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(Hansard)**

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(Hansard)**

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43rd Parliament
Tuesday
20 February 2024

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43^e législature
Mardi
20 février 2024

Speaker: Honourable Ted Arnott
Clerk: Trevor Day

Président : L'honorable Ted Arnott
Greffier : Trevor Day

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 20 February 2024

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 20 février 2024

The House met at 1015.

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

Prayers.

RESIGNATION OF MEMBER FOR MILTON

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I beg to inform the House that, during the adjournment, a vacancy occurred in the membership of the House by reason of the resignation of Parm Gill as the member for the electoral district of Milton, effective February 16, 2024. Accordingly, I have issued my warrant to the Chief Electoral Officer for the issue of a writ for a by-election.

TABLING OF SESSIONAL PAPERS

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I beg to inform the House that, during the adjournment, the following documents were tabled:

—the 2022-23 Annual Report of the French Language Services Commissioner of Ontario, from the office of the Ombudsman of Ontario;

—a report entitled Ontario School Boards: Enrolment, Finances and Student Outcomes, from the Financial Accountability Office of Ontario;

—a report entitled Expenditure Monitor 2023-24: Q2, from the Financial Accountability Office of Ontario; and

—a report entitled Economic and Budget Outlook, Winter 2024, from the Financial Accountability Office of Ontario.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

GOVERNMENT INVESTMENTS

Mr. Robert Bailey: It's an honour to rise once again in the Ontario Legislature. I'd like to take this opportunity to share more good news with the Legislature on an important investment by this government in Sarnia–Lambton.

On February 9, I was honoured to join several members, including the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Health, to announce an investment of \$4.5 million to increase access to pediatric services for children and youth in south-western Ontario. This important investment included \$964,000 in new annual funding for Pathways Health Centre for Children in my riding of Sarnia–Lambton.

This government is ensuring children and youth in every corner of the province have quick and convenient access to high-quality and convenient care. In fact, this government has increased the annualized funding to Pathways Health Centre for Children in Sarnia by more than \$2.6 million since 2022. This is further evidence that our government is committed to reducing wait-lists, improving access to care and improving the quality of life for children and their families in Sarnia–Lambton.

I want to thank the government and the Minister of Health for continuing to make these important investments in Sarnia–Lambton.

Thank you, Speaker. I look forward to sharing more great news with you in the future.

CHOSEN FAMILY DAY

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Yesterday, in Ontario, we celebrated Family Day, a provincial holiday recognized by legislation in this very chamber. Today, I want to recognize another day of significance, Chosen Family Day, which is coming up in two days on February 22. On Chosen Family Day, we will recognize all Ontarians who have created families outside of traditional and legal definitions.

Chosen families are particularly common in queer and trans communities. We have historically high rates of separation from our birth families when they won't accept us for living our authentic selves. We turn to elders in our community for life-saving support when our own families reject us. This is how I survived, Speaker, after coming out to my own parents at age 16.

1020

People of many cultures and diverse social backgrounds create chosen families. Children in foster care, veterans, the elderly, the injured and sick receiving care, immigrants and refugees often come together when families of origin are unsafe, far away, unavailable to support them or simply don't understand.

In collaboration with Friends of Ruby, a queer and trans youth shelter, last year I introduced my private member's bill the Chosen Family Day Act, which would make February 22 Chosen Family Day in Ontario. This will send a strong and loving message to all chosen families that they are valued and that they are just as significant as traditional families of origin. Let's honour them together.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mr. Will Bouma: Good morning, Speaker. It feels good to be back. Colleagues, it's good to see you all.

Last Thursday, I had the honour of joining the member from Eglinton–Lawrence and the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Health in announcing that the Grand River Community Health Centre in Brantford will receive \$1.7 million; the Six Nations of the Grand River Family Health Team will receive \$1.8 million; and De dwa da dehs nye>s Aboriginal Health Centre will receive \$264,700.

This combined \$3.8-million investment will allow over 14,000 new patients to be connected to primary health care in the province of Ontario and in my riding. These annualized investments will allow primary care teams to connect people to a range of health professionals, including doctors, nurse practitioners, registered and practical nurses, physiotherapists, social workers and dietitians, among others.

Timely access to primary care helps people stay healthier for longer with faster diagnosis and treatment, while relieving pressures on the emergency department and walk-in clinics. These investments into the Brantford–Brant community are keeping in line with our government's other historic investments to expand medical schools and take down barriers so highly skilled medical professionals can practise in the province of Ontario.

I am proud to represent a government that prioritizes the health of Ontarians and is working to provide 98% of the province with primary care over the course of the next few years. I will continue to advocate for the resiliency of Brantford–Brant and will keep working to ensure that Ontario's primary care system is more robust, public and accessible than ever.

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

MPP Jill Andrew: The year is 2024 and intimate partner violence, gender-based violence and violence against women is still an epidemic. It is still a public health issue, yet the Conservatives refuse to declare this formally across Ontario in this Legislature. Intimate partner violence and femicide is on the rise. And 68 of the 86 recommendations from the Renfrew inquest fall under provincial jurisdiction and many could easily be implemented by this government. Yet, despite our calls, this government refuses to declare intimate partner violence an epidemic.

I stand here again demanding that the Conservative government declare it an epidemic. It is an epidemic that disproportionately impacts women and girls, trans and non-binary people, women with disabilities, Black women, Indigenous women, women experiencing homelessness, underhoused women and immigrant, refugee and non-status women. Violence is socially and economically debilitating. Survivors have spoken and it's time they listened.

