend is with the ministry of the Treasury Board.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: So this is additional marketing dollars.

Mr. Robert Foster: This would be marketing strategy and preparation and contracts to support the government's communications.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Consultants?

Mr. Robert Foster: No.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Marketing consultants?

Mr. Robert Foster: Technology, mostly, or media monitoring, where we would hold a contract to take in all media; we would monitor and share the services across other ministries.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Because you used the word "marketing," I wasn't sure. That sounds similar to the bulk media, so I'm just trying to—when you say "marketing," just be a little more specific, please.

Mr. Robert Foster: Marketing technology.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Marketing technology—so vendors; you've got vendors.

Mr. Robert Foster: Vendors, yes.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Vendors for marketing technology.

Mr. Robert Foster: And probably another large expenditure in that category would be international memberships or interprovincial memberships.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Are we able to get some transparency around the process used to secure these vendors and who they are? Were they sole-sourced, were there multiple bids, is it a competitive process etc.?

Mr. Robert Foster: The nature of the procurement would depend on each of the vendors and the contract and the service being procured, but they would all follow the enterprise-wide procurement directive for how they're signed on and the contracts are executed.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Well, again, given what we've seen recently with the greenbelt report, we know that processes aren't always followed in this government. So I think that there is a need for further transparency around those things, whether that's by getting more details on specific contracts or by opening up the books on how these things are procured. I think that would be helpful to assure Ontarians that these kinds of services are being procured in a fair and appropriate manner and that their dollars are being well spent.

I had a question around the lack of common understanding amongst Cabinet Office staff and ministry staff as well as public service staff. I'm wondering if that is a sign that there's a need for enhanced protocols around documentation—which, again, costs money. People need to document things, take minutes. If there's a misunderstanding with senior people around one of the priorities of the government, which you've talked about extensively today—around housing—and that's why you've opened up the greenbelt for housing, and yet you don't have a common understanding of how the selection process took place etc., I think that shows a weakness in the current documentation and processes within the Cabinet Office.

Again, culture starts at the top, and to change culture does take some effort and resources. I'd like to understand how much effort and resources are being spent to change that culture.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Again, through you, Mr. Chair, to the member: Whatever resources that are required through the Information and Privacy Commissioner and whatever retraining may be required for members of provincial Parliament, for cabinet ministers, for their staff is available to them. The Board of Internal Economy will make sure that those resources are available. We expect our team, our staffs, to follow the rules as established by this Parliament, by the Legislative Assembly—

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Is this a new expectation?

Hon. Paul Calandra: —to follow the rules as established by Parliament. Whether it comes to the record keeping, whether it comes to the conflict-of-interest guidelines, we expect that to happen. That's how I conduct myself and that's how I expect my staff to conduct themselves.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: So that may be a new expectation because clearly that hasn't been happening related to the greenbelt—

Hon. Paul Calandra: It was really something that came out of, as you will recall—

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Anyway, I'm going to reclaim my time, Chair.

I would like to just come back to the Minister of Red Tape Reduction. You talked about \$950 million—I think the number keeps getting bigger; \$700 million, now it's \$950 million—of savings and compliance costs, and yet we have Ontario falling in overall productivity. We've fallen in the last five years. We're now at the same level of productivity as Alabama. I'm wondering if you can comment about how your efforts are helping to improve overall productivity in the province.

Hon. Parm Gill: Well, first and foremost, I'd just like to say that, to your point, you're absolutely right; the number just keeps on getting bigger and bigger. That's because each time we bring forward a piece of legislation or red tape package—we're always working on trying to make Ontario businesses more competitive, saving them more money. You're absolutely bang on. The current amount is roughly \$950 million in annual cost savings for businesses in the province of Ontario.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: That is an estimate, to be clear, right? That's not been audited. That's an estimate.

Hon. Parm Gill: I'm saying nearly—the exact number is \$933 million.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Which is an estimate, right? Based on—

Hon. Parm Gill: It's not an estimate. Absolutely not. That's the number.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: But to know that, you would have to know how much every single business in Ontario saved from your efforts. I don't think you've got—it's an estimate, I think.

Hon. Parm Gill: I appreciate that. Everything is tracked. Everything is tracked, so every time we're bringing forward a change, we work with our partner ministries and we work, obviously, with the stakeholders, the businesses, to identify what the amount is. So this is not just an estimate that we're just kind of throwing out there and hoping for the best. Absolutely not. You'll see when I bring forward the next piece of legislation this fall. It would be identified and we would be able to point out that this is the impact that this piece of legislation is going to have. This is the—

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: I'm going to reclaim my time, Chair. Just to point out, it might be an informed estimate, but it is an estimate. It's not an audited number that's proven or anything.

