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(Hansard)**

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Tuesday
14 November 2023

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43^e législature
Mardi
14 novembre 2023

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Clerk: Trevor Day

Président : L'honorable Ted Arnott
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 14 November 2023

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 14 novembre 2023

The House met at 1500.

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

Prayers.

HOUSE SITTINGS

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I beg to inform the House that, pursuant to standing order 9(g), the Clerk has received written notice from the government House leader indicating that a temporary change in the weekly meeting schedule of the House is required, and therefore the afternoon routine on Wednesday, November 15, 2023, shall commence at 1 p.m.

REPORT, FINANCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICER

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I beg to inform the House that during the adjournment the following document was tabled: a report entitled Labour Market Outcomes of Immigrants in Ontario and its Major Cities, from the Financial Accountability Office of Ontario.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON JUSTICE POLICY

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: I beg leave to present a report from the Standing Committee on Justice Policy and move its adoption.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Mr. Christopher Tyrell): Your committee begs to report the following bill without amendment:

Bill 139, An Act to amend various Acts / Projet de loi 139, Loi modifiant diverses lois.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Shall the report be received and adopted? Agreed? Agreed.

Report adopted.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The bill is therefore ordered for third reading.

INTRODUCTION OF GOVERNMENT BILLS

WORKING FOR WORKERS FOUR ACT, 2023

LOI DE 2023 VISANT À OEUVRER POUR LES TRAVAILLEURS, QUATRE

Mr. Piccini moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 149, An Act to amend various statutes with respect to employment and labour and other matters / Projet de loi 149, Loi modifiant diverses lois en ce qui concerne l'emploi, le travail et d'autres questions.

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

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Would the Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development care to briefly explain his bill?

Hon. David Piccini: Thank you, Speaker; I would. I, David Piccini, as labour minister, am proud to stand in this House to explain a bit about the bill.

This is the fourth piece of legislation we're doing in Ontario to work for workers of this great province. When Premier Ford and our government say that we've got to build a stronger Ontario, what does that mean? It means, for communities like mine in rural Ontario, which saw decades of school closure under the Liberals, inaction when it came to hospitals, the roads and bridges that move our goods to market, from the farmers' fields to the tables here in Toronto, it's going to require a workforce to build all of that.

That's why, each and every year, we table working for workers legislation. And I'm excited to table this—a piece that works for workers, protects them, supports them, supports heroes on the front line, and, most importantly, has the backs of hospitality workers in our great province.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I appreciate that.

I'll remind members, when they introduce bills, it's best to read the explanatory note to explain the purpose of the bill and keep the explanation as brief as possible.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

WINCHESTER DESIGN BUILD INC. ACT, 2023

Ms. Bell moved first reading of the following bill:
Bill Pr35, An Act to revive Winchester Design Build Inc.

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

First reading agreed to.

PETITIONS

NURSES

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's my pleasure to introduce these petitions from the Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario for the first time.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the government has a responsibility to ensure safe and healthy workplaces and workloads for nurses by enhancing nurse staffing and supports across all sectors of the health system;

“Whereas the RN-to-population ratio in Ontario is the lowest in Canada and Ontario would need 24,000” registered nurses “to catch up with the rest of the country;

“Whereas there are over 10,000 registered nurse vacancies in Ontario;

“Whereas nurses are experiencing very high levels of burnout;

“Whereas registered nurses have experienced real wage losses of about 10% over the last decade;

“Whereas the government of Ontario needs to retain and recruit nurses across all sectors of the system to provide quality care for Ontarians;

“Whereas the Ontario government needs to retain and recruit” registered nurses “to meet their legislative commitment of four hours of daily direct care for long-term-care ... residents;

“Whereas wage inequities across the health system make it particularly difficult to retain and recruit RNs to community care sectors, such as long-term care and home care” systems;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to implement evidence-based recommendations to retain and recruit nurses, including fair and equitable compensation that is competitive with other jurisdictions in Canada and the United States.”

This is a call for fair and equitable compensation for nurses in Ontario. It is my pleasure to affix my signature to give these thousands of signatures to Alina.

NURSES

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I want to present this petition from Maria Dudak, and it’s from the RNAO to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“For Fair and Equitable Compensation for Nurses...:

“Whereas the government has a responsibility to ensure safe and healthy workplaces and workloads for nurses by enhancing nurse staffing and supports across all sectors of the health care system;

“Whereas the RN-to-population ratio in Ontario is the lowest in Canada and Ontario would need 24,000 RNs to catch up with the rest of the country;

“Whereas there are over 10,000 registered nurse vacancies in Ontario;

“Whereas nurses are experiencing very high levels of burnout;

“Whereas registered nurses have experienced real wage losses of about 10% over the last decade;

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“Whereas the government of Ontario needs to retain and recruit nurses across all sectors of the system to provide quality care for Ontarians;

“Whereas the Ontario government needs to retain and recruit” nurses “to meet their legislative commitment of

four hours of daily direct care for long-term-care (LTC) residents;

“Whereas wage inequities across the health” care “system make it particularly difficult to retain and recruit RNs to community care sectors, such as long-term care and home care;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to implement evidence-based recommendations to retain and recruit nurses, including fair and equitable compensation that is competitive with other jurisdictions in Canada and the United States.”

I fully support this petition, will sign it and pass it to page Chloe to deliver to the table.

NURSES

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I have a petition from the Registered Nurses’ Association of Ontario, RNAO, entitled “For Fair and Equitable Compensation for Nurses....

“Whereas the government has a responsibility to ensure safe and healthy workplaces and workloads for nurses by enhancing nurse staffing and supports across all sectors of the health system;

“Whereas the RN-to-population ratio in Ontario is the lowest in Canada and Ontario would need 24,000 RNs to catch up with the rest of the country;

“Whereas there are over 10,000 registered nurse vacancies in Ontario;

“Whereas nurses are experiencing very high levels of burnout;

“Whereas registered nurses have experienced real wage losses of about 10% over the last decade;

“Whereas the government of Ontario needs to retain and recruit nurses across all sectors of the system to provide quality care for Ontarians;

“Whereas the Ontario government needs to retain and recruit RNs to meet their legislative commitment of four hours of daily direct care for long-term-care (LTC) residents;

“Whereas wage inequities across the health system make it particularly difficult to retain and recruit RNs to community care sectors, such as long-term care and home care;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to implement evidence-based recommendations to retain and recruit nurses, including fair and equitable compensation that is competitive with other jurisdictions in Canada and the United States.”

I’m going to add my name to this petition—the thousands of people that have signed this important petition—and then I will give it to Elliott to take to the table.

LONG-TERM CARE

Ms. Catherine Fife: This petition is entitled “Support Bill 21, the Till Death Do Us Part Act.” It passed a whole year ago.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas there are 38,000 people on the wait-list for long-term care; and

“Whereas the median wait time for a long-term-care bed has risen from 99 days in 2011-2012 to 171 days in 2020-21; and

“Whereas according to Home Care Ontario, the cost of a hospital bed is \$842 a day, while the cost of a long-term-care bed is \$126 a day; and

“Whereas couples should have the right to live together as they age; and

“Whereas Ontario seniors have worked hard to build this province and deserve dignity in care; and

“Whereas Bill 21 amends the Residents’ Bill of Rights in the Fixing Long-Term Care Act to provide the resident with the right upon admission to continue to live with their spouse or partner;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to direct the Minister of Long-Term Care to pass Bill 21 and provide seniors with the right to live together as they age.”

Of course, it’s my pleasure to affix my signature and give this to page Chloe.

GO TRANSIT

Ms. Catherine Fife: This petition is entitled “All-Day, Two-Way (Including Weekend) GO Trains for Waterloo Region.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the government of Ontario is responsible for investing in building, maintaining and upgrading GO Transit trains and rail routes throughout the province; and

“Whereas the government of Ontario has repeatedly made commitments to invest in and improve GO Transit trains for the purposes of improving connectivity, increasing transit ridership, decreasing traffic congestion, connecting people to jobs, and improving the economy; and

“Whereas a lack of reliable transit options impedes quality of life and growth opportunities for commuters and businesses, including the tech sector, in Waterloo region;

“Whereas Waterloo region is home to three post-secondary institutions, the University of Waterloo, Wilfrid Laurier University, and Conestoga College, whose students and staff require weekday and weekend train options; and

“Whereas dependable, efficient public transit seven days of the week is critical to the growth of our region;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to provide a firm funding commitment and a clear timeline for the delivery of frequent, all-day, two-way GO rail service along the full length of the vital Kitchener GO corridor.”

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

TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Joel Harden: I have a petition here that comes from neighbours in Old Ottawa East and Ottawa Centre. It reads:

“A New Plan for the 417 Canal Bridge Replacement.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“After more than five years of work,” the Ministry of Transportation of Ontario “has a new ‘preferred option’ for replacing the deteriorated 417 bridge over the Rideau Canal that would require 90-week-long detours on Colonel By Drive and Queen Elizabeth Driveway traffic beneath the bridge;

“On the Old Ottawa East side, drivers, pedestrians and cyclists would have to take a detour using Main and Hawthorne and on the Glebe/Centretown side they’d have to take Elgin and Argyle;

“The consequence would be that Main-Hawthorne and Elgin-Argyle would have more traffic than they were designed for”—I should have said, ‘Be it resolved that;’ my apologies, Speaker—“resulting” in “lengthy delays and more dangerous conditions for pedestrians and cyclists. MTO has conducted” insufficient “traffic studies to assess the impact of their ‘preferred option;’”

Be it further resolved that “the MTO consultation on the bridge replacement has” not satisfied some of “the affected Ottawa downtown neighbourhoods. Notifications and consultations for the wider Ottawa population who may use these routes daily have been ... unsatisfactory. Information provided by MTO to other orders of government about community consultations” impacts organizations like “Parks Canada, the National Capital Commission and” the “city of Ottawa” municipal departments;”

Be it further resolved that “in 2019, MTO presented a plan for the bridge replacement that had no substantial detours. Three years later ... this new plan” is being presented with details in “the documentation posted online in November of 2022, claiming it was necessary to save the two buildings at and near the northwest corner of Hawthorne and Echo;”

Be it further resolved that “the bridge replacement project is not likely to happen for another four to five years but it is just at that time Old Ottawa East will be recovering from the massive Greenfield-Main-Hawthorne construction project;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to direct its Ministry of Transportation” of Ontario “to develop construction alternatives for the Rideau Canal bridge replacement project that do not include long-term traffic diversions on either Queen Elizabeth Driveway or Colonel By Drive, as well as to have open consultations with local communities and with other government agencies, already engaged in this process, prior to completing a transportation environmental study report for the ongoing environmental assessment process.”

I want to thank the neighbours in Old Ottawa East for this very detailed petition, and I will send it to the Clerks’ table with page Leo.

NURSES

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: I’m proud to read this petition in support of our registered nurses here in Ontario. It’s entitled “For Fair and Equitable Compensation for Nurses.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the government has a responsibility to ensure safe and healthy workplaces and workloads for nurses by enhancing nurse staffing and supports across all sectors of the health system;

“Whereas the RN-to-population ratio in Ontario is the lowest in Canada, and Ontario would need 24,000” registered nurses “to catch up with the rest of the country;

“Whereas there are over 10,000 registered nurse vacancies in Ontario;

“Whereas nurses are experiencing very high levels of burnout;

“Whereas registered nurses have experienced real wage losses of about 10% over the last decade;

“Whereas the government of Ontario needs to retain and recruit nurses across all sectors of the system to provide quality care for Ontarians; and

“Whereas the Ontario government needs to retain and recruit RNs to meet their legislative commitment of four hours of daily direct care for long-term-care ... residents; and

“Whereas wage inequities across the health system make it particularly difficult to retain and recruit RNs to community care sectors, such as long-term care and home care;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to implement evidence-based recommendations to retain and recruit nurses, including fair and equitable compensation that is competitive with other jurisdictions in Canada and the United States.”

Of course, I will be signing this petition, and I will be giving it to page Harris.

ORGAN DONATION

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank Charles Tossell from Sudbury, who sent me these petitions.

“Saving Organs to Save Lives...”

“Whereas Ontario has one of the best organ transplant programs in the world;

“Whereas there are currently 1,600 people waiting for a life-saving organ transplant in Ontario;

“Whereas every three days someone in Ontario dies because they can’t get a transplant in time;

“Whereas donating organs and tissues can save up to eight lives and improve the lives of up to 75 people;

“Whereas 90% of Ontarians support organ donation, but only 36% are registered;

“Whereas Nova Scotia has seen increases in organs and tissue for transplant after implementing a presumed consent legislation in January 2020;”

They petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

“Change the legislation to allow a donor system based on presumed consent as set out in MPP Gélinas’s Bill 107, Peter Kormos Memorial Act (Saving Organs to Save Lives).”

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

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ANTI-VAPING INITIATIVES FOR YOUTH

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank Claire Redmond from Chelmsford in my riding for these petitions.

“Protect Kids from Vaping...”

“Whereas very little is known about the long-term effects of vaping on youth; and

“Whereas aggressive marketing of vaping products by the tobacco industry is causing more and more kids to become addicted to nicotine through the use of e-cigarettes; and

“Whereas the hard lessons learned about the health impacts of smoking, should not be repeated with vaping, and the precautionary principle must be applied to protect youth from vaping; and

“Whereas many health agencies and Physicians for a Smoke-Free Canada fully endorse the concrete proposals aimed at reducing youth vaping included in Bill 151;”

They petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

“To call on the ... government to immediately pass Bill 151, Vaping is not for Kids Act, in order to protect the health of Ontario’s youth.”

I fully support this petition. I will affix my name to it and ask Alina to bring it to Clerk.

ÉDUCATION EN FRANÇAIS

M^{me} France Gélinas: J’aimerais remercier Nataly et Alain Wissell de Chelmsford dans mon comté pour ces pétitions.

« Soutenez le système d’éducation francophone en Ontario.

« À l’Assemblée législative de l’Ontario :

« Attendu que les enfants francophones ont un droit constitutionnel à une éducation de haute qualité, financée par les fonds publics, dans leur propre langue;

« Attendu que l’augmentation des inscriptions dans le système d’éducation en langue française signifie que plus de 1 000 nouveaux enseignants et enseignantes de langue française sont nécessaires chaque année pour les cinq prochaines années;

« Attendu que les changements apportés au modèle de financement du gouvernement provincial pour la formation des enseignantes et enseignants de langue française signifient que l’Ontario n’en forme que 500 par an;

« Attendu que le nombre de personnes qui enseignent sans certification complète dans le système d’éducation en langue française a augmenté de plus de 450 % au cours de la dernière décennie;

Ils et elles demandent « à l’Assemblée législative de l’Ontario de fournir immédiatement le financement demandé par le rapport du groupe de travail sur la pénurie des enseignantes et des enseignants dans le système d’éducation en langue française de l’Ontario et de

travailler avec des partenaires pour mettre pleinement en » place toutes « les recommandations. »

J'appuie cette pétition, monsieur le Président. Je vais la signer et je demande à ma page Alina—qui a été très, très patiente avec moi—de l'amener à la table des greffiers.

RICK BOON

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Ottawa South has informed me that he has a point of order he wishes to raise.

Mr. John Fraser: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have some news to share with the assembly. On my way to breakfast this morning, I ran into Rick Boon, who let me know—many of you may know Rick; some of you don't know Rick. But some of you have had warm and comfortable offices—sometimes too-warm offices—because of Rick and the work that his group does.

Rick Boon is retiring after 31 years. Today is his last day. Rick is always happy when you see him. He is the manager of operations and maintenance here, and he kept this lovely, old, beautiful building that we're in going and functional for all of us.

I just want to say thanks to Rick. I think we all should show our thanks to Rick, because 31 years is a long time to devote to this place. I just want to say thanks, Rick.

Applause.

Mr. John Fraser: I'm not sure he's here—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Okay. He's in the building for sure; we know that.

And it's technically not a point of order, but we appreciate the information and the tribute nonetheless. Thank you.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

BUILDING A STRONG ONTARIO
TOGETHER ACT
(BUDGET MEASURES), 2023
LOI DE 2023 VISANT À BÂTIR
UN ONTARIO FORT ENSEMBLE
(MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES)

Mr. Bethlenfalvy moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 146, An Act to implement Budget measures and to enact and amend various statutes / Projet de loi 146, Loi visant à mettre en oeuvre les mesures budgétaires et à édicter et à modifier diverses lois.

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

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Thank you for the offer.

Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound, who I see over there, and the member from Oakville, who is right behind me, who I see right there.