This week, on February 21 and 22, Skills for Change, from my St. Paul's community, will host our third annual Together Against Violence Symposium, where hundreds of us will gather to talk about solutions to gender-based violence.

Speaker, for over 40 years, they have been doing this work in our community, but I stand here today to say that our community leaders cannot do this alone. The first step

to solving a problem is naming it. I beg of this government to name intimate partner violence, name gender-based violence and name violence against women what it is, and that, Speaker, is an epidemic.

EVENTS IN MISSISSAUGA–LAKESHORE

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: Yesterday was Family Day, and in my riding of Mississauga–Lakeshore, my team and I held our annual free skate at the Clarkson arena. We had an incredible turnout of over 150 people, including many young families and children who enjoyed the hot chocolate and the mini hockey sticks and pucks.

Most importantly, community events like this give us an opportunity to meet constituents and listen to their concerns. Debra and several others were concerned with the rising cost of living, especially the rising federal carbon tax.

I want to thank Premier Ford and the Minister of Finance for joining us last week at the Pioneer Gas Station in Port Credit to announce an important measure to protect against any future carbon tax. I got my first job at that station when I was 16, pumping gas and propane. At the time, the price of gas was 33 cents per litre. Within the next six years, the federal carbon tax is scheduled to rise to more than 37 cents per litre—more than the price of gas when I had my first job there.

As I said, yesterday was Family Day. Over the weekend, my father-in-law, Giuseppe Di Lena, passed away with his family at his side. Giuseppe was a successful entrepreneur, but his family was what he was most proud of. He was a dedicated husband, father and nonno, who touched the lives of many, and he will be truly missed by everyone.

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Early this month, we saw a major win for workers in Ontario as the Premier and his government lost their appeal on Bill 124. The courts upheld what we all knew: This legislation was unconstitutional. Rather than admit that they were wrong, this government has wasted time and money fighting against the very people he claims to care about, people he once called heroes.

This government works in the shadows, making insider deals and taking care of their own, while the people of Ontario struggle to survive. It takes massive demonstrations, relentless pressure, court rulings and public shaming for them to make the right decision. Bill 124, the greenbelt, hiding mandate letters—they know what they're doing is wrong. It's why they sneak language into their own legislation that absolves them from legal accountability.

The callousness and uncaring of this government are an affront to democracy. While the Ford government was fighting public workers' right to fair compensation in the courts, we've watched our health care system decay. We've watched nurses leave the profession en masse. We've watched patients suffer the consequences of this government's poor decisions.

I take heart, though. I trust the people of Ontario. I believe in them and their ability to see through this government's taglines and slogans and see the real truth. The Bill 124 result is a reminder that when the people of Ontario unite and stand up against this government's injustices, we win. This government should do well to remember: It is the people of Ontario who hold the power, not them.

NORTHERN ECONOMY

Mr. Kevin Holland: It's great to see you all again. I'm very proud to rise today in recognition of our forestry, bioeconomy and mining industry leaders in the Thunder Bay and northern region.

On January 30, Tom Ratz of Resolute and Chris Walton of CRIBE partnered to host the forestry and bioeconomy opportunity road map round table, followed by the Ontario's forestry bioeconomy workshop. And 80 representatives of these sectors participated in the day's events, including our Indigenous partners and stakeholders, who have contributed significantly to modernization efforts. We were all extremely grateful that Minister Graydon Smith was able to join us in Thunder Bay.

The "themes for prosperity" examination included the topics of collaboration, innovation, embracing the global economy and staying focused. Decarbonization for remote locations using energy system solutions and decarbonization with the forest bioeconomy for the mining sector were also matters explored.

In closing, on behalf of our stakeholders and partners, I would like to extend our sincere gratitude to Premier Ford and Minister Graydon Smith for their investments to the critical research project that will enable the future sustainability of our forestry and bioeconomy sector. We will now work together to optimize value creation and synergies, and move from research to production and market. I look forward to our next steps and action items.

GLOBAL COMMUNITY ALLIANCE GALA

Mr. Stephen Blais: Mr. Speaker, it's great to be back at the Legislature.

Every February, people across Canada participate in Black History Month events and festivities that honour the legacy of Black people in Canada and their communities. In Orléans, we are fortunate to benefit from the diversity that a vibrant Black community has and the leadership that its members offer us.

The Global Community Alliance is a community-based organization, established with a mission to bring members of various communities together to organize and facilitate events that highlight diversity and inclusion, and to recognize the efforts of individuals, associations, businesses and others that are making a difference within our diverse community.

1030

This year, Global Community Alliance is celebrating its 12th annual gala and awards ceremony in recognition

of Black History Month. The brainchild of Orléans residents Kelly and Yomi Pratt, this annual event brings to a close Black History Month celebrations in the nation's capital. Over the past 12 years, the gala has been one of the most sought-after events in Ottawa's social calendar, and this year's gala, the first since the pandemic, promises to be no different.

Proceeds will be donated to the Children at Risk association, an Ottawa-based community organization that provides services and programs to families of children diagnosed with autism. I'm very much looking forward to attending the event this weekend.

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Ms. Patrice Barnes: Today, I rise to highlight Black History Month. It serves as a reminder of the enduring contributions of Black Canadians to the fabric of our nation. Among these, the legacy of Lincoln Alexander shines brightly—a symbol of resilience, leadership and transformative change. As the first Black member of Parliament, the first Black federal cabinet minister and the 24th Lieutenant Governor of Ontario, he shattered racial barriers, blazing a trail for generations to come, a story of triumph over adversity.