I just want to come back to the productivity.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: You've referenced the 300,000 jobs lost. People who understand economics may understand that the Canadian dollar strengthened significantly during that time period. So that also affects our productivity and our ability to—for people wanting to buy here versus serve things elsewhere. I'm really talking about what your efforts are doing to improve productivity in the province beyond just saving some compliance cost, which, of course, is valuable and appreciated, but it hasn't made a dent in improving our productivity.

Hon. Parm Gill: Well, it's sending the signal to the business community out there that, yes, the government is

there to support them. I mentioned, due to the measures that we have brought forward, the investments that we're obviously attracting in the province of Ontario, the jobs we're creating—these are all due to the initiatives that our government has taken, not just by accident.

We saw what was happening before 2018: Businesses were fleeing the province, jobs were fleeing the province, individuals were having—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much. That concludes that question.

We're now going to the government's side. MPP Cuzzetto?

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: Thank you, Minister Gill, for being here today.

You know, under the previous Liberal government, we lost over 350,000 manufacturing jobs here in the province of Ontario. They were adding over 10,000 new regulations every year. That's an average of 30 new regulations every day for 15 years. They didn't refuse any regulations. Even the CEO of Chrysler said that, under Kathleen Wynne, this was the worst jurisdiction to produce automobiles or anything in this province.

What is your ministry doing to reduce red tape?

Hon. Parm Gill: As you mentioned, we saw, before 2018, the previous Liberal government—obviously, the Liberals supported by the NDP. For the most part, the only thing they cared about was adding regulations. That's how we got to be the highest-regulated province in the country. We were not even anywhere close to some of the other provinces in terms of the regulatory compliance requirements that the businesses were expected to meet and the costs they were incurring, whether it was time, whether it was money. You mentioned some of the examples where, obviously, we're hearing from the business communities. Businesses were fleeing because Ontario was not competitive anymore. They couldn't compete at the global level to run a business in the province of Ontario.

1650

We immediately got to work. We looked at ways of how we can help Ontarians, how we can help businesses be more competitive. What are some of the things that we need to do? That's why, initially when we formed government in 2018, the Ministry of Red Tape Reduction was part of the Ministry of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade—this was an associate ministry. The tremendous work we were able to do even as an associate ministry—then, in June 2022, we were able to turn this into a full stand-alone ministry to continue that tremendous work that we had done for the previous four years.

I'm obviously honoured to lead our efforts at the Ministry of Red Tape Reduction. It's working with our stakeholders, working with the business community, working with Ontarians in general to hear from them, because they are the experts. Those are the individual organizations that are, actually, having to deal with some of the obstacles that are in their way. That's causing them grief. That's holding them back—whether it's expanding their business or creating more opportunities or hiring more Ontarians to do the job and so forth. We seek them out and, of course, we work with them, identify some of those issues. Then, we work with our partner ministries. We go to them and say, "Hey,

is this an issue? Is this necessary regulation? Can we look at it?"—then, revising them, improving them, making them better or eliminating them, potentially. From there on, we come up with a package that we're able to bring forward into the Legislature. All the members in the Legislature have an opportunity to participate in the debate process, refer to committee and so forth—you know the process.

Ultimately, it's due to all of those efforts that we're able to be where we are today: achieve almost \$950 million in annual cost saving. As the independent member pointed out, that number continues to go up. Yes, I agree, and we want that number to continue to go up. It means that we're doing our job, what Ontarians expect us to do.

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: I think that number will hit over a billion dollars by the end of this year. I want to congratulate you on all the work that you're doing.

The automotive industry: I always talk about it, because that's where I came out of. We've attracted over \$25 billion worth of investment here in the province. How has your ministry helped in attracting that much of the automotive industry here?

Hon. Parm Gill: One of the things we do, as I mentioned, is we work across government. We work with all of our partner ministries to look at ways to continue to make the province more competitive. It is due to those efforts that I think we're seeing the investments.

We work very closely with all of our colleagues, but especially the Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade. I would say he has done a tremendous, tremendous, job in terms of attracting some of those large investments you've mentioned in the automotive sector. There will be really well-paying jobs over the many, many, many years to come.