Today I rise to speak to the second reading of the fall bill, the Building a Strong Ontario Together Act (Budget Measures), 2023. The measures in this bill continue our responsible, targeted approach that will help get Ontario through the uncertainties of today and build critical infrastructure in communities right across the province, while also laying a strong fiscal foundation for future generations.

Mr. Speaker, Ontario is seeing significant growth.

Monsieur le Président, l'Ontario connaît une croissance considérable.

Nearly 500,000 more people came to the province last year, and 4,400 more businesses operate in our province today compared to last year. Our population is growing, jobs are being created, and companies are choosing Ontario as a place to do business. But we cannot take this good news for granted. This is because the world today is marked by rising geopolitical and economic global uncertainty. Now, more than ever, it is important to remain fiscally disciplined, responsible, and flexible so that we can emerge from these uncertainties stronger than ever before. We must continue with our plan to build a strong Ontario, and we must do it together.

Our plan is guided by two key pillars: building Ontario and working for you. Underscoring these pillars is our government's prudent and responsible fiscal plan that includes a path to balancing the budget. I can say we are focused on responsibly eliminating Ontario's deficit while delivering on the priorities of the people and businesses of Ontario.

Due to a slowing economy impacting revenues and an increased need for flexibility to respond to risks, our government is now projecting a \$5.6-billion deficit in 2023-24. We are maintaining a path to balance, and following a projected \$5.3-billion deficit in 2024-25, our government is forecasting a surplus of \$0.5 billion in 2025-26.

As we have done since day one, we will continue to be transparent with the people of Ontario about the fiscal outlook of this province. Every 90 days, I'm out before the people of Ontario to provide an update on our finances. And we have received six clean, unqualified opinions from Ontario's Auditor General ever since we came into government.

As we deal with the uncertainty ahead, our government will never hesitate to do what is necessary to support the people and businesses of Ontario.

Devant l'incertitude qui plane sur l'avenir, notre gouvernement n'hésitera jamais à faire le nécessaire pour soutenir la population et les entreprises de l'Ontario.

Our plan to build includes building the critical infrastructure we need to support communities right across the province. This means building hospitals, building long-term-care homes, building schools, building child care spaces, building highways, building roads, building transit.

Our population is now over 15 million people. Some 15.6 million people call Ontario home. And we have hundreds of thousands of people a year coming to our

great province. Again, this growth is really good news—really good news; une bonne nouvelle, madame la Présidente.
1530

To accommodate this growth, we need to build. We are delivering on our \$185-billion capital plan, our historic capital plan and, dare I say, the most ambitious plan in the history of this great country. However, our government inherited an infrastructure deficit, and this growth is adding more strain to existing, aging infrastructure. We need to build, and we need to build even more.

Ontario taxpayers alone cannot shoulder the costs. That is why we are launching the Ontario Infrastructure Bank. Modelled on similar institutions in jurisdictions around the world, the Ontario Infrastructure Bank will attract pension plans and other trusted institutional investors to help finance essential infrastructure that otherwise would not get built. The bank will focus on large-scale infrastructure projects that will build long-term-care homes, affordable housing and major infrastructure in our communities and in municipalities—also investing in energy and transportation sectors. This will give the world-class pension funds that call Canada home, such as the Maple Eight, the opportunity they've been looking for to invest workers' savings right here in Ontario.

While we build the infrastructure Ontario so desperately needs, we are doing so by building a stronger, more prosperous economy.

En bâtissant l'infrastructure dont l'Ontario a tant besoin, nous bâtissons également une économie plus forte et plus prospère.

Madam Speaker, for too long, the previous government failed—I see them over there—to seize Ontario's critical minerals opportunity despite the value these minerals can bring to this great province. Key to us building the economy of the future is unlocking northern Ontario's critical minerals—would you agree?

Mr. Kevin Holland: Absolutely.

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: “Absolutely,” says the member right beside me.

Unlocking these minerals will help bring investments and better jobs with bigger paycheques to Ontario. This is why our government is committing close to \$1 billion to support critical legacy infrastructure in the Far North. By “infrastructure,” I mean all-season roads, broadband connectivity and community supports in the Ring of Fire region—all of this is needed to keep moving us forward on one of the most promising mineral deposits in Canada.

Madam Speaker, these deposits will play a critical role in batteries, electronics, electric vehicles and clean technology. These are the building blocks of tomorrow. This is why we amended the Mining Act earlier this year to help ensure Ontario has a modern and competitive regime for mineral exploration and development—I see the Minister of Mines just over my right shoulder—thanks to his great leadership. And it is why, with this bill, we are proposing amendments to extend the Ontario Focused Flow-Through Share Tax Credit for expenses related to minerals considered critical minerals under the federal Income Tax Act. These critical mineral resources in the

north need to be—and are being—connected to our world-class manufacturing sector in the south. So we must continue to grow the province's manufacturing sector and create the conditions to attract new investments.

Madam Speaker, the Liberals decimated manufacturing in Ontario. Between 2004 and 2018, Ontario's manufacturing sector saw a decline in employment of over 300,000 workers. But since we were elected in 2018, we have attracted billions of dollars worth of investments in automotive and clean steel manufacturing. In three years alone, we have attracted over \$26 billion in electric vehicle and battery manufacturing-related industries. That includes regions like Durham and Oshawa, where thousands and thousands of GM jobs disappeared over a long period of time—but they're coming back, through the actions of many, the conditions for growth, and the actions of this government.

Our government has done this through many new measures. We're continuing to cut red tape. We're now saving businesses \$567 million in annual regulatory compliance costs. Our government is setting up Ontario to a more prosperous, more productive future.

While we continue to maintain important Ontario regulations that protect people's health, safety and the environment in the province, we have more to do. That's why we have implemented the Ontario Made Manufacturing Investment Tax Credit.

Interjection.

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Thank you to the member from Brampton.

This new credit is helping local manufacturing companies invest and expand.

A couple of budgets ago, I talked about a road trip. We went on a road trip, didn't we? We went out of the DVP; we went up from Queen's Park, up the DVP. It took us about two hours to get to the 401, because there is much gridlock. We've got a plan to fix that with the Ontario Line, the Scarborough line, the Yonge extension. We have a plan. When we took that road trip, we touched points like Oshawa, to bring back those good jobs at GM to Oshawa. Then, we went up to Alliston. We did a little detour into Brampton—and all the great manufacturing jobs that are being found and returning back in Brampton. And then we did a little trip over to Oakville, didn't we? We did a little Oakville trip and went to say hi to our member there. We also dropped in on Ford, which is bringing back good jobs, good-paying jobs, and electric vehicle manufacturing jobs in Oakville. Of course, we went down to southwest Ontario and said hello to our couple of MPPs out there and made a little pit stop in St. Thomas, where one of the largest car companies in the world has announced a 16-million-square-foot operation, to bring thousands of jobs to southwest Ontario. But we didn't stop there; we kept going. We kept going all the way to Windsor. If the member for Windsor was here, he'd be clapping right now.

Interjection: Then we'll clap for him.

Interjections.

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Thank you, colleagues.

This is about supporting Ontario. This is about growing Ontario. This is about creating the environment for those

good jobs and those bigger paycheques so that people can put food on the table, so that they can deal with the cost of living and the affordability crisis we're in, so that we can work together to build a more prosperous Ontario—an economically prosperous Ontario which then pays for the world-class health care, world-class education, world-class social services under the able stewardship of the minister.

Miss Monique Taylor: Wow. Where was that increase in there?

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: And that increase—well, thank you for prompting me on the increase.

Madam Speaker, may I recall, when the previous government was in power, how much did ODSP—was it indexed to inflation? Did they ever increase it by 5%? Did they ever increase the earning exemption?

Interjections: No.

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: So there you go. Clearly, this government is acting.

And while they had the opportunity to do something, what did they do? Nothing.

Madam Speaker, I'm going to come back to the bright future that Ontario has, and some of the products of that future are right here in Ontario.

By continuing to attract electric vehicle supply chain investments to the province, we're making Ontario a leading jurisdiction to build the cars of the future.

En continuant d'attirer dans la province des investissements dans la chaîne d'approvisionnement des véhicules électriques, nous faisons de l'Ontario un territoire de premier plan pour la fabrication des voitures de l'avenir.

We are also making Ontario a global leading producer of clean steel.

We must continuously find ways to make Ontario competitive. This is why our government is working with partners to have shovel-ready sites available for new, large manufacturing sites and projects. These investments in critical minerals and manufacturing also are enabled by the province's clean energy advantage. Companies in various sectors are looking to invest in jurisdictions that can help them achieve their goals as they relate to environmental, social and governance measures, or ESG. And Ontario is very well positioned to leverage that clean energy advantage. To help companies achieve these ESG goals, and to help boost our competitiveness, is why we launched a voluntary clean energy credit registry.

I will add—and I was just speaking to the Minister of Energy, but he's done a runner. I know he's close by, though; we just spoke.

We are also supporting the continuous safe operation of the Pickering Nuclear Generating Station.

1540

And we are leading in record battery procurements, with the largest battery storage project in Canada being built right here in Ontario. Folks, this is really a success story. It's called the Oneida Energy Storage Project. It is being developed with our partners—Six Nations of the Grand River Development Corp., Northland Power,

NRStor, and Aecon Group—and located in Jarvis, Ontario.

At the same time, to help create jobs and economic growth, we are keeping electricity costs down for businesses.

Madam Speaker, we will continue to strengthen Ontario's competitiveness and make our province the best place in the world to do business.

As we grow our economy, we need to keep people and goods moving across the province, so we're building highways, we're building transit, and we are building infrastructure projects. Nous bâtissons des routes et nous réalisons des projets de transport en commun et d'infrastructure. We're building the Bradford Bypass. We're building Highway 413 right through Brampton, and the Ontario Line in—

Interjection.

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: And the Yonge North subway line. The Ontario Line, the Yonge North subway line, the Scarborough line—I could go on, but of course the time limits me to 20 minutes.

Madam Speaker, we're also enabling the future widening of Highway 401, from Brock Road in Durham region and right on. We're investing in more transit in the north, with the Northlander. These investments will help get people to where they need to be faster, and it's going to help them spend more time with their family and loved ones, instead of being stuck in gridlock.

The people of Ontario can know that we are working for them. Everywhere, we are working for our families, workers, students and seniors. We know the challenges.

As we help create jobs across the province, we still face a persistent labour shortage in key sectors such as health care and construction—particularly those—education workers, skilled trades and many other significant sectors. That's why we are investing an additional \$75 million over the next three years in our wildly successful Skills Development Fund. We're also providing an additional \$224 million to leverage private sector expertise and expand training centres and union-led training halls, so we can help prep skilled workers for the jobs of not only today, but for the jobs of tomorrow.

We know that the Bank of Canada's rapid interest rate increases and inflation have increased pressure on household budgets. That is why our government didn't wait to act when the cost of living began to rise. We took early action to keep costs down for the people of Ontario. We eliminated licence plate renewal fees and licence plate stickers, and refunded the past two years' fees for eligible vehicles, saving the average household over \$600 so far.

Interjections.

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Yes, I think that helps—putting money in people's pockets, helping them with the challenging times we have.

We also are eliminating double fares for commuters transferring from GO Transit to most local transit systems in the greater Toronto area, saving transit riders up to—get this—\$1,600 a year.

Interjection.

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: The member from Scarborough and Associate Minister of Transportation particularly liked that, because it's his remit.

But, Madam Speaker, we did more than that. We increased the minimum wage by 6.8% in October 2023.

And because of the low-income individual tax credit, Ontario has some of the lowest personal income tax rates in the country for low-income workers, so they can keep more money in their pockets.

And we're providing an estimated \$115 million through the Ontario Seniors Care at Home Tax Credit this year to over 200,000 low-to-moderate-income senior families with eligible medical expenses.

We temporarily cut the gas and fuel tax rates. Contrast that with the city and the government down the road in Ottawa, where the carbon tax is hitting many people hard. We know that inflation remains high and people and businesses continue to feel the pressure—especially, as I just said, as the federal government's carbon tax continues to make everyday essentials more expensive.

Passing this bill would extend the gas and fuel tax rate cuts to June 30, 2024. If passed, this would see savings to households of \$260, on average, since the tax rate cuts were first introduced.

Madam Speaker, despite the uncertainty facing the world today, I'm confident in the future of Ontario, its economy, its workers and its people. Madame la Présidente, malgré l'incertitude qui règne actuellement dans le monde, j'ai confiance en l'avenir de l'Ontario, en son économie, en ses travailleuses et ses travailleurs, et en sa population.

We've seen before what the people of this province can accomplish when we come together. We can overcome any obstacle in our way.

By passing this bill, the members of this House can help us build a strong Ontario together.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): I recognize the member for Oakville.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: It's a pleasure to be able to speak in the House today on Bill 146. It's a real honour to share my time with the Minister of Finance and the member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound.

Second, I want to congratulate the minister and his staff at the Ministry of Finance for their incredible hard work and dedication in putting together a strong economic plan to build a strong Ontario. I'm proud to be part of such a great team.

It is my pleasure now to rise and speak in support of the bill before us today, Building a Strong Ontario Together Act, 2023. This bill and its measures support our plan, our responsible, targeted approach that provides the flexibility Ontario needs to help address ongoing economic uncertainty—a plan that will help build critical infrastructure in growing Ontario communities, while laying a strong fiscal foundation for future generations.

As the minister had already mentioned, our government's work has structured key themes that help drive our strategy. "Better Services for You" is one of those themes. As we have shown time and time again, our government is

improving public services and making it convenient and faster for the people of Ontario to access them. For example, we have made it faster, easier, and more convenient for people and businesses to access driver's licences, health cards, birth certificates and many other services.

When it comes to health care in Ontario, our government is connecting people to convenient care, closer to home, through their OHIP card, and never through their credit card. Thanks to our government's plan, the wait-list for surgeries has been reduced by more than 25,000 from the peak in March 2022. Pharmacists can now prescribe treatment for 19 common ailments. We are tirelessly building on that plan.

Our government announced a plan to invest \$1 billion over three years to get more people connected to care in the comfort of their own home and community through the 2022 budget. Fast-forward to today, and we are now accelerating investments to bring home care funding in 2023-24 up to \$569 million. This includes more than \$370 million to support home and community care workers through rate increases and investments to hire more care workers. This funding will also expand home care services and improve the quality of care. This is just the beginning.

Just a few weeks ago, our Deputy Premier and Minister of Health, and alongside our great Minister of Finance, announced that we are expanding access to breast cancer screening for women aged 40 to 49. Beginning in fall 2024, this historic expansion will help more women detect and treat breast cancer sooner. We know early detection and increased access to care saves lives. By expanding access to the Ontario Breast Cancer Screening Program, we will connect more than 305,000 additional people to the services they need to ensure timely diagnosis and access to treatment as early as possible.

1550

This isn't all we are doing—far from it.

As we have seen with the Ontario Breast Screening Program, we are making it easier and faster to connect people to care.

We are also providing an additional \$425 million over three years for mental health and addictions services. This includes a 5% increase in the base funding of community-based mental health and addiction services provided by the Ministry of Health.

I can confidently add that expanding the scope of practice of pharmacists to prescribe over-the-counter medication for common ailments has been an incredible success.

Speaker, as we make health care more convenient, we are also investing in growing and retaining the health care workforce. While over 60,000 new nurses and nearly 8,000 new physicians have begun to work in Ontario since 2018, we know it is still not enough. That is why our government is providing an additional \$80 million over three years to further expand nursing program enrolment. This year, we are investing \$200 million to address immediate health care personnel shortages and to expand the workforce for years to come.

It's challenging for Ontario medical students to find residency spots right here at home. We understand that.

That is why, to support these graduates, beginning in 2024 and going forward, we are adding 154 postgraduate medical training seats to prioritize Ontario residents trained at home and abroad. We are adding 100 medical undergraduate seats, and we'll continue to prioritize Ontario students for these spots.

Speaker, we know that today many people in our province struggle to afford a place to call home. This includes some of the most at-risk people in our communities. That is why Ontario is investing an additional \$202 million each year in supportive housing and homelessness programs. With this investment, we will help those experiencing or at risk of homelessness, those escaping intimate partner violence, and support the valuable community organizations that deliver housing.

Ontario's most vulnerable continue to need support from our government—at a higher risk of being trafficked or experiencing homelessness, or our youth leaving the child welfare system. It is with this population in mind that our government is providing \$170 million over three years to the Youth Leaving Care program to ensure youth leaving provincial care are set up for success. Notably, we are also expanding program eligibility to include those up to 23 years old, as currently, support ends at 21 years of age.