His bust here in the Legislature stands as a monument of learning, reflection and action in pursuit of a more inclusive and equitable society.

That is why I'm thrilled about our government's decision to incorporate mandatory Black history learning into our curriculum. By integrating Black history into our curriculum, we acknowledge that it is not separate from Canadian history, but an integral part of it. It is a history of resilience, creativity and perseverance in the face of immense challenges—a history that enriches our collective understanding of who we are as Canadians.

We applaud the tireless efforts of all the organizations and individuals who have championed Black history education in the past, and those that have carried the flame of informing and educating about our stories. Together, let us forge ahead, united in our commitment to a future where diversity is embraced and celebrated.

POLICE SERVICES

Ms. Jess Dixon: It's probably no secret from some of my statements that I am an advocate of policing and a lover of social media. A little-known fact about me: I did my undergrad in philosophy, but it was specifically focusing on Islamic Golden Age philosophy and theology in a historical lens. I never thought all of those things would come together, but they did.

Early on in my journey of being an MPP, I was on Instagram, and I ended up connecting with a Toronto police officer where we were talking about school resource officers. Our friendship since then has developed significantly. My friend Farhan Ali, who is present here, is a Muslim officer, and his insights became incredibly important to me as an MPP representing a very diverse

riding with a lot of newcomers to Canada. He was a wonderful resource for me.

I'm also, as you know, a big advocate of community policing, which is about building those relationships early on. What I'm very pleased to be commemorating today is that Farhan has joined with Constable Haroon Siddiqui, who was primarily our first Muslim liaison officer, and together, the two of them are now part of a new operation, a new organization, spearheaded by Officer Demkiw of the Toronto Police Service, to really maintain those relationships: to foster current relationships and build new ones in the Muslim community. I think that's an absolutely wonderful initiative and, also, I want to celebrate good friends of mine.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Miss Monique Taylor: It is great to see the Ontario Autism Coalition in the chamber today. Welcome back to Queen's Park.

Hon. Kinga Surma: I just want to wish my chief of staff, Aryn Azzopardi, a very happy birthday today. Thank you so much for your hard work and have a wonderful day.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: I would like to introduce my friends Kate Dudley-Logue, Rhonda Allaby-Glass and Bruce McIntosh from the Ontario Autism Coalition. Welcome to your House this morning.

Hon. Stan Cho: I want to introduce Karyn Popovich to the Legislature this morning. She has had a distinguished 40-plus-year career in the Ontario health care system. She has done it all, from being a nurse to becoming president and CEO of North York General Hospital, my home hospital. She has kept herself very busy. She can literally run circles around many people, and I mean that, because she's a heck of a marathon runner.

I hope you enjoy your retirement. I'm looking forward to lunch. I'm buying. Thank you, Karyn.

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: I'd like to give a very warm welcome to my guest, Tenzin Choezin. She is a member of the 17th Tibetan Parliament-in-Exile and the youngest MP in the history of the Central Tibetan Administration. Welcome.

Mr. Deepak Anand: It's an absolute pleasure to welcome the future nurse and my daughter, Suvidhi Anand, to Queen's Park. Welcome, Suvidhi.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I'd like to warmly welcome my niece Jessica Fife, my nephew Fraser Evans, and my beautiful daughter, Claire Fife, to our House today. Welcome.

Ms. Jess Dixon: Just formally, I would like to introduce my wonderful friends and colleagues Constable Farhan Ali and Constable Haroon Siddiqui, both long-serving members of the Toronto Police Service and now new members of the Muslim liaison outreach project. Welcome to your House.

Ms. Jessica Bell: I'd like to introduce some visitors today: Wendy Campbell, Susan Girvan, John Bilodeau,

Ruth Stern and G. Michael Katzmarek. Thank you so much for coming here today.

Ms. Patrice Barnes: I'd like to welcome Ivan Dawns, political director of the International Union of Painters and Allied Trades, as well as Kellie Morgan, the government relations affairs person for—she's from the US. She's here visiting us today, and she's also representing the International Union of Painters and Allied Trades. Thank you for being in the House today.

I just want to let everyone know that they have a reception at 5 today.

MPP Jill Andrew: I just want to say good morning to my mum, who's watching.

Also, I'd like to welcome Fraser, who is in the House. I don't see him yet, but I know he's here visiting.

Oh, there you are. It's very good to see you, Fraser.

I'd also like to thank a couple of high school friends of mine who are also watching this morning.

Hon. Todd J. McCarthy: I'd like to welcome to the House today an excellent lawyer from Durham, Ms. Kelli Preston, and her son Liam, a major in political science.

Mr. Vincent Ke: I would like to welcome a group from the adult education program in my riding of Don Valley North. They have a trip to Queen's Park. Welcome.

INTRODUCTION OF MEMBER FOR KITCHENER CENTRE

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnett): I beg to inform the House that the Clerk has received from the Chief Electoral Officer and laid upon the table a certificate of the by-election in the electoral district of Kitchener Centre.

1040

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Trevor Day): I have a letter dated December 13, 2023, addressed to the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario that reads as follows:

"Dear Mr. Day:

"A writ of election, dated the 1st day of November, 2023, was issued by the Lieutenant Governor of Ontario and addressed to Cathy McInnes, returning officer for Kitchener Centre. This writ was for the election of a member of provincial Parliament to represent Kitchener Centre in the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, following the resignation of Laura Mae Lindo as representative of this electoral district.