I also want to point out, for the benefit of the committee—I mentioned different ways we solicit feedback whether it's the portal, whether it's our round tables, whether it's consultation or coming from members of the government caucus. But in our Ministry of Red Tape Reduction, I've yet to receive a single idea from either the NDP or the Liberals. I think it's unfortunate. I think each one of us has the responsibility to do our job, to make sure that we're working with our business leaders within each one of our communities, speaking to them and looking at ways of helping them identify and work with them. I would love for the NDP and the Liberals to come to me or our ministry and say, "Hey, this is an idea that a business in our riding has identified. Can you look at that?" I'm still waiting for that day to come.

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: Thank you, Minister.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): MPP Crawford.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Thank you to both ministers for being here today.

I wanted to carry on the topic of red tape reduction—to Minister Gill—and point out that the member opposite, in discussing the productivity issue, I think, is referring to a Canada-wide productivity analysis. Unfortunately, Canada hasn't had as much productivity improvement as—

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Point of order, Chair?

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): We have a point of order. MPP Bowman.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: I'm just correcting. Actually, Ontario was compared to Alabama, not Canada. Canada is—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): That's not a point of order.

We'll go back to the member.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Ontario was a laggard for many, many, years under the Liberal administration, losing manufacturing jobs. Quebec became the manufacturing engine of Canada. Ontario lost that key role that we had since Confederation. We've now reclaimed that role, with manufacturing jobs coming back to the province, with industry revisiting investing in this province, and seeing record investments, including in my own community of Oakville, where the Ford auto plant, I can tell you, was very, very close to leaving the province. Minister Calandra mentioned that. They had a chat with me—high regulation, high taxes, high energy costs, the cost of manufacturing. Imagine the energy input cost to a manufacturing plant like that. So we've made some changes. There's much more to do; no doubt. I'm sure Ontario, as all our provinces, can improve our productivity. But at least Ontario is moving in a good direction.

Minister Gill, I'd like to ask you specifically about how your ministry is contributing to this re-energization of Ontario industry.

Hon. Parm Gill: One example I'll give you is, obviously, looking at the regulations that have been on the books for 10 years or longer. The review that our ministry along with all of our partner ministries is conducting is to look at some of the regulations that are in place, that have either outlived their purpose or are just duplicated, or the way of working might have changed through technology and other means.

I also want to give a lot of the credit, honestly, to Minister McNaughton for all of the work he has done in terms of training and skill development and making sure we have the necessary workforce in place to continue to help our province move forward.

Ministry of Transportation, an example—making sure we're able to move the goods along the way from point A to point B, the supply chain. Over the years, that used to be a sticking point. Our government has done a tremendous job in terms of making sure that we're there and we're helping the business community.

Ultimately, each and every one of us has a responsibility to continue to help move our province forward. That was the mandate that was given to the government back in 2018. That was a strong mandate, obviously—even a stronger mandate that was given to us in June 2022. Our government is delivering on that. And I am proud to be part of that solution—one of the ministries that's helping to move forward the yardstick in terms of continuing to make our province the most competitive and continuing to track investment and continuing to create good-paying jobs.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: That's great.

Did you have any thoughts on how the carbon tax is affecting businesses in Ontario?

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Point of order, Chair.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): We have another point of order. MPP Bowman.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: I don't think this relates to the estimates.

Interjection.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): I'm sure he'll get the question back to relating to the estimates.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: To Minister Calandra.

Hon. Paul Calandra: It is a good question because it relates to intergovernmental affairs and the work that we're doing in trying to ensure that the economy continues to grow.

It is no secret that the carbon tax is something that we have said right from the beginning would impact the people of the province of Ontario in a very negative way. We're seeing that throughout the economy, throughout the supply chain, from farmers who plant to groceries in the store. We've said that the entire time.

That is some of the work that the Premier, frankly, has done in order to help the federal government understand that the carbon tax is not how we're going to meet our greenhouse gas emissions targets.

We're seeing the huge impact that it is having on families across the province of Ontario: high inflation, which is leading to higher interest rates; which is leading to so many people having a challenging time. It is just one of those things that the Ministry of Intergovernmental Affairs, supported by Cabinet Office, has been pushing really since day one.

1700

We're not alone on that. We're not unique on that. Many provinces have felt the exact same way about it. But we're really seeing many of the things that the opposition have said—fought us. We said carbon tax would cost the people of the province of Ontario. They said that it wouldn't. We're seeing it in the high-energy costs. We're seeing it in food at the stores.