Speaker, as noted in the fall economic statement released by the minister earlier this month, our government is continuing to do its utmost to build Ontario and work for the people of Ontario. Our efforts to build Ontario and work for you are supported and moved forward by the statutory changes contained in this bill today.

I'd like to take a few minutes to shine the spotlight on some of the more notable efforts by this government to support our plan.

We are protecting communities and unlocking new housing opportunities with \$200 million over three years in a new Housing-Enabling Water Systems Fund. This funding is for the repair, rehabilitation and expansion of a variety of municipal water infrastructure projects.

We are providing an additional \$100 million to the Invest Ontario Fund, for a total of \$500 million, which will enable Invest Ontario to help attract more leading companies to this great province, further support businesses already here, and create good-paying jobs in communities right across the province. Invest Ontario is the government's investment attraction agency.

We also announced, in our March budget, the Ontario Made Manufacturing Investment Tax Credit. This credit will help Ontario's manufacturers lower their costs, innovate and become more competitive—offers an estimated \$780 million in income tax support over three years.

That's not all. We are strengthening Ontario's position as a global leader across the electric vehicle, or EV, supply chain. We have done this by attracting over \$26 billion in the last three years in transformative automotive and EV battery-related investments from global automakers, parts suppliers and EV battery and materials manufacturers.

We are taking steps to strengthen Ontario's position as a global leader in mining as well. With this bill before the

House, we are proposing to enhance the Ontario Focused Flow-Through Share Tax Credit eligibility to help stimulate the critical mineral exploration and improve access to capital for small exploration companies. If passed, the change would start with the 2023 tax year and add \$12 million per year in tax credit support to Ontario's critical minerals mining industry.

Touching on what the minister spoke of, we are building on Ontario's clean energy advantage and meeting growing electricity demand today and into the future. We are doing this by supporting the refurbishments of Darlington and Bruce nuclear generating stations and the extension of the Pickering nuclear plant to 2026, and also by supporting the building of North America's first grid-scale small modular reactor, starting pre-development work for a large-scale nuclear station, planning strategic new transmission lines and procuring long-duration storage projects. We are doing this by committing a historic \$185 billion over 10 years, including \$20.7 billion in 2023-24 toward Ontario's Plan to Build.

This bill under discussion today includes a measure that, if approved, will help move forward our plan. Here, I refer to the proposed amendments to the Construction Act. These proposals would allow for lower minimum bonding requirements for projects that do not involve private financing to help attract more contractors to bid on capital projects, fostering and diversifying market competition.

You see, we are investing and building. This includes investing more than \$48 billion over 10 years in health infrastructure, supporting more than 50 hospital projects that would add 3,000 new beds over 10 years to improve access to reliable quality care. Totalling a historic \$6.4 billion since 2019 is our planned investment to build 30,000 new long-term-care beds and upgrade more than 28,000 existing beds across the province by 2028.

To build new schools, add child care spaces and modernize school infrastructure, we are investing \$22 billion over 10 years. This school year alone, 21 new schools and additions have opened, creating 7,000 new student spaces, including six French-language school projects. We are making progress toward creating 86,000 new, high-quality, affordable child care spaces by 2026. By the end of 2023, now only weeks away, over 23,000 new spaces will be created, including over 1,500 new licensed child care spaces in schools.

As the minister touched upon, we are working to put money back in people's pockets—among the most significant is how we are proposing to extend the current gas and fuel tax rate cuts through to June 30, 2024. This proposed change, along with gas and fuel tax cuts already in place, would save households \$260, on average, since the cuts were first implemented in July 2022.

Another step in our government's plan to help the people of Ontario find and afford a place to live is how we are encouraging builders to construct more rental units. We are encouraging construction of new, purpose-built rental housing by taking steps to remove the full 8% provincial portion of the HST on qualifying projects. Together with federal actions, this would remove the full 13% HST on qualifying new purpose-built rental housing.

We are also supporting people who are on the go. We are eliminating double fares for most local transit when using GO Transit services and increasing Presto discounts for youth and post-secondary students, all while providing riders with more options and convenient ways to pay.

Another way we are helping people is by increasing the general minimum wage to \$16.55 per hour—a 6.8% pay raise to help workers and their families keep up with the rising costs.

1600

This year, we are putting \$550, on average, back in the pockets of more than 200,000 low-to-moderate-income senior families with eligible medical expenses. This includes expenses that support aging at home through the Ontario Seniors Care at Home Tax Credit.

We are also building—building at least 1.5 million homes by 2031. We are building these homes through targeted incentives to municipalities, including the Building Faster Fund, strong-mayor powers and the Streamline Development Approval Fund.

We are a government focused on building Ontario together. To facilitate this building, we are supporting skills development and training with more than \$1 billion invested over three years in Ontario's Skilled Trades Strategy, as well as investing \$860 million in the training stream and \$224 million in the capital stream of the Skills Development Fund.

Speaker, as we continue to grow our job market, we are welcoming more skilled immigrants to Ontario, investing \$25 million over three years in the Ontario Immigrant Nominee Program and expanding the Ontario Bridge Training Program with a \$3-million investment in the 2023-24 tax year, helping skilled newcomers start working in their trained fields and faster.

We are also removing Canadian work experience requirements for certain regulated professions. Why? To make it easier for newcomers to work in the professions they trained for.

Speaker, in closing today, let me say the following: Our government is very confident in our vision—that despite the geopolitical and economic uncertainties in the world today, the Ontario economy and our communities continue to demonstrate resiliency.

We are putting in place the infrastructure to support the growth of the economy and communities, through the infrastructure—in roads, bridges, highways, schools, and health facilities.

We are also building up the skilled workforce for the jobs of tomorrow.

We are helping those who need it the most during these uncertain times.

We are connecting the people and families of Ontario with the health care and the child care they need, when they need it.

I encourage all members to vote in favour of Bill 146, Building a Strong Ontario Together Act, 2023.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): I recognize the member for Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound.

Mr. Rick Byers: Madam Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to speak on this bill this afternoon. I certainly thank the minister for his remarks, and the member from Oakville for his comments this afternoon. It's a terrific team, and I'm happy to be part of that.

Today, I rise to speak in support of the second reading of the fall bill, Building a Strong Ontario Together Act (Budget Measures), 2023. As part of my support for the second reading, I'd like to take a few minutes to speak to some of the specific statutory aspects of the bill and how they support and/or fit with our government's plan.

A number of measures in this bill are related to taxation, while many others are non-tax initiatives. I'd like to begin by discussing the non-tax measures. Many of them relate to the financial services sector—the securities marketplace, in particular. You see, the province is looking to modernize capital markets to better protect investors, foster economic growth and increase investment in Ontario.

Ontario's economy and capital market trends are constantly evolving and changing. The pandemic, ongoing economic uncertainty and technological developments such as digital assets have reinforced the importance of capital formation and of enhancing Ontario's economic competitiveness.

If approved, the proposed legislative and regulatory changes in the bill would support economic growth, encourage market innovation and enable greater retail investor access to investment opportunities here in Ontario.

The financial sector in our province is very large—and in particular, in the city of Toronto—and it impacts positively in so many different ways. Direct jobs in the industry are very substantial, and that generates a huge, broad economic base, and its financial sector operates as a catalyst for investment. These measures will support the industry but also regulate it and provide that ongoing scrutiny.

As the minister and the member said, economic development is a very high priority for our government—\$16 billion of investments, 700,000 jobs. These are very important measures. If the measures are approved, the government will continue to work with the capital markets sector, the Ontario Securities Commission—or OSC—and other key stakeholders to ensure the new legislative framework protects investors and consumers and supports Ontario businesses.

To the bill items: We are proposing amendments to the Securities Act—well-known, seasoned issuers item. These proposed amendments are to allow the OSC to make rules streamlining the prospectus-filing requirements for those large public companies that have an established record of appropriate financial disclosure in Ontario. These companies are known in the industry as well-known, seasoned issuers, and these measures will streamline the access to capital for these important companies.

It's really an important measure because, like our red tape reduction initiatives, it helps keep these companies' costs down. That affects the OSC as well. Each time a company is spending time and money, staff at the OSC are as well. So these changes are better for issuers, better for

the OSC and, in the long run, better for economic development in the province.

We're also proposing amendments to the Securities Act and Commodity Futures Act to address automatic and streamlined reciprocal orders. These proposed amendments are to provide that orders and settlements made by Canadian regulators outside of Ontario apply automatically in Ontario, as if made by the OSC.

The amendments would also establish a streamlined process for the recognition of orders and settlements made by courts outside Ontario, regulatory authorities outside Canada, and certain recognized self-regulatory organizations and exchanges within Canada. These would serve to protect Ontario investors in a timelier manner and make it easier for consumers here in Ontario.

I'd also like to highlight the new changes to the Securities Act and the Commodity Futures Act as they pertain to whistle-blowers. With these proposed amendments, we are protecting those who would come forward to do the right thing. These changes would amend the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act to ensure that whistle-blower confidentiality provisions prevail over freedom-of-information disclosure requirements, and amend the Securities Act to extend statutory protection to whistle-blowers and to expand anti-reprisal protections.

The OSC Whistleblower Program and other whistle-blower programs encourage and rely on individuals in various positions in the capital markets sector to disclose information of misconduct and wrongdoings that might otherwise go undetected and cause harms. These changes are expected to increase the number of individuals who report misconduct and wrongdoings to the OSC and other organizations, which will strengthen enforcement and provide further investor protection. These are very good measures, because when the market knows these provisions are out there, they will ensure they're behaving better, and the awareness will be an important factor in their operations. So these are good measures.

1610

The improved accountability and transparency is not only good for the capital markets; it helps foster economic growth across the board by boosting confidence and the reputation that Ontario has as being a good place to conduct business.

Next, the Securities Act, Commodity Futures Act, and Securities Commission Act, distribution of disgorged amounts: Proposed here are amendments to prescribe a statutory framework to support the timely and efficient distribution of disgorged money to investors who have suffered financial losses as a result of a Securities Act contravention. Currently, the Securities Act and Commodity Futures Act do not prescribe a specific framework or process for the distribution of disgorged funds to harmed investors in cases where funds have been collected. This results in slower and less efficient investor compensation following a finding of securities market misconduct.

A statutory framework for the distribution of disgorged funds would be prescribed via legislative amendments to

the Securities Act, Commodity Futures Act and the Securities Commission Act, along with accompanying rules developed by the OSC. Establishing a clear and transparent distribution process would support more timely and efficient compensation of investors who have suffered direct financial losses as a result of security contraventions. It would also create more effective and predictable operational processes in this area for the OSC.

Madam Speaker, I'll now turn to the management of investments; specifically, a measure in the bill focused on the Investment Management Corporation of Ontario Act and municipal investment boards.

This proposed amendment is to allow municipal funds, which are maintained under the authority of an investment board or joint investment board, to be invested with the Investment Management Corp. of Ontario, or IMCO. This change would provide clarity and address the current discrepancy for municipalities that wish to invest with IMCO. The proposed amendment would enable though not require investment boards and joint investment boards established under the Municipal Act and investment boards established under the City of Toronto Act to become members of IMCO. This would allow municipal funds under the authority of such boards to be invested with IMCO.

As background, and as you may know, IMCO is an independent investment management organization designed to serve public sector clients in Ontario. With over \$73 billion in assets under management, IMCO is one of the largest institutional investment managers in Canada. In fact, Ontario and Canada have a great number of similar types of investment organizations. So this change that we are proposing makes great sense. You may have heard of some of these institutional investors—OMERS pension plan; the Ontario Teachers' Pension Plan; Healthcare of Ontario Pension Plan, or HOOPP. Many of these organizations—for example, OMERS—were established in the 1960s. Why? So that municipalities could have their pension assets managed centrally and together. OMERS today has over \$100 billion in assets. It makes so much sense, rather than have each individual municipality manage and administer their pension plan, to have it centrally done through OMERS. I use OMERS as an example—it's similar to what happens with IMCO.

The minister has mentioned our commitment to infrastructure. There are two pages in my—am I allowed to make reference? Okay, well, if I were allowed to make reference, I would suggest page 18, which outlines the amazing long-term commitment we have to infrastructure as a government, whether it's \$70 billion over 10 years for transit, \$28 billion for highways, \$48 billion for health care, or \$22 billion for education. These are long-term investments, and this is a long-term perspective that our government has, and this change to IMCO is exactly consistent with that change.

Madam Speaker, I now move on to the Ministry of Revenue Act child support services program. This is a proposed technical amendment in support of the expansion of enforcement of Ontario's child support orders in

international jurisdictions. The Ministry of Finance operates the online child support calculation services. The Ministry of Finance operates the online child support calculation on behalf of the Ministry of the Attorney General and the Family Responsibility Office, or FRO. The program determines the child support obligations of parents who have settled amicably outside of the court process and issues a notice of calculation/recalculation to the parents and FRO.

Another measure in the bill would provide the government with the spending authority it requires to carry on operations. A new interim appropriation act is normally introduced each fall. A new supplementary interim appropriation act is normally introduced in years in which the amounts in the interim appropriation act for the year were insufficient to cover expected expenditures.

Now I'd like to take a few minutes to discuss tax initiatives. As has been noted by the minister and the member for Oakville, our government is seeking to extend the cuts to the gasoline tax rate and the fuel tax rate for an additional six months—to June 30, 2024—as we continue to make life more affordable for Ontarians. As noted by the other speakers, this is the number one priority that we are certainly hearing from our constituents at this time—the affordability challenge they're all facing. That's why this government continues to take action to support these efforts. These rate cuts took effect on July 1, 2022, and would otherwise have ended on December 31, 2023. This change is proposed in the continuation of our government's priority of keeping costs down for the people of Ontario.

Madam Speaker, our government is unlocking the economic potential of critical minerals and finally building all-season roads to the Ring of Fire, in partnership with Indigenous communities. Critical minerals are the key to positioning Ontario as a global economic powerhouse—ready to seize the electric vehicle revolution and energy transition and be a serious player amidst geopolitical change. As has been noted by the other speakers, the investment commitments that have been made to Ontario are so exciting—\$26 billion in these industries, which is going to be a generational investment for jobs and economic development in our province.

We are continuing to support critical mineral exploration with the Ontario Focused Flow-Through Share Tax Credit. Through this bill, we are proposing technical amendments to extend this tax credit to exploration expenses related to minerals considered “critical minerals” under the federal Income Tax Act. Enhancing the Ontario Focused Flow-Through Share Tax Credit is aimed at helping stimulate critical mineral exploration in Ontario and improving access to capital for small mining exploration companies.

As the minister stated, we are seeking to strengthen critical mineral exploration in Ontario through this change that would amount to a proposed additional \$12 million per year in tax credit support to the critical minerals mining industry. If approved, the government would expand eligibility of the Ontario Focused Flow-Through Share

Tax Credit to include critical mineral exploration expenses that qualify for the federal Critical Mineral Exploration Tax Credit, starting in the 2023 tax year.

1620

Now I will provide a quick overview of the items in the bill related to additional ministries.

First, the Ministry of the Attorney General, legislative amendments to strengthen opioid cost-recovery litigation: The opioid crisis has cost the people of Ontario enormously. This is why Ontario is actively participating in national litigation to hold pharmaceutical manufacturers, wholesalers and their marketing consultants accountable for damages caused by the opioid crisis.

Amendments proposed to the Opioid Damages and Health Costs Recovery Act would strengthen Ontario's participation in two ongoing British Columbia-based national class action lawsuits against opioid manufacturers, wholesalers and their consultants. These proposed legislative changes would help hold the pharmaceutical industry accountable for damages caused by the opioid crisis and the impact on our health care system.

Interjections.

Mr. Rick Byers: Hear, hear. Good change.

It's an important change, and one that is so relevant. We've all seen, in our communities, the impact that opioids are having on the most vulnerable, and so our government continues to take action, and with this proposal, would continue that work. Any proceeds would be invested into front-line mental health and addictions services. This is another important step in providing further protections for the people of Ontario.

I'd like to further highlight the changes to the Construction Act. Supporting the great work done by my colleagues in the Ministry of Infrastructure and the Ministry of the Attorney General, the amendments are aimed at authorizing the Lieutenant Governor in Council to make regulations allowing the minimum surety bonding requirements for large, non-P3 public infrastructure projects to be adjusted, as appropriate. These Construction Act proposals would allow for lower minimum bonding requirements for projects that do not involve private financing. If passed, this would help attract more contractors to bid on capital projects, fostering and diversifying market competition.