"This is to certify that, an election having been granted and held in Kitchener Centre on the 30th day of November, 2023, Aislinn Clancy has been duly elected, as appears by the return of the said writ of election dated the 2nd day of December, 2023, which is now lodged of record in my office.

"Yours sincerely,

"Greg Essensa

"Chief Electoral Officer."

Ms. Clancy was escorted into the House by Mr. Schreiner.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Speaker, I have the honour to present to you and to the House Aislinn Clancy, member for the electoral district of Kitchener Centre, who has taken

the oath and signed the roll and now claims the right to take her seat.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Let the honourable member take her seat.

INDEPENDENT MEMBERS

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'm going to ask for the attention of the House so I can address the participation of the independent members.

As a result of the recent by-election in Kitchener Centre, the number of members sitting as independents has increased by one since the House last met in December. Our practices must now be adjusted accordingly to ensure that these members have a reasonable opportunity to participate in our daily proceedings and in debate.

During question period, I will recognize the new independent member to ask a question during each eight-day period, allowing us to accommodate all 15 eligible independent members into the rotation. This means that one independent member will be recognized to ask a question each day, with a second independent member recognized on alternate Mondays as well as every Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. Each independent member recognized during question period will continue to have the opportunity to ask one question and one supplementary question.

Additionally, the member for Kitchener Centre will be allotted three minutes of speaking time for debates on second and third reading of government bills and on substantive government motions. This time may be banked but not shared.

Finally, with regard to members' statements, there will continue to be one statement allotted to an independent member every sessional day. However, each eligible member will now be entitled to participate in this proceeding once per 15-day period instead of once per 14-day period.

QUESTION PERIOD

LABOUR POLICY

Ms. Marit Stiles: Good morning, Speaker, and welcome back. It's good to be back here, I think.

This question is for the Premier. Throughout the break, I was travelling all around this province. It's pretty clear that people all across this province are hurting right now. They're feeling the rising cost of everything from utilities to mortgage payments, groceries, rent. For workers in our hospitals, in our schools, in the broader public sector, they've also had to contend with their own government fighting to suppress their wages with Bill 124 and then with the costly legal battle and campaign to defend that bill. But the workers won, and the courts have ruled once again that Bill 124 was unconstitutional. It was an unconstitutional attack on the rights of working people and their paycheques.

So my question to the Premier is: Will he apologize to Ontario's hard-working nurses, PSWs, teachers, educational

assistants and all the public sector workers for suppressing their wages with Bill 124?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Members will please take their seats.

To respond, the Premier.

Hon. Doug Ford: It's great to be back in the House here, and it's so nice to see everyone.

Maybe I'll start with the cost of living. The Leader of the Opposition went around the province, she said, and looked at the cost of living. Well, let's tell your constituents and everyone in Ontario that you voted against the one fare that we put forward that saves people \$1,600 a year. She voted against getting rid of the licence sticker fee; again, voted against reducing the gas tax by 10.7 cents. She voted against getting rid of the tolls on the 412 and 418. So I don't think the Leader of the Opposition really cares about the people and making sure that they keep the costs down, taxes down, because she's voted constantly against us reducing the tax.

Let's talk about health care. There's no government in the history of this country, not to mention the province, that is spending \$81 billion a year—that's up over \$20 billion since 2018. In the—

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

The supplementary question?

Ms. Marit Stiles: Speaker, do you know what we voted against? We voted against Bill 124, and we told this government it was unconstitutional.

I'll tell you, Premier, that did not sound like an apology to me. The government not only used their power to cut the wages of health care and education workers during a pandemic, they spent untold amounts of dollars fighting those workers in court for years, only to be told what we already all knew: The bill is and always was unconstitutional.

Speaker, through you again to the Premier—do-over—how much did this government spend on legal costs to keep down workers' wages on Bill 124?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Members will please take their seats.

Premier.

Hon. Doug Ford: Just ask us what we've done for the health care workers, which we think the world of—we think the world of the nurses—as the Leader of the Opposition voted against the \$7,000 bonus that we gave the nurses, she must not have cared about the nurses.

Do you know something? The nurses out there—we're paying for the education of new nurses, and obviously, there's a huge take-up, because we set another record of 17,500 nurses registered last year. We've seen over 80,000 nurses register in this province in the last five years. Over 10,400 doctors have registered. We've added more seats: 449 postgraduate seats, 260 undergraduate seats. We're building new medical universities, which haven't been built in decades. As the Liberals froze health care funding, we increased it \$21 billion. As they slashed physician services and cut residency seats, we've added them. We've

added over 3,500 beds. We're going to add another 3,000 beds—

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

The final supplementary?

Ms. Marit Stiles: Well, I guess we'll find out eventually, one way or another, how much it cost.

Bill 124 deteriorated conditions in hospitals, in long-term-care facilities, at the worst possible time. We were already struggling with rampant hallway medicine when this government came into power, and they managed to make things even worse. Burned-out nurses, health care workers have been leaving the sector in droves. They can't get out of here fast enough with this government in power. And guess what, Speaker? Private nursing agencies, the friends of this government, have been ready to jump in and fill the gap, bleeding our hospitals dry at the same time, and demanding exorbitant fees for exactly the same work.

1050

Speaker, back to the Premier: Will he admit his choices worsened the crisis facing our health care system and, once and for all, please, apologize to Ontarians for Bill 124.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Members will please take their seats.

Hon. Doug Ford: I find this so ironic. Their government, the NDP government, supported the Liberals. They fired 1,600 nurses. We've registered 17,500—80,000 since we've been in office. We're building 50 new hospitals, as I said—either building them or expanding the hospitals, adding 3,000 beds. We're going to add another 3,500 beds when these new hospitals go up.