We've tried, of course, to make some progress by the gas tax refund. Of course, the opposition is not in favour of that.

That is a strong and an important role that the Ministry of Intergovernmental Affairs can do: to try and move the yardstick, to help our federal partners understand that some of the decisions that they are making are having very, very, very difficult outcomes for the people of the province of Ontario. We're seeing that manifested, as I said, in higher costs right across the spectrum, ultimately, leading to inflation and higher interest rates. High interest rates, high taxes, are not the way to build a strong stable economy. It has never worked and I think that we can do better. That's one of the strengths of the Premier and the Ministry of Intergovernmental Affairs.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Yes, the higher interest rates are obviously making housing affordability more difficult for Canadians, but—

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Point of order, Chair.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: With that, I'm going to pass it to my colleague MPP Gallagher Murphy.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Do we have another point of order?

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: I'm not sure you heard what he said, but that was related to my point of order.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): I would remind the members asking the questions, again, they must relate to the estimates of Cabinet Office and the future spending of that office. I will make sure that the members put that in their question.

MPP Gallagher Murphy.

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: My question is for the Minister of Red Tape Reduction. Thank you very much for your remarks earlier.

As we know, our government is made up of many different ministries each of them with their own portfolios and policies. When we look at regulatory modernization in this province, it really requires a cross-ministry approach, cross-government approach, in every sector.

My question is, when we think about that mandatory 10-year requirement for regulatory review, how is the Ministry of Red Tape Reduction working with the ministers of each of the various ministries to implement this review of regulations so that we can absolutely fulfill this mandatory 10-year requirement?

Hon. Parm Gill: Thank you for the question. I can tell you that I get a great deal of co-operation from all of my colleagues in every single ministry. We work very closely, obviously, on some of the initiatives that you highlighted. The 10-year review of regulations: That is ongoing. That's the work that's already under way that we've started.

Not only does it help us as a government to eliminate a lot of those regulations on the book that might be outdated, might be unnecessary, but ultimately our goal, our focus, is to help the business community out there to be more productive, to be more efficient, and to help them save costs so they can focus their energy on other things—whether they want to focus on growing their business, creating more jobs—and continue to compete at the world stage. I think we've done just that.

As I've mentioned earlier, I'm going to be, in the very near future, bringing forward another piece of legislation that is only going to help add to all of the accomplishments that we've been able to complete so far to date. This is an ongoing work. Honestly, I don't think we can ever get to a point where we can say: "Hey, our job is done." Our job is to look constantly at ways of how we can improve, how we can make the system better ultimately, and we'll continue to do that work each and every day.

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: And just a follow-up to that: What I think is interesting when I speak with constituents about red tape reduction is that we have a stand-alone ministry specifically focused on red tape reduction. Business people are very impressed.

So my question to you is, why did our government develop a specific stand-alone ministry for red tape reduction?

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Point of order, Chair.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Point of order?

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: This is not a new ministry this year. It's not related to the estimates.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): The member will know that the question needs to relate to the estimates. As

I said, I'd like to remind all members that the question must be related to the estimates of Cabinet Office and future spending of that office. I'm sure the member will get back to that in the question.

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: Then I'll rephrase the question: What is the importance of the estimates as it relates to red tape reduction?

Hon. Parm Gill: Listen, obviously the investments that we've been making at the Ministry of Red Tape Reduction—I can tell you how the Premier and the government felt when we were given the mandate initially back in 2018, and the work that we needed to do to start attracting investments back to the province: eliminating the barriers and some of the burdens and obstacles that were slowing businesses down, where it was preventing individuals and businesses from investing in the province of Ontario.

In our first term, as I mentioned, this used to be an associate ministry, but the tremendous work we were able to do, though an associate ministry as part of economic trade, was absolutely tremendous. So in June 2022, our government, led by Premier Ford, saw fit that this needed to be a stand-alone ministry. We needed to do more of the work that was done. Let's dedicate some resources. Let's make sure we put a team in place that is solely dedicated to looking at ways of eliminating red tape. That's exactly what we have been doing over the last year or so, and we will continue to do that tremendous work.

All of the accomplishments that I mentioned didn't just happen by mistake. That's the sheer hard work of our government and the ministries, and obviously the officials that continue to bring forward ideas and work on pieces of legislation—so far, 10 I mentioned that we've introduced and passed in the Legislature. We will continue to introduce that legislation into the Legislature so we can continue to improve on some of the accomplishments we've already achieved, but there's more to do.