Madam Speaker, a number of initiatives that I have spoken about in this proposed legislation are so important. And as I step back and look at all of them together, whether it's the gas tax cut extension to June 30 of next year, or something that hasn't been mentioned—removing the HST on rental properties, which has been so well received by the construction industry and will be so helpful in spurring the construction of rental properties for Ontarians.

I've mentioned the flow-through shares initiative—such an important one for expanding access to capital, as the minister knows so well, to expand our access to the Ring of Fire.

Target benefit pension plans, also included as measures in this proposed legislation, would enhance the benefits

potentially available to construction workers, for building a pension that they don't currently have.

And so much of our spending on an ongoing basis—if I were allowed to reference the book, which I know I am not, if you were to look at page 7, the ongoing commitments in health care spending of over \$81 billion this year; education, \$34.7 billion this year; post-secondary education, \$12.1 billion; children, community and social services, \$19.4 billion. On and on the list would go, if only I were able to access that document. It's so important that it underlines our government's commitment to spending, and more importantly, to serving the needs of Ontarians who need it the most.

And as well, the Ontario Infrastructure Bank has been mentioned as being an important new investment partner for the outstanding current investment pension funds and others. It will be so important in—as the minister noted, whether it's in long-term care or energy or other sectors—making sure there is capital available for the good projects that need to be developed.

Madam Speaker, our plan is working. We are building Ontario and working for the people of this great province. Whether it's \$26 billion of economic development, 700,000 jobs and on and on, the results are out there. Let me close by encouraging all members of the Legislature to vote in support of the fall bill, Building a Strong Ontario Together Act (Budget Measures), 2023.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Thank you. And just as a reminder, for the rules for members, you're allowed to read from a document. You can't just use it as a prop—just for clarification to the members. Thank you.

We'll move to questions.

MPP Jamie West: Thank you to my colleagues for their debate on this.

My question is to the Minister of Finance. There is \$5.4 billion in the contingency fund, and a lot of people are calling it a “slush fund” or a “rainy day fund.” There are a lot of organizations that haven't had funding increases for more than a decade. I want to read one of them: “Sexual assault centres in Ontario, like Amelia Rising, have not had a core funding increase since the mid 1990s.

“When people take the brave step to call our centre for help, they face a five-month wait-list for services. Staff positions have decreased year” after “year while demands for services increase exponentially.

“Amelia Rising will potentially close and continue to reduce services unless this is addressed. What will the community look like without this essential service?

“Financial control is a commonly used tool used by perpetrators to silence and control their victims—this is exactly the tactic the government has used to silence a centre like ours, an irony not lost on us.”

My question, Speaker, is, when will the government admit that it is raining on publicly funded institutions like Amelia Rising and provide the funding they need instead of putting it in a rainy day fund?

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): To respond, the member for Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound.

Mr. Rick Byers: I thank the member for the question and understand the focus that has been placed in the past on the contingency fund. The member is right that it has been enhanced in this document. That is, in my opinion and this government's opinion, the practical and right thing to do. The risks out there for the economy and otherwise—if you talk to 10 people, you would get 10 different answers on what the future looks like. That's all the more reason why it is prudent to have a contingency fund that will be put to work if needed, and that's the important factor here.

But the real answer is back to the spending that has been outlined by our government, whether it's health care or education or any other social programs. That's the real response that we have to these programs.

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

Ms. Laura Smith: I want to thank the parliamentary assistants and the minister for presenting. I'm quite pleased to hear that there will be a surplus estimated in the 2025-26 year of half a billion dollars. These are positive steps.

But we're also aware that the federal government has decided to pause the carbon tax on one type of home heating used mainly in Atlantic Canada and increase the tax on other types of home heating like lower-emitting natural gas here in Ontario. This is concerning as a taxpayer in Ontario. Perhaps the member from Oakville can advise what sense this brings or what the federal government should be doing and what our government is doing to reduce the costs for hard-working taxpayers in Ontario.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Thank you to the member from Thornhill—a very good question. The federal government, as you are aware, has reduced the carbon tax in Atlantic Canada for heating oil. Well, that was politically motivated, with a caucus revolt from Atlantic Canada.

What our government is trying to do is help all the people of Ontario by reducing costs where possible. We've obviously lobbied the federal government to eliminate the carbon tax, which is a very punitive tax on all the hard-working people across this province and across this great country, but we've been taking other steps to make life more affordable. The minister mentioned in his remarks today that we will be extending the gas tax cut until June 30, 2024. That is an enormous tax savings to all the people of Ontario who heat their homes or drive their cars, take their kids to soccer practice, go to work every day—as many of us do here—in cars. That's a big savings to all the people of Ontario.

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There are many other programs we've put in place as well to help the people, but that's certainly a good start. I hope that the opposition will support us and support this fall economic statement.

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

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: The minister talked about child care in his budget. But the Ontario Coalition for

Better Child Care, the Association of Early Childhood Educators and other experts and workers have been warning this Conservative government that the \$10-a-day child care program is under threat because of low pay and the working conditions.

The average ECE stays in that position just three years. The education minister consulted with these experts. Overwhelmingly, they said that the results were that they should pay ECEs more. Ontario is only one of four provinces that hasn't implemented a salary scale or a wage grid.

So I'd like to ask the Minister: Where in Bill 146 is there an establishment of a salary scale of at least \$30 per hour for registered ECEs and \$25 for non-RECEs to get this program back on track?

Mr. Rick Byers: I thank the member for the question. We all know how important child care services are in our constituencies and how important they are to working families these days. Having that access to have your kids looked after with the quality of care that they deserve and you deserve is so important. That's why our government reached out and made a deal with the federal government for \$13 billion in child care support for the province. It's so important, the direct economic benefits to the families of working parents from this program.

I acknowledge the member's point. This is a difficult and challenging current economic circumstance, and we'll continue to look at the compensation levels across the board for these areas and understand that. But our government's focus on affordability and supporting Ontarians through so many different measures is a key factor to consider.

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

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Congratulations to my colleague the Minister of Finance, as well as his two parliamentary secretaries.

I want to pick up on something that my colleague from Thornhill was talking about, which is the carbon tax. I think what we saw in Atlantic Canada—yes, I am an original Atlantic Canadian—was that this tax is not about fixing the environment. He has proven—he being the Prime Minister of Canada—that that tax is nothing but a political tax on everything. I want to know how this budget, this fall economic statement, is going to support Ontario families who are right now struggling with high interest rates, who are right now worried about losing their jobs, and who right now are concerned about the high prices not only of gas but also the groceries at our grocery store. How are we helping them as the Trudeau Liberals continue to shove more taxes down our throats?

Mr. Rick Byers: I thank the member for that important question. It's good to see a Maritimer standing up in the House.

She's absolutely right that the federal government's carbon tax—and the member outlined some of the key issues that are involved there. It goes into the price of everything that's made in Ontario, whether it's your food—farmers have no ability to find other options for

them, so they're forced to pay this tax. It makes the cost of everything higher. Imagine the gas pumps at 14 cents a litre. They're finally—it would be in the 20s if that were removed now.

What we're doing: We have consistently taken a view to remove the provincial taxes off fuel for the time being. That's what we've done—specific measures in addition to many others to support Ontarians in this challenging time.

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

Miss Monique Taylor: I'm pleased that I had the opportunity to be able to listen to the members opposite talk about the economic statement.

Something that definitely caught my attention, as I'm sure you would understand, was when they talked about ODSP and being the best government in decades to be raising those rates. I can tell you, the Liberals didn't do much better, but we have people who are literally starving in our communities due to the ODSP and Ontario Works rates, and people who are not able to pay the rent. Our rents are much higher than the income that they're earning for a person who is disabled in this province.

So can one of the members who spoke to the fall economic statement please tell me where the humanity lens was put when it came to this fall economic statement to ensure that we don't have people dying of hunger and freezing on our streets this coming winter?

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

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Thank you to the member opposite. The member opposite is probably aware that we've not only had one increase where we did have the 5% increase in the ODSP some time ago, but we also increased it by 6.5% in July. If you add the two together, that's an 11.5% increase. That's the largest increase in the province's history, full stop, okay? That is an enormous increase.

Secondly, we also increased the threshold for our workers to be able to go out there and work, collect ODSP and not be taxed. A lot of employees in the past would not be able to continue working past a certain number of hours because they were taxed. We've increased that threshold so they can go out there and work. The government of Ontario has the backs of the people on ODSP.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): We're out of time for questions and answers. We're going to move to further debate.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Of course, it is a pleasure, always, to join the debate on legislation that is before this House. I will tell you that I may be bringing a little reality back into the debate today. But before I start, I do want to just pass along condolences to the finance minister on the passing of his mother. I'm sure she was very proud of him.

I want to also say that this morning I was quite impressed with our new LG, Edith Dumont. She particularly got my attention when she talked about her family and friends and how they keep her grounded, with a sense of belonging, when we love and care for each other, and also her words around the common good, which should be a

unifying call to action, I think, for all legislators in Ontario.

Congratulations on her, and I look forward to—with her focus on seniors, perhaps she and I may be able to find some alliance with regard to ensuring that seniors are not cruelly separated in our long-term-care system when they are married or they are partners. It's actually one year today since our Till Death Do Us Part act passed second reading in this House, and if anybody thinks I'm going to give up on this, you have another thing coming. I took great comfort in her voice this morning.

We have the fall economic statement before us. The minister gave a speech, and I gave a speech, and this is six months into the budget year in the province of Ontario. I wish I could say there was firm ground here for this document, but I will say that in difficult times a government can be tested, and they could show how strong they are by reprioritizing their focus, past their political agenda, past the partisanship, but refocusing on the people we're elected to serve.

I do not believe, as the finance critic and the Treasury Board critic for the province of Ontario, that the mini-budget that was presented to us saw what was actually happening in the province of Ontario on the health care front, on the mental health care front, on housing and on justice. So I'm hoping that this is a piece of legislation—I'll say at the beginning—that gets to committee so we can actually review some of the priorities that were mentioned in the document itself. However, they're not necessarily reflected in Bill 146, which is the technical portion of the fall economic statement. So I'm going to start with that, and I'm also just going to raise some context, really, for where we are in Ontario with this mini-budget.

Six months in, as I mentioned, we are dealing with a government that is truly lurching from scandal to scandal to scandal and very much in reversing-the-bus mode. We have before us quite unprecedented circumstances, where the RCMP is not reviewing the government; the RCMP is investigating this government on several fronts—I would say on the criminal front.

Now, some of my colleagues whom I've served with now for 11 years in this place will remember—this is unsettling for a government, as it should be, I would say. When the OPP investigated the Liberals, it was actually one of the only times that I saw the former Premier rattled—and for good reason, as it turned out. I think in total they may have had four OPP investigations. I will be honest; we lost track of that after a while. However, in that instance a senior official did go to jail—served time—for destroying government records and emails and not following what is the law for the Ontario public service in maintaining records.

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We are in an unprecedented time. Urban boundaries have been destabilized, municipalities have been undermined, MZOs have become this political tool which is very much connected to fundraising and who you know and which consultant has your ear. And the fact that some guy named Mr. X is really shopping this new concept

called “MZOs are us” is really quite embarrassing, I would say.

We're in this world and sometimes we don't see what other people see. But when they're looking at us and this is how a government is conducting their business, it doesn't instill confidence. And I think confidence is going to be very, very important—as is trust—as we move into some difficult economic times, particularly by Q3 and Q4 in the province of Ontario.

The greenbelt housing affordability discussion, if you will, has been fully rejected by the people of this province. They see very clearly that the government's own Housing Affordability Task Force was very clear that there was enough land within municipal boundaries that was already serviced by infrastructure and by those infrastructure dollars that had been already invested into the communities to build those \$1.5-million homes—sorry, those 1.5 million homes. It was the \$1.5-million homes that were actually on the greenbelt. Nobody can afford them, except for friends of this Premier.

Moving forward, though, this is the ground that we are on in Ontario. It's very shaky. It's very destabilized. Thank goodness for those small businesses across this province that are incredibly resilient. They have been through the ringer. They keep pivoting—remember when that was the word of the day around here? And thank goodness that they are being as innovative as they can within this context and as interest rates continue to go up.

I'm going to start off just giving the financial environment that we're currently in here in Ontario. I do reference the work from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives quite a bit in this House. Sheila Block and Randy Robinson have been keeping their eye on the numbers here at Queen's Park and they have been doing a very diligent job at that. They try to see the government of the day as trustworthy and that the investments are being done strategically, where the return on those investments serve the people of the province, who we—just in case anybody has forgotten—are elected to serve.

They say, “By now most Ontario budget-watchers have learned to take provincial budget projections with a handful of salt. The deficit forecast, for starters, is pure accounting fiction.”

Then they go on: “The current government typically spends less than what it earmarks in its budgets and finance Minister ... Bethlenfalvy loves to pad his budgets with large ‘contingency funds’ that aren't earmarked for anything in particular.”

Don't take Sheila's and Randy's advice on this entirely; the Financial Accountability Officer, an independent officer of this Legislature, has confirmed this pattern.

This is a government that puts numbers in a budget and that budget line does not get spent, does not find its way to the community. I can think of several organizations. One of them is the Alzheimer Society of Ontario, which is still waiting for their 2021 allocation of \$5 million. So this money gets funnelled back into the contingency fund and does not get into the community.

Home care is another example. In 2021-22, of the home care dollars that were sent out to Ontario health teams,

\$70.8 million came back to this place. We all know how smart it is to invest in home care. People do not want to go to long-term-care institutions; they want to stay in their homes. The pandemic was frightening for so many seniors because this government did not see them, and it was deadly for over 5,000 seniors—that we know of; that number is a moving target, because keeping those stats has been proven to be very difficult, for some reason, for the Ministry of Health.

So when we look at this budget cycle, six months in, the 2023-24 budget included \$4 billion in contingency funds. Now, just for those at home, contingency funds are different than the \$1-billion surplus, which is prudent to set aside for an emergency—a rainy day, if you will. But two thirds of the way through the fiscal year, the province had only spent \$336 million of that contingency fund, so they just took a little withdrawal from this unallocated fund, meaning that the contingency fund remained at \$3.7 billion.

But then, in this fall economic statement, halfway through a budget year, they drop another \$2.5 billion into this fund. Now, if you were paying attention in the province of Ontario, you would be hearing about code reds, about backups at emergency rooms. You would be hearing about emergency closures. You would be hearing about the 14,000 children who are waiting for surgery in Ontario. You would be hearing about the backlog in special education services in our schools. You may even be hearing about the children who are still waiting for autism therapy services in Ontario.

So it's not like there isn't an immediate need. It's not like the finance minister had to go digging around to say, "Oh, do you know what? Everything is okay. Let's just sock this money away—\$2.5 billion—in this fund." Some would say "fiscally prudent;" we would say "fiscally irresponsible," because there is a cost to these wait-lists. There is a cost, both in human suffering—we've seen people come to this Legislature; I remember the dad whose daughter had spina bifida and had been waiting in pain for almost three years. You should not have to drag your family to Queen's Park to get the health care system that you need and that you deserve.

So here we are. The minister added this \$2.5 billion—and the biggest thing, also, about the contingency: (1) It's fiscally irresponsible, but (2) it removes the oversight that we have as legislators. Now, why does that matter? Because it means that the Minister of Finance and the cabinet can do whatever they want with it.

Let me be really clear with you, Madam Speaker: Nobody trusts this government.

Interjections.

Ms. Catherine Fife: You should clap for that. Get on it.

This means that we actually have, for some reason, a \$5.6-billion deficit by 2023, but the CCPA makes the point that this really is accounting fiction. It's also clear that the deficit, the debt-to-GDP ratios and the percentage of revenue going to interest payments right now are at an all-time 10-year low. So in the face of seeing the people of this province be evicted or delayed in health care services,

the government has made an intentional choice to not invest in making their lives better.

Some people would take great umbrage at that. Some people would say that it's an unethical decision and that it goes counter to the oath that we take as legislators to serve the people of this province.

I do want to say that this is actually after five years. I have unfortunately been the finance critic for five years, and this started back in 2018. There's a very clear pattern in how the current government, through three finance ministers now, views spending on public services and income supports. It's really clear that programming spending in Ontario over the past five years by major sectors, if you take in the changes for inflation and population growth, show real per-capita spending, how much the government is spending per person in Ontario in constant dollars—the results are quite something.

I just want to say, there were Conservatives at one point in the history of this province who recognized that inflationary cost pressures were real and that you needed to adjust expenditures to address those cost pressures.