But one of the best was a couple of weeks ago when my Minister of Health added \$110 million to connect 300,000 more patients to family physicians—and, by the way, it's the lowest in the country, Mr. Speaker.

We're going to continue investing into health care. Just the pharmacies alone served over 700,000 people that didn't have to go to primary care docs in less than a year. That's what we're doing for health care. As they continue to vote against health care, we continue to fund it and expand health care.

HEALTH CARE

Ms. Marit Stiles: Just consider for a moment, Speaker, how many times this government has let Ontarians down. We are starting this session with another example of that, another policy reversal.

Here's the thing, though: There are consequences. Because of Bill 124, the privatization of health care and the growth of these for-profit nursing agencies has absolutely exploded. Ontarians want reliable, publicly delivered health care, not a publicly funded revenue stream for private companies.

Back to the Premier: If the government is going to continue backing up the policy train this session, can they make reversing their privatization of health care their next signature policy reversal?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Members will please take their seats.

The Deputy Premier and Minister of Health.

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Speaker, I want to be very clear what the Leader of the Opposition is asking for. She is asking that 17,000 people who received cataract eye surgery and minor eye surgery last year are still on waitlists. That is what you are asking for.

When Premier Ford announced an expansion of cataract surgeries in the province of Ontario in January 2023, that meant 17,000 people are back reading to their children, are back volunteering in community, are back driving their vehicles. That's what we are doing to make sure people are looked after in the province of Ontario.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: No, Speaker, what I'm asking for is for this government to stop wasting billions of dollars lining the pockets of private health care shareholders while our operating rooms and our emergency rooms remain empty.

Speaker, the government has had to backtrack on almost all of their major policy decisions because they met with tremendous public opposition: the greenbelt grab, unilateral municipal boundary changes, the dissolution of Peel, licence plates you can't read, cuts to public health during a pandemic—all bad ideas that we warned you about. At this rate, they're going to spend more time reversing their own legislation than taking the actions that would make life better for the people of Ontario, the people that they were elected to serve.

Speaker, back to the Premier: How many reversals, how many flip-flops, how many backtracks does he have to be forced to make before he realizes that his insiders-first agenda is failing Ontario?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Members will please take their seats.

Premier?

Hon. Doug Ford: Mr. Speaker, let's go back five and a half years when we walked through the doors and found out it's a bankrupt province—the highest electricity costs, the highest regulations and red tape. I'll tell you what we had to do, Mr. Speaker, to create the environment, the conditions for companies to come here—which we're leading North America in. We're an economic powerhouse now because of our policies: \$28 billion of EV investments; \$20 billion of tech; life sciences, \$3 billion. But the greatest thing is, Mr. Speaker, we've created more manufacturing jobs here in Ontario than all 50 states combined. That says it all. What we're doing here is we're making sure we're reducing the costs and the red tape by a billion dollars, Mr. Speaker.

Another great thing since we took office—the Liberals and NDP chased 300,000 jobs out of this province because they were going to the service sector. Do you remember that? Well, there's 700,000 more people working today

than there were five and a half years ago. That's what we have done.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: And one in every 10 people at a food bank. That's the legacy of this government. That's the legacy of this Premier. The reversals don't stop, but neither do the new and the very flawed policies.

I want to take, for a moment, the plan to sell off our critical services at ServiceOntario to yet another American big box corporation, like Staples and Walmart. Ontarians are so on to you. They are so on to you, and they can tell that this is another privatization scheme, Speaker, that is going to make corporations richer and not serve the people of this province.

My question is for the Premier: How exactly did Staples get a sole-source contract to open ServiceOntario kiosks?

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

To respond for the government, the Minister of Public and Business Service Delivery.

Hon. Todd J. McCarthy: Our ministry officials took the opportunity, with expiring contracts at some ServiceOntario locations, to reach out to a dozen potential retail partners. This is part of a tradition that goes back a century. Every party that has ever formed government here at Queen's Park has embraced and expanded the private service delivery model, to the point where we now have 71% private sector delivery models in this province, and it works. The retail partnership model has proven so successful with Canadian Tire, IDA and Home Hardware that we've expanded it:

—longer hours—up to 9 p.m. on weeknights;

—more parking;

—more accessibility;

—ability to make appointments online, so you can get in and out of interacting with government in just 15 minutes; and

—of course, all-day Saturdays, 9 to 5.

This is what Ontarians have embraced and appreciate. It's about convenience. It's about putting the customer first. The people of Ontario come first. That's why we're doing this.

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Ms. Marit Stiles: Speaker, I'm going to go back to the Premier again with this question. It would be easier to take the government's word on these matters if they had a better track record, frankly. The truth is, this is a government that has been mired in scandal and controversy, desperately trying to bury records, all so they can put their friends and insiders first—until they're found out. With that in mind, Speaker, I'm going to give the government a chance to be a little bit more transparent again.

Speaker, to the Premier: Since the Legislature was last in session, Ontarians want to know, how many government officials, including ministers' staff and staff in the Premier's office, have spoken with the RCMP as part of their investigation into the greenbelt scandal?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Mr. Speaker, I think that's a question better asked to the authorities. We're continuing to work with them, but at the same time, we are continuing to focus on things that matter to the people of the province of Ontario.

Look, there can be no confusion about the fact that we inherited a housing crisis in the province of Ontario. We've heard that from former Liberal ministers who have been testifying in front of the regional government review committee, who talked about the crisis that was created under the previous Liberal government.