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: Thank you, Minister.

Chair, through you, if I have time, I'll pass it to my colleague MPP Smith.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): MPP Smith, one minute.

Mr. David Smith: Thank you very much, Minister. You're doing a fine job.

We did not speak about the Indigenous today, and I do have a question I'd like to shoot out to you right away. Minister, I think it goes without saying that when we're drafting new policies, we need to take the rights, privileges and freedoms of all groups into account. How is the Ministry of Red Tape Reduction ensuring that the rights and needs of Indigenous communities are considered prior to policies' approval?

Hon. Parm Gill: I can assure you that our government takes the consultation process with the Indigenous communities very, very seriously. We understand the importance—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): We'll have to hear that another time.

We now go to the official opposition.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I just want to say to the Minister of Red Tape Reduction: You said that you've never received

an idea from me or the NDP on how to reduce red tape, and you know that that's not exactly accurate. When we were in Kenora, we had a meeting with you, and it was about the trucking situation. A transport trucker from Ukraine came here and spoke to the committee and said he was desperately trying to get a job here in Ontario, but getting an international licence converted to a driver's licence in Ontario was too prohibitive. It was going to take him two years. That's when I said to you, "Minister, I would love to work with you on reducing the red tape around streamlining these qualified drivers. This is a skill set that we need in the province of Ontario." Unfortunately, that driver from Ukraine went over to Manitoba.

I'm still willing to work with you because, listen, if you can reduce these barriers for good jobs, especially when those skills are needed in Ontario, that's a good place to invest your energy.

My question is also going to be for you though, because I am tracking, as I've said—you've encouraged me to say this. Your ministry keeps records of meetings, and I have to say, from September 7 of last year, 2022, organized by the Cabinet Office, until all the way to October 27 when the Premier got a briefing on how the new land policy around how to get land out of the greenbelt was established, there are no records. So my questions are very simple: How is it possible that with this many meetings and discussions, no one in Cabinet Office or the Premier's office was aware of the errors in the site-selection process? Did the Cabinet Office attempt to clarify at any point that site selection was not a part of the mandate? What efforts did the Cabinet Office take to clear up any possible understanding? And do you regard this as red tape, keeping records?

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Chair?

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Point of order?

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Again, I want to reiterate, through you, Chair—to make sure the focus is still on the estimates.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): I'm sure the member will get to the point where it connects to the estimates.

Ms. Catherine Fife: My question—because it does feel quite strange here today given the different set of rules for folks—is, do you consider keeping government records on meetings as red tape, or do you think that is just a good public policy for what a responsible and ethical government that is operating with integrity should do?

Hon. Parm Gill: This obviously refers to the area that's covered by Minister Calandra, so I defer to him—

Ms. Catherine Fife: Oh, but I specifically wanted to know from you about red tape—

Hon. Paul Calandra: I'll be happy to take that, Mr. Chair. Obviously, as I said, we expect that all—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Ms. Catherine Fife: You know what? I'm going to give up my time then to my colleague MPP Bowman.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Can I finish the answer, Mr. Chair?

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): MPP Bowman.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Thank you, Chair. I would also just like to respond to Minister Gill's comment about not offering suggestions. In this committee, I talked about how

we need to reduce barriers to interprovincial trade, which has been talked about extensively by experts in the economy. There's lots of work to do there—things like reducing trucking requirements between borders so that we have standards etc. So there's one for you. I mentioned one earlier today as well, which was around offering less red tape for those applying for take-home cancer drugs, as it relates to—they have to fill out a lot of paperwork just to get approved through the Trillium Foundation. So there's two for you today. I'm grateful for the opportunity—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much. That concludes the time for the estimates.

The time has expired for the committee's consideration of the estimates of the Cabinet Office. Standing order 69 requires that the Chair put, without further amendment or

debate, every question necessary to dispose of the estimates. Are the members ready to vote?

Shall vote 401, Cabinet Office program, carry? All those in favour? All those opposed? The motion is carried.

Shall the 2023-24 estimates of the Cabinet Office carry? All those in favour? All those opposed? The motion is carried.

Shall the Chair report the 2023-24 estimates of the Cabinet Office to the House? All those in favour? All those opposed? The motion is carried.

With that, I want to thank everybody. Sometimes the debate gets heated, but there we are—all finished. I thank everybody for your participation in being here. We now stand adjourned.

The committee adjourned at 1714.

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