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Listen to this: Real per capita spending on post-secondary education has dropped by 11% since 2018; in children's and social services, it's down 12%; in education, it is down 11%; and in the justice sector, it is down by over 2%. There is a minor increase in health, but I'm going to get to that—because where that 2.9% increase is going is right into the pockets of private investors; it's not going into the health care system. So that's the reality check for this government. If you've been in an emergency department or if you're lucky enough to find an emergency room that's open in Ontario when you need it, you will know that that 2.9% misses the mark, just like this fall economic statement misses the moment.

In health and all sectors, the slow suffocation of public services has gone on too long.

This is a direct quote from Sheila and Randy: "It is time for the government's spending to catch up with the needs of Ontarians—spending that invests in the public services that all of us rely on. Indeed"—and this is a very good quote—"this government seems intent to hide behind dire fiscal projections rather than face the music on badly needed public service improvements." That is the sorry state of affairs for the province of Ontario, I can tell you.

If I move over now to one of the shiny objects that was in the fall economic statement, this is the infrastructure bank—actually, before I move on to that: the context for how this government is doing business. I should set the groundwork for this, because the infrastructure bank is dependent on having some kind of trust. Well, you talk about not reading the room—because the fact that this government really had the gall to introduce a brand new arm's length organization that's going to have its own board of directors and is going to do its own business over here and is going to be as transparent as mud, I get. But if you look at even what's in the news today—"Senior Ford Government Cabinet Ministers Barely Using Work Phones, Docs Show."

Just to go full circle: We know that when the OPP investigated the former Liberal government, they were able to access personal and work phones, and for good reason. When you are in cabinet, when you are serving at that level, everything that you do on your personal phone and your work phone should be FOI-able. But some people are moving through their phones pretty quickly. Think of those phones that cycle through. I think the Premier has given out six or seven different numbers over the last five years. I think people think that it's kind of endearing that this happens, but the fact of the matter is that he's still compelled by the law. The law still matters in Ontario, even when the "business as usual" mode is a sticker business here. But transparency and respect for the electorate is key to here.

Today's article, which is actually published by Isaac Callan and Colin D'Mello—I know the Premier is very fond of Colin D'Mello. On a regular basis—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Excuse me. I have a point of order to respond to.

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: I was really excited to hear about the debate over the budget and what we're going to be doing for the province of Ontario, to build up Ontario for the budget, but I currently do not hear that conversation being had. So through you, Speaker, I just wanted to see if we could talk about the budget today.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): I think the budget measures are general enough that it touches upon several subjects. I'll allow the member to continue.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I am talking about money, and money is in the budget. I'm going to keep going back to the money—

Interjection: Not all of it.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Not all of it—some of it actually ends up in pockets, and that's part of the problem.

Just going back to the trust issue and connecting it to the infrastructure bank, which obviously is highlighted in the fall economic statement: This is all happening as the government lawyers who—I just want to say the lawyers are doing very well in Ontario. This government has given them lots of business.

MPP Jamie West: Lawyers R Us.

Ms. Catherine Fife: "Lawyers R Us."

"As the government lawyers attempt to shield" the Ontario Premier's "personal cellphone records from being publicly released, new documents show several prominent ministers in his cabinet also have large stretches of inactivity on their official devices when critical government decisions were being made.

"Freedom-of-information requests submitted by Global News"—actually, this is how we have to get most of our information these days, which is not ideal—"show that then-ministers of education, finance, health, housing and transportation made either no phone calls or used very few minutes on their government-issued devices during crucial moments in their ministries." This is problematic, obviously, on a number of levels, and one is that this was all

within the context of the government starting their own bank.

"The phone records requested by Global News covered a one-month period for each minister...."

"One minister made zero phone calls on their government-issued device during that one-month period"—which is very strange, because when we're here, everybody's on their phones; they're on somebody's phone; they're texting their family, maybe looking at their dog videos. I don't know what's going on, but I know that everybody has their phones. This is an acceptable way to do our jobs. We have legislative-issued phones that we use to do our jobs.

So it is surprising that the Minister of Health, who also serves as the Deputy Premier, "had the least activity on her phone, according to the government records. During January 2023"—and why is this significant? I'm totally going to pull it back. The minister did not make a single call from her government cellphone. At the time, though, this was when they were making sweeping changes to how health care is delivered in Ontario and tapped private, for-profit clinics to take on an expanded role.

This is a problem, because if we don't have a clear idea of how a minister of the crown, whose level of accountability and transparency—that bar is very high for these individuals. And when you are talking about a \$70.1-billion item in the budget, that's a lot of money, and when the money is not getting to where it's supposed to go, like paramedics and emergency room doctors and nurses—we just read out a petition on behalf of the Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario. The out-migration of nurses in Ontario is real, and Bill 124 has a lot to do with that. So if the Minister of Health is, as you know, during these crucial times not recognizing the health human resources crisis that the province of Ontario is in—you can build all the beds. Building beds is one thing; staffing beds is a complete other thing.

Also, it's worth noting that the education minister had less than 20 minutes on his phone during November 2022—I think that was around Bill 28, wasn't it?

MPP Jamie West: Bill 28, yes.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Yes.

And the cellphone bill shows that there was just a total of one minute in phone calls. I don't know what to say about this exactly. I'm sure we'll get to the bottom of it, but it is a disturbing pattern.

All of this is happening as the Premier and the finance minister decide to start a bank—the infrastructure bank of Ontario. There are more questions than there is any information on this, although I've been told that the minister did extensive consultation, but it's not on his phone—but just not on the phone. There were no phone calls made. Also, it's not contained in Bill 146, the actual budget measures act, which is the technical bill which operationalizes the fall economic statement, which leads me only to conclude that somewhere on a napkin this idea came up—this shiny little prize called an infrastructure bank. I feel that it should just stay on the napkin, Madam Speaker, and I'm going to tell you why.

This is one article from Thomas Marois from McMaster University: “Whose Interests Will New Ontario Infrastructure Bank Serve? Not the Public’s, It Seems.

1700

“With the launch of the Ontario Infrastructure Bank, the province has just become home to the world’s newest public bank. As part of the provincial budget—they’re going to invest \$3 billion of public, taxpayer dollars into this bank. Why? Because the government says that it doesn’t necessarily have the money to invest in long-term-care homes, energy infrastructure, affordable housing, municipal and community infrastructure and transportation. But the question is, will the OIB—the Ontario Infrastructure Bank—serve the public or the private interest?

So far, what we know about this infrastructure bank is that it’s very much modelled under the federal infrastructure bank. You can see where I’m going with this, obviously.

Just recently, a press release came out from the federal Conservatives—our distant, distant, distant cousins. This is the press release around the infrastructure bank. This is what your federal cousins think about the infrastructure bank at the federal level, which your provincial infrastructure bank is modelled under. The Conservative shadow Minister of Infrastructure and Communities released the following statement after it was discovered that a \$1.7-billion Canada Infrastructure Bank project had failed: “Trudeau’s bank invested \$655 million in a \$1.7-billion project to build an underwater electricity cable that is now dead in the water due to financial volatility and inflation. The Lake Erie Connector Project is yet another failure for the Canada Infrastructure Bank,” which is “a \$35-billion taxpayer-funded bank that has not completed one project in almost six years.”

It makes no sense whatsoever. We should learn from other jurisdictions not to follow down that path. Ontario, and this government in particular—you have enough issues, I think, on your plate. If one could get lost and sort of lose track of the scandals, one could be forgiven for doing so, because they are so prevalent.

It goes on to say, “At a time when Canadians are struggling to put food on the table, this government keeps wasting taxpayer dollars. \$655 million was promised to a multi-billion dollar company for an electricity project that ironically seems to have failed due to inflation....”

“One and a half years ago, the Liberals were gushing about their new partnership with Fortis Inc., a private company that rakes in billions in revenue every year, promising tons of low-carbon energy, billions in GDP and hundreds of Canadian jobs.” It almost sounds too good to be true. Conservatives warned from the beginning—because they’re very good at that—that this was risky, although they do a fair number of risky things themselves.

It was “an inappropriate use of taxpayer dollars.” This is your federal cousins telling you that this infrastructure bank is an “inappropriate use of taxpayer dollars.” They were ignored by the federal Liberals. It’s a very sad story.

“What’s worse is that there has been no transparency.” Transparency—I should get the dictionary out for this one.

Transparency matters in government, in public service. “Only when Conservatives demanded answers last week in Parliament did the government or the bank provide any update on a massive project that was quietly cancelled back in July. We also still don’t know the details of the Fortis agreement or where the cost overruns were. That’s unacceptable for a taxpayer-funded bank.

“Conservatives will continue to call on this government to respect the only recommendation from the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities—that this \$35-billion boondoggle be abolished. It has failed to attract the promised private investment, it lacks transparency and it can’t get a project built.”

But where does this government go? This government is going down this road. Why? Why are you doing this? It’s really concerning.

There are a number of issues here that lead us to be very concerned. One is that the finance minister and the Premier are pitching this as a silver bullet for funding the province’s infrastructure needs. I know that this government, just like the Liberals, is very fond of these arm’s-length organizations. You try holding Metrolinx to account. We do know that this is going to be an arm’s-length organization. It’s going to take up to a year to create—as if we can wait for affordable housing for another year—and it’s going to have a board of directors anywhere between three and 11, so we expect to see that list and track these people back to various weddings and birthday parties. The strategy is cut and pasted from the Canadian Infrastructure Bank’s initial promise to leverage private funds many times over, but it is important for my colleagues to know that this never happened. It’s built on this cascade model in finance. The approach is: “To maximize the impact of scarce public resources, the cascade first seeks to mobilize commercial finance, enabled by upstream reforms where necessary....” However, this government, the PC government of Ontario, has chosen to step away from that model. There are public banks around the world that are quite successful, but they have a different structure than what is being proposed by this government.

Further, the government sees the OIB as a way to attract trusted Canadian institutional investors to help build essential infrastructure.

“Trust is indeed important,” says this article. “How are we to trust and hold accountable this new public institution with control over allocating \$3 billion in public money?” I hope some of my colleagues on that side of the House are asking this kind of question.

These checks and balances that need to serve—that need to be put in place to serve the public, not foreign investors.

According to the website, the infrastructure bank’s affairs will be composed of at least three or at most 11 board members, who are going to be chosen by the Minister of Finance and will need to have significant financial and infrastructure-related project expertise.

“These policies need advancing with government and society, not through opaque nominations and appoint-

ments.” We could not agree more. We have seen the appointments process in this House. It’s like a who’s who of PC donors. It’s very problematic for trust.

So if you don’t have trust and you have a track record right now which is incredibly problematic, why in the world would you introduce a brand new little bauble of a bank? This shiny little thing over here is not necessary for this government to build infrastructure, to build SMRs, to build energy projects, to build affordable housing. Ontario has never really had a problem with financing of the projects. It certainly has had an issue with public-private partnerships and getting those jobs done on time. Just look at the Eglinton Crosstown. Are we at \$1 billion per kilometre—

Interjections.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Oh, the Ontario Line. The Ontario Line is \$1 billion per kilometre.

Oh, those public-private partnerships are just working so well.

This, again, is from Thomas Marois: “There is nothing inherently good or bad about public banks. They are only ever as good or as bad as society makes them. Good ones contribute to the public good by advancing prosperous, inclusive and increasingly sustainable societies. Whether Ontario will craft the new OIB in that vein remains to be seen.”

This is something to watch very carefully. I would prefer that they just take that \$3 billion and create a funding mechanism in partnership with municipalities, much like the federal accelerator fund. We have seen municipalities meet those targets very quickly—I’m thinking of Vaughan; I’m thinking of Kitchener-Waterloo. When municipalities know that there is money on the table, they can advance, they can streamline those projects, and so far, I have to say, this seems to be very effective.

Now, who doesn’t like this? Well, the Premier. The Premier doesn’t like this at all. He doesn’t like the fact that the federal government is bypassing the province and actually getting money into communities. Do you know why he doesn’t like it? Because he doesn’t get invited to the ribbon cuttings or the infrastructure project announcements—

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Interjection: You don’t pass them up.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I don’t get invited to them. I just got heckled that I don’t pass them up; I don’t get invited to them. I used to show up and crash the party. It was really fun, I have to tell you. But no, we don’t get invited to them, because this government thinks that that money is their money. So sometimes councillors or a community leader will say, “Oh, by the way, the member from Kitchener-Conestoga is going to this place, and you might want to show up.” And sometimes you do; sometimes you don’t. Anyway, in the end it doesn’t—

Interjection.

Ms. Catherine Fife: No, it’s not insulting, exactly; it’s just disrespectful to the people we’re elected to serve.

Interjection.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Yes, because it’s not the government’s money; it’s their money.

So this one final piece on the infrastructure bank—but, goodness, you gave me a lot of material to work with with this fall economic statement.

Why is the Premier’s government creating a bank to finance public projects? “Questions swirl” around this whole idea. I think that the general point is that here we have a government that’s on the ropes, that’s quite worried about the narrative that’s actually happening about what is driving your decisions around the budget, especially six months in, when you drop \$2.5 billion in an unallocated contingency fund when you know—if your eyes are open, if you are paying attention, if you’re spending time in your community, you know the needs are there.

We even saw a reduction in Meals on Wheels. That’s eyes on seniors addressing the issue of isolation and loneliness—which, actually, the LG mentioned this morning—and we know after the pandemic that loneliness kills. We know that we have a minister responsible for seniors who says we have to do more. Well, you can do more by actually resourcing those amazing not-for-profits in the communities. You show up for the photo ops with them, and sometimes you go on a ride-along with Meals on Wheels. But when they see a 30% cut, they’re making very hard decisions about who they can see and who they can deliver food to. That is a big thing. It’s a big thing for a government to say, “I see you. I see you, and I’m going to work towards”—imagine having the money, which they do, that you have the legal authority because you have a majority government. Imagine making the choice to not help, to not invest and to sock away, or squirrel away, \$5.4 billion in an unallocated contingency fund. It really defies a lot of common sense.

The last point on the infrastructure bank, because I’m just fascinated with the fact that it’s not really contained in Bill 146 but it’s in the fall economic statement, is that when the minister was questioned about this—CBC News had asked “if establishing the bank opens the door to big investors profiting off public infrastructure projects.” It’s a very good question for the minister. He went back, and he said, “I don’t think profiting is the right way to think about it. Think about it in terms of revenue streams.” But who are the revenue streams for, Madam Speaker? Because if it’s interrupting and if the investor becomes the primary person of concern, organization of concern, how dedicated really is the government of the day to the infrastructure project?

We’ve seen this carving out of responsibility, really an abdication of public responsibility by this government. Even this weekend, I’m sure my colleagues must have seen that Shoppers Drug Mart, which is also a favourite of the Premier—for some reason, they have the distribution contract for vaccinations. So these small mom-and-pop pharmacies across the province, they’re supposed to get 200 flu shots or they’re supposed to get 200 COVID vaccinations, and they’re getting 20 and 50. When we see 2.1 million people in Ontario not have a family doctor, they become very reliant on pharmacies. Pharmacies and

pharmacists perform a very crucial role in the health care system, and for them not to be able to get access to basic and, I would say, essential health care resources because you have, essentially, a monopoly with a private distributor—and this was the best part. The news article that I read—I don't have it here—said that the Ministry of Health is going to meet with Shoppers to see if they can do their job. Can you imagine? This is 2023. Have we learned no lessons on the privatization and outsourcing of basic health care needs? Apparently, we have not.

So that's how we feel about the infrastructure bank. And this is something that has rarely happened in this House: I'm just going to quote the Canadian Taxpayers Federation. This is Jay Goldberg. He says the Canadian Infrastructure Bank was “‘a complete failure,’ and says it's concerning that the province would follow suit.” Just one for the Hansard: We definitely agree with the Canadian Taxpayers Federation.

Moving on, though, especially as it relates to where the money in this last fall economic statement is not going. One of the issues, and I want to get this on the record because this is certainly a disturbing trend, particularly on the justice file—we've seen it's down over 2%, funding in justice. And if you've ever actually had to deal with a case in your riding of someone who is navigating the court system, you will see how completely broken the court system is in Ontario.

One story that caught my attention this week—and this will appeal, I think, this story, to the strong law-and-order group of Conservatives who often are complaining to the federal government about bail reform and about appropriate justice resources. Well, in Ontario, on November 7, an alleged rapist was released from custody because the court system took so long, Madam Speaker. And this is an important part, that—this is a CTV article, and this was done by Abby O'Brien and it's very comprehensive.