We're undoing those obstacles, Mr. Speaker, and we're seeing, month after month after month, a trend is continuing in a very positive way, despite the high inflation, high interest rate policies of a federal Liberal government bent on hurting the Canadian economy. We're seeing strength in the province of Ontario.

Now, these are the same policies, of course, federally that we saw here in the province of Ontario—colleagues, you will know this—high interest rates, high inflation, out of control debt, spiralling costs for the people of the province of Ontario. That is what we've put back on track. We're ensuring that people have jobs and opportunity, and we will not stop on that mission, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: Well, it's clear we're not going to get any answers to that either, Speaker.

The greenbelt grab was an \$8.3-billion scheme intended only to carve up vital resources in the province of Ontario for wealthy developers with connections to this government. And I will remind everyone in this room again: They are being criminally investigated by the RCMP for that scheme. It has cost this government at least two cabinet ministers. An RCMP investigation, I will remind you again, is under way. And we are still no closer to improving access to affordable housing in this province.

1100

Today in Ontario, housing starts are down from last year, the cost of housing is skyrocketing and rents are worse than ever. Encampments have become the norm in most cities. Will the Premier finally act, support our proposal to build the affordable, non-market housing that people desperately need and bring back real rent control?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Members will please take their seats.

Interjections.

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

The Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Again, there can be no doubt that when we came to office in 2018, Ontario was facing a crisis, largely as the result of policies of the previous Liberal government, policies that of course are under way in Ottawa: high inflation, high interest rate policies, which have made it difficult to build homes.

However, because of the policies of this government, we are seeing, month after month after month, housing starts continuing to increase in the province of Ontario. In fact, we have met our target for last year, and the year has actually started off very strong. But the trend line is a very important one, and we're going in the right direction. I'm very happy about that, Mr. Speaker.

When it comes to purpose-built rentals, in fact, more purpose-built rental starts have happened under this government's watch than at any time in the history of the province, Mr. Speaker, because what we're trying to do is end what the NDP and the Liberals did for 15 years. We're trying to end NIMBYism, to make sure that we make the most use out of the investments that we're making in transit, in transportation.

We will meet our targets, we will reduce obstacles and we will restore Ontario to the best place to live, work, invest and raise a family, to ensure that all Ontarians have the dignity and the opportunity to have the same dream that millions more did. That dream was lost under the previous Liberal government. This Progressive Conservative government will restore it.

TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE

Ms. Laura Smith: I want to say a heartfelt welcome back to all my friends and colleagues in the House.

My question is for the Minister of Transportation. Residents in my riding of Thornhill have been extremely vocal about the need for more infrastructure to support the rapid and consistent growth of Ontario's population. In 2018, our government promised to get people moving and better connected to communities across the province. We're keeping our promise and building new highways, roads and transit, but at this time, these projects just can't come soon enough.

Speaker, can the minister please explain what steps he is taking to build infrastructure faster?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: The member from Thornhill is absolutely right: After 15 years of previous governments neglecting their duty to build infrastructure, transit and highways across this province, our government is getting it done. Our population is growing rapidly—over a million people in the next two years—and we need to build that infrastructure now. That's why, in 2019, our government made it a priority to introduce the Building Transit Faster Act to ensure that we can better connect the people in the GTHA, and faster.

Speaker, we know that more transit is needed today, and it couldn't come soon enough. Whether it's highways or transit, our government is committed to building Ontario, which is why later today our government will introduce legislation that tackles unnecessary delays and makes it easier and faster to build. We are the only party working to save Ontarians money while fighting for fast and reliable infrastructure.

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

Ms. Laura Smith: Thank you to the minister for his response and his solid work for the people of Ontario. I'm so excited to hear about the details of the announcement, as commuters literally cannot wait to see more critical infrastructure built.

Speaker, we know that in order to ensure Ontario remains the best place to live in Canada, to work, to raise a family, we also need to ensure that costs remain low for Ontarians. People in my community and across this province need stability and certainty. Can the minister please explain what steps our government is taking to make life more affordable for communities and businesses?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Thank you once again to the member from Thornhill. Mr. Speaker, we know that families are seeing costs go up everywhere, from the grocery store to the gas pumps. That is why, if passed, this piece of legislation will freeze fees on driver's licences and Ontario photo cards. This will help Ontarians save money—over \$60 million—over the next couple of years.

We're also giving commuters more certainty by permanently banning tolls on provincial highways. We know we are the only party standing up for Ontarians. We are the only party focused on making life easier for people and building our future. That is why we have removed vehicle val tags. That is why we have reduced taxes by over 10 cents per litre at the gas pumps and that is why we will also continue to fight for the people of Ontario and keep costs down.

SMALL BUSINESS

Mr. Jeff Burch: Speaker, through you to the Minister of Public and Business Service Delivery: This month, 11 small business people in Ontario were told they would lose their business. Their ServiceOntario contracts were ripped away without a tendering process and handed to Staples, a big box American corporation that is in the process of laying off staff. These businesses were then sent a threatening email telling them not to speak to the media.

What followed was an interview between this minister and Richard Southern, from CityNews, that can only be described as a dumpster fire inside a train wreck. This minister couldn't produce a business plan and was not aware of the costs or basic details of the sole-source contract.

When will this government stop pandering to big box corporations and apologize to small business owners who feel they've been slapped in the face?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Members will please take their seats.

To reply, the Minister of Public and Business Service Delivery.

Hon. Todd J. McCarthy: My ministry and our government are always looking for alternative service delivery models, building on a century of private sector delivery models. Small business will always be part of that, but the retail partnership process is also such a great success, with the extended hours, with the convenience and the com-

munity hubs associated with it. Every single location that was due to expire anyway, every single one of those employees is eligible for employment at any one of the retail partnerships, including that of Staples Canada.

This is good news for Ontarians. They welcome the longer hours—up to 9 p.m. weeknights, all day Saturday—more accessibility, more parking and the convenience of online booking. That is interaction with government that puts the customer first. The people of Ontario come first every time with ServiceOntario.

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

Mr. Jeff Burch: Speaker, through you to the Premier: Klaudia Savona, a small business owner in Welland, received an email from this government, closing her business. She had invested \$40,000 of her own money and operated her business for 23 years. Now this government will pay Staples to renovate their big box store, leaving Klaudia out in the cold. She also received a threatening email warning her not to speak to the media.

But she told CityNews she feels she's been treated like garbage and said, "I've been a PC member my entire life. I've stuck by them my whole life. I'm finally done."

Did the Premier have prior knowledge that small business owners like Klaudia were going to be used and abused in this manner, or is this yet another example of incompetence in the offices of the Premier and his cabinet?

Hon. Todd J. McCarthy: As I have indicated, the small business model is a key part of the service delivery model for all ServiceOntario locations, but not one-size-fits-all. When existing locations were due to expire anyway, that created an opportunity to look at possibly expanding the retail partnership model, which our government did. The people of Ontario have welcomed that.

As I have indicated, there are no job losses whatsoever on the government side. Everyone on the private side has the opportunity and are eligible for employment at the extended-hours locations of the nine Staples Canada locations.

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INTERNATIONAL TRADE

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: My question is for the Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade. When the Liberals were in office, Ontario was known for its high-tax, overly regulated and uncompetitive business environment. Companies that were here left in droves and companies abroad would not even consider Ontario as a place to expand their businesses. Thankfully, when we got in office, we immediately reversed course. We are tearing down the unnecessary red tape that the Liberals put up. As a result, we've seen investments flood in from across the globe.

I understand that the minister just came back from a trade and investment mission to India where he spoke with companies who are intrigued by what Ontario has to offer. Can the minister provide an update on how Ontario's mission to India went?

Hon. Victor Fedeli: In this tumultuous world, our message to India was clear. The fundamentals in Ontario have not changed; our value proposition has not changed. In Mumbai, we met with Piramal pharmaceuticals, who produce ingredients for cancer, eye and kidney disease treatments in the member's riding. They invested \$4.7 million to modernize their plant in Newmarket–Aurora. We joined CSM Technologies to announce their brand new Toronto office—150 brand new tech workers. This comes on the heels of other announcements from XLScout and BSIT, both who are opening tech facilities in Toronto, creating hundreds of new jobs.

Speaker, companies from across the globe are choosing Ontario to invest and expand.

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

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: Thank you to the minister for his answer. I'm thrilled about the growth of my local business Piramal Pharma Ltd. in Aurora. It is great to hear that, once again, Ontario is open for business, and that is exactly what happens when you listen to businesses and foster the conditions for them to succeed in. We've added nearly 700,000 jobs since we took office, and the investments the minister highlighted mean more good-paying jobs for communities across this great province. Under our government, we will never go back to the days of the Liberals' high-tax policies.

Can the minister elaborate on why companies in India and abroad are choosing Ontario to invest and expand in?

Hon. Victor Fedeli: We reminded Indian businesses that all of the fundamentals are still in place here in Ontario: lower taxes, lower electricity rates, less red tape. Businesses there see Ontario as this beacon of hope. We told them that, last year, Ontario created more manufacturing jobs than all 50 US states combined. We're leading the nation in job creation. Last month alone, Ontario added nearly 24,000 jobs. That's because companies in India and all over the globe know that Ontario has everything that businesses need to succeed.

Unlike the Liberals' high-tax, high-cost regime, we will continue to create the conditions to attract more companies and bring even more good-paying jobs to our families.

HEALTH CARE

Ms. Jessica Bell: My question is to the Premier. Today, I'm joined by former patients of a family doctor at Taddle Creek Family Health Team. They, along with 1,600 other patients, were left scrambling when their family doctor moved to an executive health private medical clinic called MD Direct. MD Direct charges patients an annual fee of up to \$4,995 a year to see a doctor.

The Canada Health Act is very clear. Canadian health care providers are prohibited from extra-billing and user charges for medically necessary services, like primary care.

My question is to the Premier: Does the minister think it is legal that patients are being required to pay \$4,995 a year to see their family doctor?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): To reply, the Deputy Premier and Minister of Health.

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Thank you very much, Speaker—*Interjection.*

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Are you going to snipe or are you going to let me answer my question?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Thank you.

Two weeks ago, we were able to announce 78 new expanded primary care practitioner teams in the province of Ontario. As part of that announcement, Speaker, we actually also set aside an investment of \$20 million for existing primary care multidisciplinary teams in the province of Ontario.

Speaker, would I, would Premier Ford, like to do more? Absolutely. The challenge is that we had a previous Liberal government that actually cut medical seats in the province of Ontario, so we are now dealing with a shortage courtesy of the previous Liberal government. If they had not cut those 50 medical seats, we would have 200, almost 300—

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

Ms. Jessica Bell: I did not hear an answer to my question.

My question, back to the Premier and the Minister of Health: I am worried about the Conservatives' push for a two-tier health care system. It is distressing and dangerous for people to be without a family doctor, yet there are 2.2 million people in Ontario who do not have one. Ontarians should not have to go to busy emergency rooms to get access to basic care, and they should not have to pay \$4,995 a year to access their family doctor.