I'm not going to read all of the disturbing details in it because it could be triggering for a lot of people: “In hindsight,” it says, “Emily recalled doing everything she'd been taught to do in the wake of an attack—she reported it to the police, took herself to the hospital, gave an interview to a detective, and, months later, testified in court.”

But on November 7, “a sexual assault charge laid by the Toronto police against the man Emily reported raped her in January 2022 was stayed and the case against him thrown out, court documents show.”

This is what she said: “It took so much to even do that first step”—right? This takes so much courage. It's one of the worst kinds of violence you can ever experience, sexual assault. And then a year and a half later, she gets to face the alleged rapist in court, and it was a very—it takes a lot of courage to do this.

The court system is not kind to sexual assault victims. It's a very harsh place. We need a better system, and we're going to be working on a better system for sure, Madam Speaker. But it goes on to say that “Emily's experience is no anomaly. Under the Criminal Code of Canada, anyone charged with an offence has the right to a trial within a reasonable time frame.” In Ontario, “barring exceptional

circumstances, that time frame is 18 months in the provincial courts of Ontario”—18 months, a year and a half. Our court system is so underfunded and understaffed that we can't get a victim and a perpetrator in the same court in 18 months in Ontario.

I think it adds insult to injury, given that this is the newest court, making my point that you can have a good building, you can build a bed, you can build a classroom, but boy, if you don't have the human resources, you don't have the people to help navigate that space, then you really are failing—failing. I have to say, if we had the opportunity, having a \$5.4-billion contingency fund that is just sitting there, that you squandered away by not investing in certain areas—I would say that we could find some alignment here, with your “tough on crime” and more cops and more resources. We want more people. We want more people in the court system to make sure that people have access to justice, and that is what Emily deserved in the province of Ontario.

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So in the end, Emily said a crown attorney told her that they believed she had been sexually assaulted, but that the charge had been stayed, and that they suggested that she move on with her life and try to put the event behind her. And she said, “What about my rights? Why are the rights of this man held with more importance?”

And then the judge of this particular court said, “This case should serve as a chilling reminder that this inexcusable state of affairs must never be allowed to happen again.

“The emotional trauma associated with never knowing the outcome of a case on the merits will often be long-lasting and severe for both victims and accused persons.”

“The judge identified the staffing shortages as the reason for the delays in the trial.”

So we have over a 2% cut in justice. We have a \$5.4-billion contingency fund. If the minister responsible brought forward a motion to this House and said, “I need more money to staff these courtrooms,” you would have no objection from the NDP.

He goes on to say, “There is no reason this case could not have been completed...”

“What happened in this case was entirely predictable, and avoidable. Yet it was allowed to occur, despite all the warning signs...”

He said this case serves “as yet one more example of how the government's failure to ensure this courthouse could function at full capacity [has] produced tragic results.”

When charges are stayed, both parties in the case are failed by the system.

“That will now never occur. That alone is regrettable,” adding that the people of Ontario “deserve a justice system they can be proud of.”

Trust in the system is long gone, and Emily said, “I've lost faith in our province's ability to keep me, us, safe.”

And I can tell you, Madam Speaker—I don't know Emily; I'm just completely impressed by her courage. But this is an issue for everyone, and it should be a non-

partisan issue. We should care about justice. We should care about timely justice, because we often hear in this House that justice delayed is justice denied and, certainly, that happened in that courtroom.

I want to move on to education, because education has seen a year-over-year reduction. I think our critic has done an amazing job on this file and pointing out inflationary cost pressures on the system as a whole. As I said before, this used to be a government—Conservatives used to acknowledge inflationary cost pressures as real, and plan for those cost pressures.

This, again, is from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives's Ricardo Tranjan, who is an excellent researcher and very well-spoken on these issues. But they have been tracking the pattern of this government and how they view public services. In this, Ricardo actually goes all the way back to the Better Schools and Student Outcomes Act, which was recently tabled, as the "clearest display to date of the Ford government's ideological agenda against public education. The writing was on the wall from the start."

It goes back to 2019, when there was a plan to eliminate 10,054 teaching positions by 2024 through increased class sizes and mandatory online learning. There was, obviously, a disruption around that plan by parents and organizations who fought back. Education is always worth fighting for. It's one of the reasons why I'm standing in this House today.

But I do want to say, in tracking of the funding and this trust issue that I've referenced before, we have to remember that most of the COVID funding that came into the education system came from Ottawa or school board reserves, Madam Speaker. This is why it's so ironic, really, that the Premier is bemoaning the fact that the federal government isn't giving him the housing money so that he can then in turn pass it along to municipalities. I think the federal government learned their lesson in that regard and don't trust the middle man here in the province of Ontario.

Also, after that, the government began sending money directly to parents, instead of into classrooms. We all remember this. It also expanded the scope of online education, justifying cuts to brick-and-mortar schools, and last year, when funding became available for tutoring, it had to be partially spent on third-party providers. This is directly, intentionally, with purpose moving education dollars out of the education system.

Now, I'm sure that the government of the day and the minister, perhaps, has his own rationale for doing this, but at the end of the day, when you factor in inflationary costs, in this year students are seeing \$1,200 less per student around the GSN funding, so \$1,200 less per student in the 2023-24 school year than they received in 2018-19. That has a real impact. If you're going to invest in the future economy, in the health and communities that we're all elected to serve, education is one of those key places, as is child care.

Toronto last week just saw 12 infant spaces close down because they can't find staff. You know why they can't

find staff? They can't find staff because this government does not respect early childhood educators. They deserve a fair wage. You cannot roll out a \$10-a-day child care strategy in Ontario without child care workers, right?

This has an impact on the economy. If you're not going to do it for the right reason, if you're not going to say, "I value those first five years of a child's life, one to five"—the impact that an educator, in collaboration with a parent, has can be life-changing. We've seen some real success stories across Ontario, and the research is sound. For every \$1 invested in child care, you have a \$7 return on that investment—\$7. That's actually 2019 numbers. I'm sure today it must be higher.

Also, there's a new funding line that the government has in education. It's on unallocated amounts. This appeared in the GSN for the first time with amounts between \$30 million and \$40 million. In this year's document, that line was replaced with "planning provision," which has \$317 million sitting inside it, which is 10 times as much as was originally said. A footnote explains that the money is for possible in-year funding changes, and more unallocated funding has been included with the totals of specific grants.

This government is actively shuffling money away from the classroom. The amount is similar to the cost of the direct payments to parents, which is \$365 million. Some parents really appreciate those two tutorial lessons that they get for their child with the money that they are allocated, but at the end of the day, \$365 million invested specifically in special education resources in a classroom benefits the entire classroom. It benefits the entire school. It benefits the entire community.

Finally, Ricardo goes on to say, "Stashing cash away and using it to pay for populist measures—like cash transfers and tax cuts—has become a common practice of this government," which they have been monitoring.

This is another trend of this government—shuffling the money around. I look forward to the new FAO's analysis of where the funding is going. I was proud to be on the hiring committee. Jeffrey Novak is going to be the new FAO. He was the Acting FAO prior to that. I think that this government has given him a lot of material to work with as well—including the whole staff there at the FAO office.

We are down in justice, down in education, and then you have health care.

1730

Madam Speaker, I just have to say: When I am reading these investigations—and thank goodness for the media, because they really are tracking the pattern of governance of this government, and I think that's an important distinction to be made, because it's not just about where this government is not investing or where they are investing; it's about who gets control over that money.

Last year, as I mentioned, when the Minister of Health was not using her government-issued phone to talk to stakeholders, a major change was happening in Ontario. The government was creating another parallel system to alleviate the pressure on the public system, but they were very intentionally underfunding the public system, which

is why we have had now over 5,672 hours of emergency closures in Ontario.

The damaging impact of Bill 124—I'm sure somebody somewhere is reviewing it and exploring it, but, boy, you absolutely were running health care workers right out of the province, and it's going to take us years to rebuild. I will say this is one of the issues that keeps me up at night, because we have an aging demographic, so the health care needs of Ontarians are only growing, expanding and becoming—quite honestly, because of COVID and post-COVID impact—even more complex.

So when I read this morning that the Ford government is paying for-profit clinics more than hospitals for OHIP-covered surgeries, this is what we always suspected was happening, but thankfully CBC filed another FOI—it's the theme. We should just have an FOI banner outside of the Legislature: "If you want information, FOI it". They've never made it public—the rates it pays private clinics to perform thousands of outpatient day surgeries each year. So this is why I posted it this morning. Ontario, quite honestly, cannot afford Doug Ford, because he is paying these surgeons in these private clinics exorbitant rates, which, again, is so insulting to the surgeons, doctors and nurses who are just down the way on University Avenue performing life-saving surgeries, who are answering the call.

Just before I forget to get this into the record, because I see that time has gone very quickly, the Ontario Medical Association—when they came here earlier in the fall, we had an amazing conversation with them, because they were proposing solutions. We even heard from a doctor last year in Windsor who proposed solutions. This is what's happening to family doctors: They are spending 19.1 hours every week on paperwork. So they have proposed to the government—you have a doctor shortage; 2.1 million Ontarians don't have a doctor. In two years, it's going to be three million Ontarians with no family doctor. Unless you're going to completely privatize the entire system, family doctors are the gateway to diagnostic tests and to really accessing acute care.

The Ontario Medical Association has said, "Having family doctors spend 19.1 hours a week doing paperwork is not a good use of our resources. If you funded a scribe, if you funded these family practices so that a nurse practitioner or a professional person who has medical knowledge could do the paperwork, at the end of the day you would have the equivalent of 2,000 more doctors available for patients." That's a good solution. Is that money here in the fall economic statement? No, it's not.

This is another thing I don't understand. Imagine having the privilege—and it is a privilege, I think, to be a minister of the crown. It's a duty. It's a responsibility. But if you have that power within the scope of practice, you should absolutely be using that power for good and making these decisions that actually make a difference.

This article very clearly outlines how much more these private clinics are costing. This money is absolutely coming at the expense of the Ontario Hospital Association, and this discrepancy, it goes on to say, "raises questions

about the government's imminent plans to expand the volume and scope of surgeries performed outside of hospitals, including the potentially lucrative field of hip and knee replacements."

I just want to remind my colleagues on the other side of the House that when something goes wrong in these private clinics—you know where those patients end up? They end up in a publicly funded hospital. So, you're throwing good money after bad. It is so short-sighted.

So the fall economic statement, for us—and none of these measures, for some reason, are contained within the technical bill which operationalizes the fall economic statement, including this new bank. I really feel somebody in cabinet should have said, "Let's read the room here. We have a serious trust issue. Why are we creating a new fancy bauble of a bank when we should just do what we're elected to do—invest in public services, support the people of this province and actually do our job."

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): I'm going to move to questions. I recognize the member for Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound.

Mr. Rick Byers: I thank the member for her remarks on the fall economic statement. It's much appreciated.

The member was talking a lot about affordability throughout, and I just wanted to offer three points to have her and her party consider:

(1) We're extending the removal of the gas tax to mid-June to keep the cost for Ontarians low. That's an affordability measure.

(2) We're removing the HST from rental construction projects, which will enhance the affordability of rental properties throughout Ontario.

(3) Overall program spending is \$193 billion expected versus \$173 billion, which is an increase of 11% over the year—well in excess of inflation.

Does that not cause the member to consider supporting this bill?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Affordability is the number one issue right now that we are all facing in Ontario. There's no doubt about it. I think the one good thing that I did say earlier about the fall economic statement—perhaps it was last Thursday—was the removal of the HST for the purpose-built rentals.

That said, the government of the day understands that you're not in the business of building affordable housing. The housing that is being built right now across this province is unaffordable housing. So we have proposed a program to build non-market housing. The government of the day must get back into the business of funding truly attainable and affordable—and I know you don't want to do it, but there's no way that the developers out there on the greenbelt are going to do it for you.

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

Mr. Joel Harden: I want to thank the member for Waterloo for her thoughts on the government's financial plan.

I'm looking at transit across this province, and what I'm seeing is upsetting. In the city where we're from, we just

heard that OC Transpo is cutting 74,000 service hours because of cuts from the province. We have a transit strike going into its fifth day in the city of Hamilton, and the city is telling this government there's not enough funding coming from the province to pay those operators and mechanics. We have a transit strike potentially forthcoming in Peterborough on the 17th of this month.

I don't see anything in the government's fiscal plan to deal with the \$500-million hole that we have in operating transit in this province, when we have jurisdictions like Brampton operating at 130% of its capacity.

Does the member from Waterloo believe this government has to get serious about funding transit so we can get people on the bus, on the train, on the streetcar, in the subway, and not throw our municipalities under the bus?
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Ms. Catherine Fife: The short answer, of course, is the smart money is on public transit, but it is also the mechanism by which you are funding that. The public-private partnerships that this government has embraced, just like the Liberals did, are so irresponsible.

I will note that in the fall economic statement there are no details, still to this day, on the estimated costs of Highway 413 or the Bradford Bypass. There is no timeline for frequent all-day, two-way GO rail to Kitchener, to Niagara or to Bowmanville.

Basically, what we have here is a government that is addicted to making announcements about transit—and yet, no follow-through.

Finally, there's no timeline for the restoration of the Northlander, which we hear a lot about.

And then, a real safety issue: There's no plan to address threats to northern winter roads due to climate change.

This fall economic statement missed the moment entirely on transit.

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

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Thank you to the member opposite.

The current state of Ontario today: We have some great news, with a lot of newcomers coming to the province—500,000 people. The reason they're coming to Ontario is the strong economic growth, the manufacturing sector that's growing again.

The unfortunate news is affordability. The Bank of Canada has increased interest rates, which is making affordability very difficult for the people of Canada, particularly here in Ontario. Adding to that, of course, is the carbon tax, which the federal government put into place.

Part of this particular bill, the fall economic statement, is reducing the gas tax that people pay at the pumps until June 30, 2024.

Will you, as the official opposition, support reducing the gas tax to help the people of Ontario?

Ms. Catherine Fife: I just want to say, reducing the gas tax for drivers probably will be welcomed, but there are people—a vast majority of people—who are so dependent on public transit.

The member from Oakville mentions all these people coming into Ontario. You know one of the largest groups is international students, and the colleges and universities are so underfunded—as I said, by 12%—that international students have become a funding vehicle for the post-secondary education sector. They're charged astronomical fees. They arrive here in Ontario. In Kitchener-Waterloo, there are 12 of them sleeping in a two-bedroom apartment because of affordability.

If the government truly wants to have a respectful relationship with newcomers, you might want to start building some non-market affordable housing so that they don't have to sleep on the street and don't have to go to a food bank just to survive their experience here in Ontario.

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

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Thank you to the member from Waterloo, our finance critic, who has shown yet again that she is honestly the best finance critic we've had in the province.

My question to you is about the Ontario investment bank. Given that the trust of regular Ontarians in this government is zero—they do not trust this government; they have lost all confidence in this government—if they had a choice to invest their dollars in this bank, they would say, “There's no way I'm putting my money in that bank.” But they have no choice, so \$3 billion of people's money is going into this bank whether they have trust or not.

The other part is about this private money that's going into the bank. What private investors hate more than anything is risk, and we have seen a government that went out of their way to de-risk the investment environment for developers. But that scheme has been unveiled.

So my question to you is, do you think that private investors will see this as a de-risk preferential treatment opportunity, or will they also mistrust and be concerned about putting their private dollars into this OIB?

Ms. Catherine Fife: If I was an investor and I was looking at the province of Ontario and I looked at how haphazard this province plans transit and infrastructure projects—remember Highway 413 and the Bradford Bypass, otherwise known as the “cottage highway,” were not in the 10-year transit transportation plan. So what happened was that those special projects by the Premier and his friends—they knocked down all of our local projects like Highway 7 or transit projects in Ottawa or transit projects in Hamilton. So this government, by picking and choosing highway winners, actually are destabilizing the infrastructure planning for Ontario.

If I was an investor, I wouldn't want to lose money here in Ontario.

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

Mr. Stephen Crawford: The member opposite talked about housing. I think we can all agree that we need more housing in this province—there's no doubt about that—all kinds of housing; not just one, simple format, but all components. With the amount of people who are moving to this province—record numbers last year, continuing to

expand—people are voting with their feet. They want to come to Ontario. Why? Because this is a place where they can get a good manufacturing job now, where the service economy is growing, where manufacturing is booming again, where critical minerals and mining are being supported by the government.

On the housing front, we've taken the initiative in this bill—along with the federal government, I might add, of a different political persuasion—to eliminate the GST and HST on purpose-built rental housing in order to stimulate more rental housing, which we need. Does the member opposite support this component of the fall economic statement?

Ms. Catherine Fife: I would just say to the member, it is really hard to hear some of the privilege that we hear around homeowners, the people who—we now have two tent encampments in Waterloo. They don't have a thermostat. They're not worried about their energy bill. They're worried about surviving the province of Ontario during some of the toughest times.

So small measures are great, but why is this government spending so much time writing to the federal government to do their job for them, when they can actually have mechanisms that can make Ontario more affordable for everybody?

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): We're going to move to further debate.

Mr. John Vanthof: It's always an honour to speak in the House. Today, I wasn't planning on speaking. I'm surprised that the government doesn't want to speak to what they claim to be their fantastic political record.

Bill 146, Building a Strong Ontario Together—a great title.

I would agree that the MPP for Waterloo is the best finance critic that we have ever had—and considering that I was once finance critic, even I agree. She brought up a lot of good points.

I'd like to start with a few things that are supportable in this piece of legislation—some particularly for northern Ontario.

Flow-through shares aren't a new thing. They've been around for a while. They actually do encourage exploration and investment. It's a pretty straightforward concept. Specifically, when you're in the exploration business, it's risky, but flow-through shares actually—I don't know if it lessens the risk, but it does encourage investment. I think people in the mining industry and particularly the exploration industry have been pushing for flow-through shares for a while. I think that's a supportable part of this legislation that actually will help the mining sector.

Believe it or not, although the Conservative government tries to say that the NDP doesn't support mining because we didn't support their last changes to the Mining Act—the reason we didn't support the last changes to the Mining Act is because what the government is trying to do with the Mining Act is very similar to what they did with the greenbelt changes, because they're trying to take regulations away and put them in into the political realm.

I'm not trying to disparage the Minister of Mines's experience in mining—not at all. But when you take the

planning out of the actual civil service and put the approvals of those plannings into the political realm, you actually might end up slowing down development instead of speeding it up.

1750

Now, I don't think the current mining minister believes that, and I respect that, but I think there would be a few developers in this province who are now questioning the help they got from the Ford government, because actually it shone a huge spotlight on some of the problems that the Ford government is creating for those developers. And I hope, I sincerely hope—because no one wants to support good mining projects more than I do. Mining is a huge part of the north, a huge part of my riding, and I hope that the government's meddling in the approval process doesn't actually slow down, actually jeopardize the mining sector.

The one thing that the mining sector has done a really great job at, probably better than any other sector, is—and I know this from where I live—100 years ago, mining was incredibly damaging to the environment—it was—and we're still dealing with those damages in places like where I live, close to Cobalt. We're still dealing with it, and in other places, like close to the minister's area, Kamiskotia Lake.

But now, because of strict regulations, because of a very good planning process, mining in Canada has, rightfully so, a very good reputation. Some of the same companies don't have the same reputation in other areas, but in Canada they do. It's largely because of a very strict regulatory process, and I sincerely hope that the meddling of the Ford government doesn't actually hurt the mining sector.

Now, I've often heard members say, “Well, it takes way too long to approve a mine and way too much red tape.” I don't think we have an issue. The length of time it takes to approve a mine—I think we could make changes there to actually add certainty for mining companies, for the investors that when they do things right, there's an actual timeline that they can—I look at other jurisdictions, like Nunavut, which actually has stricter regulations than the province of Ontario, yet a much quicker approval timeline. I know that because one of the mining companies I talked to, Agnico Eagle, told me that. So it's not a case of more political meddling; it's a case of having a better, more stable approval process with timelines.

It's not that we're anti-mining, not at all. And it's not that—mining is going to play a more important role, actually, in the future—as important or more important than it has in the past. I'm just going to say it once more: I'm incredibly concerned that meddling from the government and trying to do things quicker politically is actually going to slow things down and hurt the reputation and hurt the profitability and hurt the long-term viability of the mining sector. So flow-through shares are good, some of the other moves maybe not so much.

It's often been brought up: the gas tax refund. You know what? I come from a place, northern Ontario—I have one community that has public transportation, the municipality of Temiskaming Shores, and also, they part-

ner with Cobalt. But that's the only community I have that has any public transportation. Everything else is by car. There is no bus; it's car. And we are very sensitive to gas prices, 100%. Gas prices are always more expensive in Timiskaming–Cochrane than they are in Toronto. I know that. I know that because I drive it every week.

Actually, it's kind of around Gravenhurst, and right in there, a little bit north of Barrie, it seems cheaper than anywhere else—lots of times. It's kind of weird, because they're always telling us that gas prices are dependent on transportation—how much it costs to transport. That doesn't make any sense to me at all, because it has nothing really to do with the routes.

Getting back to the gas price or the gas tax reduction, I guess the biggest question we have is, what certainty do we have that the reduction actually gets passed to the gas pump? I don't know what that certainty is. They will say, "Okay, the law of economics and the law of competition"—I understand that, but I don't know if you've noticed but gas prices in towns seem to follow each other pretty closely. Then, you will drive through the next town, and all of a sudden, they're different. So what proof does the government have?

The government may be very well-meaning with the gas tax refund or rebate. I'm not questioning that. I'm questioning, how do we know it's actually getting to the consumer? I don't know. When I drive, when I do the six hours—depending on traffic; it took me eight hours yesterday. Yesterday is Monday, right?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Yes.

Mr. John Vanthof: Because I hit Toronto—I have sympathy with people who live in Toronto. Toronto traffic is something, because it took me two hours to get from the 400 to Bay and Edward, where my apartment is. Toronto traffic is something. Normally it takes me six hours, and the difference in gas prices is just phenomenal.

So how do we know? And that is a huge issue.

Now, a couple of minutes, I'll maybe have—oh, I'm going to have some time when I'm here next time.

The infrastructure bank has always kind of confused me, because federally, the Conservatives' federal cousins—Mr. Poilievre says that the federal infrastructure bank is a boondoggle and a total waste. Yet, they import it provincially and it's the greatest thing since sliced bread.

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's a carbon copy.

Mr. John Vanthof: Yes. As the member from Waterloo, thankfully, is heckling me about this, it is a carbon copy of the program that the federal Conservatives say is a sham.

Now, I don't understand. I don't understand the concept. Do you want to—I understand the concept; I do. I just don't understand why you would want to do it. In my business past, I've built things—nothing on the scale of government. But you want to build something, a public building, a highway—you talk a lot about highways. The province has the ability to borrow money cheaper or for less—yes, cheaper, I guess—than the private sector in many cases.

For the infrastructure bank to work, you're going to have to offer a better income for the investors than they can get anywhere else. So when you're paying the in-

vestor, when you're paying the people who are putting money in your bank more money than they're getting anywhere else in the market, it's—

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): I apologize to the member. There is time on the clock, but it is 6 o'clock. I have to interrupt the member because it is private members' public business.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

1800

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

CHANGE OF NAME AMENDMENT ACT, 2023

LOI DE 2023 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LE CHANGEMENT DE NOM

Ms. Scott moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 138, An Act to amend the Change of Name Act and to make consequential amendments to another Act / *Projet de loi 138, Loi modifiant la Loi sur le changement de nom et apportant des modifications corrélatives à une autre loi.*

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

Ms. Laurie Scott: It's an honour and a privilege to stand before the House today to present the Change of Name Amendment Act, 2023, known as Bill 138, and I am proud to introduce this bill with my co-sponsor, the MPP from Thornhill, who I will be sharing my time with.

Similar legislation has been successfully enacted in other provinces, and it is time for Ontario to do the same. This bill has a simple purpose: to prohibit convicted sex offenders from obtaining a legal name change. The term "sex offenders" refers to individuals that are convicted of a sexual offence and are required to comply with the provincial Sex Offender Registry, known as Christopher's Law. We want to make it harder for sex abusers to cover up their criminal activity and to hide their true identities.

Legal name changes happen frequently in this province, as is necessary. Whether it's due to marriage or identity purposes, name changes are foundational to allowing people to be who they want to be. While name changes are often positive, there are concerns that need to be addressed. Criminals will exploit and take advantage of any opportunity that comes their way. For example, convicted sexual offenders can use a legal name change to obscure themselves and possibly commit further harm under this new identity.

There is no denying that some individuals will take advantage of rights and privileges and use them to inflict harm on others. Although Ontario's current name change regime has existing protections, there is a need to tighten the process so that sexual offenders do not abuse this privilege.

The Change of Name Amendment Act will enhance our government's zero-tolerance approach to sexual assault. Further, it will aid our commitment to protecting sur-

vivors, their families and communities as a whole. We take sexual assault and crimes against children extremely seriously. Providing supports and protections to Ontarians remains one of our top priorities.

A zero-tolerance approach is necessary when dealing with a heinous crime like sexual assault, particularly when the victims are children. These types of crimes often follow a pattern as predators seek out their targets. Unfortunately, predators often target individuals they perceive as vulnerable. Through coercion, threats and intimidation, they force their victims into silence, causing them to feel alienated and alone. You are not alone, and we as the government of Ontario are doing anything we can to bring justice.

Under the current name change process, individuals are required to complete a criminal background check and to have lived in the province for the previous 12 months. Additionally, name changes are published in the Ontario Gazette, unless requested by the applicant and approved by the registrar. That seems complicated, Madam Speaker, but I want to emphasize this: that although name changes are published in the Gazette, making them publicly available, this is not a publication that people frequently consult. In fact, most people probably don't even know the Gazette exists or where to access it.

While there are existing safeguards in the name change process, more can be done to protect survivors of horrific crimes as convicted sex offenders could successfully change their name under the current system even before they leave jail. Name changes provide these dangerous offenders with an opportunity to distance themselves from their crimes. While offenders can adopt a new identity and possibly commit further harm, their victims are forced to grapple with the repercussions and the trauma. Sex offenders must be held accountable, and the rights of survivors should remain paramount.

It is, of course, important to recognize that recidivism, as in repeating, among sex offenders remains an ongoing problem. Offenders with a prior sexual offence conviction had a recidivism rate nearly double the rate of first-time sexual offenders, 19% versus 37% after 15 years. Unfortunately, there is a visible upward trend of sexual assaults, especially against children, according to the most recent reports from Statistics Canada. This is horrifying. The time to act is now. This is an important measure of protection for the victims.

As previously mentioned, this measure has been adopted in other provinces, like Saskatchewan and Alberta. To demonstrate the need for this legislation, I'll provide a grave example that contributed to Saskatchewan adopting this policy. David Donald Shumey was a 76-year-old man who returned to Regina after spending 20 years in a US prison for various sexual offences dating back to the mid-1990s. He was arrested in Las Vegas and charged with 88 different counts. When he was released from jail, he returned to Regina and legally changed his name to David Donald Stryker.

We cannot allow individuals like David to adopt a new identity and cause further harm. Even though the name change would have been published in the Saskatchewan

Gazette, is it fair to place the onus on survivors to keep tabs on their abusers by browsing the gazette each week? Or would it make more sense to prevent the name change altogether?

Our goal has been and always will be to protect survivors, their families and their communities. If someone is convicted of a sexual offence and required to comply with the sex offender registry known as Christopher's Law, they should be barred from changing their name. It's as simple as that.

I'm extremely proud to co-sponsor and bring this legislation before the House. Improving the lives of survivors and providing reassurance and safety to communities is our goal. I look forward to working with all members of the Legislature.

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

Ms. Laura Smith: It's an honour for me to bring this private member's matter, Bill 138, the Change of Name Amendment Act, along with my colleague, the member from Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock.

Speaker, name changes are relatively common in Ontario and often indicate a positive transition in life. It could be a new beginning for an adopted child, or a person, perhaps, who wants to capture a part of their family lineage—regardless, there are a number of reasons that provide an honourable and positive reason for changing your name.

But sadly, there are many bad actors who use the application to hide their identity for the wrong reasons—creating a new world for themselves, unknown to their victims and their community. These convicted offenders could take advantage of this opportunity of a legal name change to distance themselves from crime so very heinous, providing them with a new life, a fresh start—something their victims will never have.

The right to change one's name shouldn't be abused. As a community of people who sit within this House, I believe we have a moral obligation to put the rights of those victims first.

Let me give you a bit of background on this bill. In 1988, when Christopher was just 11 years old, he was kidnapped at knifepoint at a Brampton mall, and, after hours of abuse, the abuser killed Christopher and left his body in a field. It was determined through the investigation that the person responsible for the attack, Fredericks, was a repeat sexual offender. From the ashes of that horrific experience, Christopher's parents rallied to create Christopher's Law, also known as the Ontario Sex Offender Registry, which came into effect in 2001. This bill is very simple: to ban convicted sex offenders that fall into this registry from having the privilege of making application for a legal name change. They should not get a new chance at life, because that's something their victims will never have. We have to do everything in our power to protect the lives of our most vulnerable in society: our children, their family members and the supports that keep them whole.

Sexual offences are among the most heinous and degrading forms of violence against children. They have a

devastating impact on survivors, who are literally broken, and they live with this trauma for the rest of their lives.

In my past life, I worked on matters under the child protection act and it was very rewarding work. Many files were a happy ending for the children that Ontario supported—placement in a safe and nurturing family environment—and I'm always reflective of this work as positive not only for the children but also as a community. I'm not blind, though, to the trauma some of those children face. As a mother it especially hits home for me. We have to work to protect Ontario's children.

1810

Speaker, let me be very clear: We currently have very strong laws. Ontarians seeking a legal name change must undergo a criminal record check, and under most circumstances, those who change their names must register these details with the Ontario Gazette, where name changes are published. Yet truthfully, Speaker, most Ontarians do not read the Gazette, let alone know of its existence. While safeguards do exist, they still do not prevent sex offenders from making applications.

It's also crucial to keep in mind that recidivism amongst offenders remains an ongoing concern. Given the heinous nature of sexual offences, recidivism cannot be ignored, and the highest likelihood of reoffenders is observed amongst those who victimize young boys, with a 15-year recidivism rate of 35%. That means one in three are going to recommit.

Recently, an investigation by a joint task force of police services across Ontario known as Project Limestone has led to the arrest of 10 people for child exploitation. One of the people taken into custody was a repeat offender; one who was out on bail at the time of their arrest. And I also think of Donald Shumey, the 76-year-old man who returned to Canada after spending 20 years in prison after 88 different sexual offence counts. He changed his name as well: David Donald Stryker.

And, like most of us, we think of Karla Homolka, who is now living under the name of Leanne Teale in Quebec. We all remember her, and I will choose not to mention her former husband's name, because, quite simply, their crimes were so reprehensible that I do not wish to bring his name into the record. My understanding is that Ms. Homolka—or, should I say, Ms. Teale—was at one point volunteering at a school.

This legislation aims to deny these offenders the legal right to change their name. There are no acceptable excuses for those who commit such acts, and our laws and our punishments must be consistently firm in addressing these cases. This legislation has been adopted in other jurisdictions, and these are positive steps that Ontario needs to make.

The right to change one's name must not be abused. Closing this loophole will strengthen our government's zero tolerance against sexual offenders on our most vulnerable, and strengthen our position with survivors and their families, putting them first and not the thousands of offenders who have committed the most reprehensible crimes against our most precious citizens.

This bill, if passed, will stop the Karla Homolkas of the world from becoming Leanne Teales. These heinous criminals are the people that this legislation aims to stop. I hope you will support Bill 138, the Change of Name Amendment Act, for the sake of our communities, our children and our children's children. Thank you.

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

Mr. John Vanthof: It's always an honour to be able to stand in the House, today to discuss Bill 138, An Act to amend the Change of Name Act and to make consequential amendments to another Act, sponsored by the member from Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock and the member from Thornhill.

Just to put it in context, I'd like to read the explanatory note: "The bill amends the Change of Name Act to provide that certain offenders are ineligible to apply to change their name. The offenders who are ineligible are those who are required to comply with Christopher's Law (Sex Offender Registry), 2000." The member from Thornhill did a good job of explaining what Christopher's Law's role is to register sex offenders.

As a parent, I think I speak on behalf of everyone in this province that I can't imagine what it's like for a parent to experience their child being abused, or for the child. And as a party, we, as every other Ontarian, want to make sure that children are protected and that people who have harmed them in any way—that we do our best to make sure that it doesn't happen again. That is incumbent on us.

We think this bill is supportable. We support it. We support it to actually go to committee and actually make sure that it's done correctly, that we actually make this bill as good as it can be and that it actually passes. This is an issue, I think, on which we can all agree, but we have to make sure that someone doesn't get caught up in this who we're not trying to get caught up. That's why it should go to committee. The member for Thornhill, I agree: We do have strong legislation in this province, strong legislation that can always be made better. With this bill, I think it is a step forward as long as we make sure that it's as good as it can be.

I don't think we need to prolong this debate. We are all on the same page in this one. You have our support. There's nothing that should be stopping this bill from going to committee and becoming law. I'd like to thank the members for putting it forward. I'd like to thank you, Speaker, for allowing me the time. Those are my remarks.

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

Mr. Brian Saunderson: It's my pleasure tonight to rise in support of Bill 138, and I want to congratulate my colleagues the MPP from Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock and the MPP from Thornhill for bringing this important private member's bill forward. It's also my pleasure as the parliamentary assistant to the Ministry of the Attorney General to speak to this matter.

This is a government that is committed to putting the safety and well-being of our citizens and our communities first and foremost. Earlier in this session, we spoke to the need to address bail reform to make sure that a small

percentage of our most violent re-offenders are kept off the streets pending trial. This debate tonight is a little bit different, because what we're discussing is not pre-sentencing issues; what we're talking about is post-conviction issues. That type of sentencing and carrying through on those types of sentences to make sure that we safeguard our community and specifically those that are most vulnerable in youth and women is a critical, critical issue for us.

We look at the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and it states in section 1 that the charter "guarantees the rights and freedoms set out in it subject only to such reasonable limits prescribed by law as can be demonstrably justified in a free and democratic society." We in Canada are somewhat unique in this. We do not prioritize rights. We don't stack rights. They live in a continuum, in the balance that we try to strike in making sure that we have a respect for the rights of the individual, and we understand how those rights turn into obligations when we live in a community. So with a right comes an obligation. For example, in our freedom of speech: That freedom of speech is balanced by our obligation to prevent hate crimes, to not speak prejudicially about others and to make sure that the conversations we're having are productive and discursive.

That same balancing act, Madam Speaker, exists in our Criminal Code as well. While we want to make sure that the rights of the individual charged are respected—that they get a free and impartial trial, that they have the right to a lawyer—that is balanced with the need for us to protect our citizenry and to make sure that, when we're sentencing, we're looking at the determinants of a sentence, from rehabilitation to retribution to deterrence. All of these foundational aspects of the sentencing process are grounded in the idea that, if you break the law, you will pay the price, and there's a balancing to make sure that our citizens and our most vulnerable are protected from criminal conduct or the acts of others that transgress the Criminal Code.

The situation that we're talking about tonight is really about protecting our most vulnerable. We're looking at a convict who has been convicted of crimes, of sexual crimes against youth, against women and against other men, to make sure that they must serve the penalty that's been meted out to them, but also that we balance that so in their post-sentencing world they will be monitored and so that we can most protect those in our society that need that protection.

1820

Christopher's Law, enacted in 2011, is a strong example of that. An 11-year-old boy was murdered by a convicted sex offender who had a past record and took the life of an 11-year-old, so we created a registry so that we would have a continuous record of those who had committed these most heinous crimes. What we're doing tonight is trying to close a loophole that would allow a convicted sex offender to walk around Christopher's Law and to subvert the protections that the government of

Canada has put in place to protect the most vulnerable from a sex offender.

We have heard from the earlier speakers tonight of the prevalence of recidivism in this type of offence: as high as 35%, or one in three. If we allow name changes to take place—and we have seen that happen. We have seen it in the example of Karla Homolka. We have seen it in the case of David Donald Shumey from Saskatchewan and also in the case of Adam Budgell, who was convicted on three separate occasions of domestic abuse and rape of his former partners. One of those partners is Jenny Smith from Welland, Ontario. After the conviction of her assailant, she said, "I could sleep at night knowing that once he was released, all any person—a woman, a family member, a friend ... could" do was to "google 'Adam Budgell' and he could not escape what he had done." But Adam did; he changed his name. By changing his name, he sidestepped the important tracking that could be done through Christopher's Law to prevent, and protect our citizens.

Madam Speaker, this motion, this private members' bill, will plug that loophole, will make sure that the intent of Christopher's Law is abided by and will balance the rights of the individual against the collective rights of our citizenry and our communities. On this topic and in this situation, there can be no mistake that the protection and the favour must fall on the side of our citizens and our communities. For that, I will be supporting this very important private members' bill. Again, I thank the members for their hard work on this.

And I will be sharing my time with MPP Leardi.

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

Mr. Anthony Leardi: There are a lot of good reasons why people change their names. One of those reasons is tradition; it's based on tradition. For example, it's a common tradition that a person getting married might change their name to adopt the family name of their spouse. That's a very common tradition.

There's another reason for changing your name, and that's a very happy reason which I experienced in my 24 years as a lawyer. It's when a child grows up and doesn't know who their biological mother or biological father is, but they're brought up by somebody, and that person becomes a parent figure to them. As time goes by, they decide they want to adopt that person's family name as a symbol of having been adopted by that person in real life. I think that's a beautiful thing. I've seen that happen myself.

Of course, famous people, especially entertainers, are always changing their name. They change their name probably for promotional reasons. That's why Destiny Hope Cyrus is Miley Cyrus. Her nickname when she was growing up was Smiley; it was abbreviated to Miley, and that's why we know her as Miley Cyrus.

But my favourite name change stories come out of ancient history. One of my favourite name change stories is about this fellow named Jacob. Jacob was travelling across the desert with his tribe. At a certain point, he

comes across another man who challenges him to a wrestling contest. They begin wrestling out there in the middle of the desert. This man strikes Jacob and renders him incapable of wrestling, so all Jacob can do is continue clinging onto this man and cling and cling. It lasts so long that finally, he forces this man to give him his blessing. It's only then that Jacob realizes that, in fact, he has been wrestling with God. God changes his name and says, "From now on, we are going to call you Israel," which in my translation means "he who wrestles with God." Some of us do that every day.

There's another great story that comes out of the ancient stories. This one has got to be my favourite. This one is about Saul. He's riding a donkey on the way to the city of Damascus, which back then was a really big important city, and on his way, he's blinded by light; he's blinded by a flash of light. He falls off his donkey, and they have to carry him away and they have to care for him because he's blind for three days. Over the course of three days, Paul experiences a conversion of sorts, after which he adopts the name "Paul." And he goes about the rest of his life calling himself Paul. He actually happens to be one of the guys that I've read a lot about. He did three incredible tours around the ancient world telling everybody about his experience: how he was knocked off his donkey and blinded and how that changed his perspective on the world. And that's the story of him.

So it's really important during this discussion to note that anybody can change their name. You can change your name today. You can ask people to talk to you and address you by whatever name you want. But what this legislation does is this legislation deals with legal name changes—a name change which, for example, might appear on your health card or your tax return or your driver's licence. We're really talking about legal name changes here. And the sad reality is that there are some people in our society who change their name for not good reasons. They change their name for bad reasons. They want to change their name because they want to escape the consequences of their own bad behaviour. We should not allow people to do that. We should not allow people to change their name simply to escape the consequences of their own bad behaviour. And that is specifically what this legislation intends to address.

So I congratulate my colleagues for bringing forth this proposal. I want to speak about the member from Thornhill, one of the co-sponsors of this bill. I've had the pleasure of meeting her. She was elected at the same time that I was elected to this Legislature, and we sat close to each other in this Legislature, and we've had many discussions. I find the member from Thornhill to be a very serious person. She's professional and intelligent, and I want to let the people of Thornhill know that they have elected an excellent member of provincial Parliament who represents them well in this Legislature.

I've also had the pleasure of meeting and getting to know the member from Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock, and what I know about her is that she has had a

long and distinguished career in this Legislature. She has been elected and re-elected five times. And when you've been elected and re-elected five times, there's nothing more to be said. The record speaks for itself.

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

The member has two minutes to reply.

Ms. Laurie Scott: I want to thank the MPP from Timiskaming–Cochrane, the MPP from Simcoe–Grey and the MPP from Essex for their support, along with the co-sponsor, MPP Laura Smith, in moving this bill forward to committee. I also want to thank the partners that have been involved with us in the House today. The 482 Collective, Victim Services of York Region, Ottawa Police Association, Smith Falls Police Association and the Niagara Region Police Association have been in contact and supportive, and of course we've had many conversations. And I want to thank—Madam Speaker, I know we've worked on bills together to further protect victims of sexual assaults and crimes.

The MPP from Simcoe–Grey articulated it very well. Two lawyers on our side that spoke to this legislation—and I just want to make clear that the legislation affects convicted sexual offenders, people that are charged with sexual abuse against our children, that are under Christopher's Law. They have violated another human being in a way that has altered that victim's life forever. This is about not letting them have the ability to hide from their crimes. And as was brought up in the debate, the community does not know. The community is searching for a name that is not publicly out there of someone that has committed this crime—that would be normal. If you were a concerned neighbour, you would go into many search engines and look up the neighbour's name, but if that convicted criminal has changed their name, that does not help the community be made aware. It protects the offender, and that is what we need to change. That is why other provinces have made these changes, and we have to let victims know that their attacker will not be able to escape and that they are going to be held accountable.

Thank you very much for your co-operation, Madam Speaker, and for the time.

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

The time provided for private members' public business has expired.

Ms. Scott has moved second reading of Bill 138, An Act to amend the Change of Name Act and to make consequential amendments to another Act. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Pursuant to standing order 100(h), the bill is referred to the Committee of the Whole House, unless the member would like a different committee.

Ms. Laurie Scott: Thank you for the opportunity, Madam Speaker. I'd like it to go to the justice committee.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Is the majority in favour of this bill being referred to the Standing Committee on Justice Policy? Agreed? The bill is referred to the Standing Committee on Justice Policy.

All matters relating to private members' public business having been completed, this House stands adjourned until Wednesday, November 15, 2023, at 9 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1831.

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| Jones, Trevor (PC) | Chatham-Kent—Leamington | Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint du gouvernement |
| Jordan, John (PC) | Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston | |
| Kanapathi, Logan (PC) | Markham—Thornhill | |
| Karpoche, Bhutla (NDP) | Parkdale—High Park | First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Première Vice-Présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative |
| Ke, Vincent (IND) | Don Valley North / Don Valley-Nord | |
| Kernaghan, Terence (NDP) | London North Centre / London-Centre-Nord | Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de l'opposition officielle |
| Kerzner, Hon. / L'hon. Michael S. (PC) | York Centre / York-Centre | Solicitor General / Solliciteur général |
| Khanjin, Hon. / L'hon Andrea (PC) | Barrie—Innisfil | Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks / Ministre de l'Environnement, de la Protection de la nature et des Parcs Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjointe du gouvernement |
| Kusendova-Bashta, Natalia (PC) | Mississauga Centre / Mississauga-Centre | |
| Leardi, Anthony (PC) | Essex | |
| Lecce, Hon. / L'hon. Stephen (PC) | King—Vaughan | Minister of Education / Ministre de l'Éducation |
| Lumsden, Hon. / L'hon. Neil (PC) | Hamilton East—Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est—Stoney Creek | Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport / Ministre du Tourisme, de la Culture et du Sport |
| MacLeod, Lisa (PC) | Nepean | |
| Mamakwa, Sol (NDP) | Kiiwetinoong | Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjoint de l'opposition officielle |
| Mantha, Michael (IND) | Algoma—Manitoulin | |
| Martin, Robin (PC) | Eglinton—Lawrence | |
| McCarthy, Hon. / L'hon. Todd J. (PC) | Durham | Minister of Public and Business Service Delivery / Ministre des Services au public et aux entreprises |
| McCrimmon, Karen (LIB) | Kanata—Carleton | |
| McGregor, Graham (PC) | Brampton North / Brampton-Nord | |
| McMahon, Mary-Margaret (LIB) | Beaches—East York | |
| Mulroney, Hon. / L'hon. Caroline (PC) | York—Simcoe | President of the Treasury Board / Présidente du Conseil du Trésor Minister of Francophone Affairs / Ministre des Affaires francophones |
| Oosterhoff, Sam (PC) | Niagara West / Niagara-Ouest | |

| Member and Party / Député(e) et parti | Constituency / Circonscription | Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités |
|--|---|---|
| Pang, Billy (PC) | Markham—Unionville | |
| Parsa, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (PC) | Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill | Minister of Children, Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et des Services sociaux et communautaires |
| Pasma, Chandra (NDP) | Ottawa West—Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest—Nepean | |
| Piccini, Hon. / L'hon. David (PC) | Northumberland—Peterborough South / Northumberland—Peterborough-Sud | Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development / Ministre du Travail, de l'Immigration, de la Formation et du Développement des compétences |
| Pierre, Natalie (PC) | Burlington | |
| Pirie, Hon. / L'hon. George (PC) | Timmins | Minister of Mines / Ministre des Mines |
| Quinn, Nolan (PC) | Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry | |
| Rae, Matthew (PC) | Perth—Wellington | |
| Rakocevic, Tom (NDP) | Humber River—Black Creek | |
| Rasheed, Kaleed (IND) | Mississauga East—Cooksville / Mississauga-Est—Cooksville | |
| Rickford, Hon. / L'hon. Greg (PC) | Kenora—Rainy River | Minister of Northern Development / Ministre du Développement du Nord Minister of Indigenous Affairs / Ministre des Affaires autochtones |
| Riddell, Brian (PC) | Cambridge | |
| Romano, Ross (PC) | Sault Ste. Marie | |
| Sabawy, Sheref (PC) | Mississauga—Erin Mills | |
| Sandhu, Amarjot (PC) | Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest | |
| Sarkaria, Hon. / L'hon. Prabmeet Singh (PC) | Brampton South / Brampton-Sud | Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports |
| Sarrazin, Stéphane (PC) | Glengarry—Prescott—Russell | |
| Sattler, Peggy (NDP) | London West / London-Ouest | |
| Saunderson, Brian (PC) | Simcoe—Grey | |
| Schreiner, Mike (GRN) | Guelph | |
| Scott, Laurie (PC) | Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock | |
| Shamji, Adil (LIB) | Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est | |
| Shaw, Sandy (NDP) | Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas / Hamilton-Ouest—Ancaster—Dundas | |
| Skelly, Donna (PC) | Flamborough—Glanbrook | Deputy Speaker / Vice-Présidente Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative |
| Smith, Dave (PC) | Peterborough—Kawartha | |
| Smith, David (PC) | Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre | |
| Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Graydon (PC) | Parry Sound—Muskoka | Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry / Ministre des Richesses naturelles et des Forêts |
| Smith, Laura (PC) | Thornhill | |
| Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Todd (PC) | Bay of Quinte / Baie de Quinte | Minister of Energy / Ministre de l'Énergie |
| Stevens, Jennifer (Jennie) (NDP) | St. Catharines | |
| Stiles, Marit (NDP) | Davenport | Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau Parti démocratique de l'Ontario |
| Surma, Hon. / L'hon. Kinga (PC) | Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre | Minister of Infrastructure / Ministre de l'Infrastructure |
| Tabuns, Peter (NDP) | Toronto—Danforth | |
| Tangri, Hon. / L'hon. Nina (PC) | Mississauga—Streetsville | Associate Minister of Small Business / Ministre associée déléguée aux Petites Entreprises |
| Taylor, Monique (NDP) | Hamilton Mountain / Hamilton-Mountain | |
| Thanigasalam, Hon. / L'hon Vijay (PC) | Scarborough—Rouge Park | Associate Minister of Transportation / Ministre associé des Transports |
| Thompson, Hon. / L'hon. Lisa M. (PC) | Huron—Bruce | Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / Ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales |
| Tibollo, Hon. / L'hon. Michael A. (PC) | Vaughan—Woodbridge | Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions / Ministre associé délégué au dossier de la Santé mentale et de la Lutte contre les dépendances |
| Triantafilopoulos, Effie J. (PC) | Oakville North—Burlington / Oakville-Nord—Burlington | |
| Vanthof, John (NDP) | Timiskaming—Cochrane | Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle |

| Member and Party / Député(e) et parti | Constituency / Circonscription | Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités |
|--|--|--|
| Vaugcois, Lise (NDP) | Thunder Bay—Superior North / Thunder Bay—Supérieur-Nord | |
| Wai, Daisy (PC) | Richmond Hill | |
| West, Jamie (NDP) | Sudbury | |
| Williams, Hon. / L'hon. Charmaine A. (PC) | Brampton Centre / Brampton-Centre | Associate Minister of Women's Social and Economic Opportunity / Ministre associée des Perspectives sociales et économiques pour les femmes |
| Wong-Tam, Kristyn (NDP) | Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre | |
| Yakabuski, John (PC) | Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke | |
| Vacant | Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre | |
| Vacant | Lambton—Kent—Middlesex | |