My question, again, to the minister: Does the minister think it's acceptable for patients to be required to pay \$4,995 a year to see their family doctor?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Again, the Canada Health Act is very clear that you cannot charge—no practitioner can charge—for OHIP-covered services.

Now, the member opposite is talking about the need for extended and added services in our primary health care space. I absolutely agree. Ontario actually leads Canada in terms of individuals who are matched with a primary care practitioner, but I know that we can do more, which is exactly why we have expanded 78 new expansions of primary care practitioners. It is something that we have not seen in the province of Ontario since multidisciplinary teams were started.

And, yes, there are primary care expansions in Toronto. There are primary care expansions in Sault Ste. Marie. There are primary care expansions in London, in Woodstock, in Innisfil and on and on. We know that we want to make sure that everyone who wants a primary care practitioner can get attached to one in their community.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

MPP Andrea Hazell: Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Minister of Transportation. Once again, the Conservatives are only showing up when it's convenient for them. Many of us on this side of the House have been advocating

all-day, two-way Milton GO service for years, and the federal government offered to provide funding for this project three years ago. The minister's predecessor declined that offer.

But it's obvious that this government is only reversing course on that because of the upcoming by-election in Milton. It appears that the only way to get this government to invest in a riding is to have the PC MPP jump ship from their caucus—and don't get me started on how much time the Premier has spent in Mississauga since December 3.

Speaker, can the minister explain to the people of Milton and Mississauga why they have had to wait this long for the government to move forward with all-day service on the Milton line?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: In 15 years of the previous Liberal government, absolutely nothing got built in this province. This government undertook the largest investment in public transit under the leadership of this Premier, and guess what, Mr. Speaker? That Liberal member voted against every single one of those transit investments, every single time, whether that's the Milton GO or whether that's the Scarborough subway extension in her own riding, in her own area. She voted against that multiple times.

When the Associate Minister of Transportation introduced One Fare, those members over there voted against it. Mr. Speaker, every time we put more money into public transit, there's one common theme: The Liberals do not vote in support of it and don't support our investments that we're making across the province. We're seeing record population growth. Our government is getting it done, and we're getting shovels in the ground, and we will take no lessons from the previous Liberal government that did nothing—

Interjections.

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The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Stop the clock. Members will please take their seats.

Interjections.

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

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

Start the clock. Supplementary?

MPP Andrea Hazell: Mr. Speaker, I will say again, there's an RCMP investigation on its way.

This government likes to boast about their investment in public transportation, meanwhile Ontarians don't see any results. My constituents in Scarborough know that all too well. What they mention less is how many of those projects have been in place for years and have only been delayed under the Conservatives: GO train electrification—delayed indefinitely under the Conservatives; Hamilton LRT—cancelled by the Conservatives in 2019 before they did what they are best at and reversed course a year later; Eglinton Crosstown—they wouldn't even give the people of Ontario an update on that one. There's still no word on all-day, two-way GO to Kitchener from the government, and the Milton service is only happening because one of their MPPs wanted to escape from the Premier.

Mr. Speaker, will the minister clarify when they will actually deliver these projects that were started years ago?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

The Minister of Transportation can reply.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Let's take a look at the record of this government: shovels in the ground on projects like the Ontario Line; shovels on the Scarborough subway extension; the largest rail infrastructure investment in this entire world—that's the leadership of this Premier. That's the record of this government. We will stand on it every single day.

We've seen rapid population growth in this province—15 years of absolute neglect by the previous Liberal government has left us in this position of gridlock all over this province. But we're building Ontario. We've introduced legislation to make sure we can speed up the process of building subways and transit.

Mr. Speaker, just look at Scarborough. That member, that government had 15 years to act for the people of Scarborough. They did absolutely nothing. It was this Premier and the members from Scarborough that committed to investing in Scarborough and building transit there. When we look at the Milton GO, when we look at GO rail, the previous Liberal government made no investments to make sure that we could have better transit for the people of Milton and Mississauga. Our government is delivering, and we will keep building—

Interjections.

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

EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS

Mr. Billy Pang: My question is for the Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development. The restaurant and hospitality industry is essential to our province's economy and labour market. People employed in this industry work day and night to provide high-quality service and experience for Ontarians and tourists alike. Unfortunately, unpaid trial shifts and punitive deductions are still commonplace for workers in the sector. This is unacceptable. Our government must ensure that workers in the service industry are well supported and their earnings are safeguarded.

Speaker, can the minister please explain how our government is delivering better protections and bigger paycheques for Ontario's workers?

Hon. David Piccini: It's so nice to be back here with everyone, and thank you to the member for that important question.

Speaker, I think, yesterday, on Family Day, many people likely spent a lot of time with Ontario's fantastic restaurant and hospitality workers. I'd like to thank Kelly, Tracy and the incredible team at Restaurants Canada for the work that they do. In fact, it's 400,000 diligent workers in Ontario's service sector who get up each and every day, working hard, and that's why we've tackled to implement significant measures to support them.

In our latest Working for Workers bill, we've introduced measures that, if passed, will disclose salary ranges

in job postings, ban unpaid trial shifts and prohibit wage deductions in instances like dine-and-dash. These are important measures we're taking to ensure that we stand with these great workers who help make our precious time with friends and family worth it. I want to thank them for the great work that they do. This government will always have their backs.

Thank you, Speaker, for the question.

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

Mr. Billy Pang: Thank you to the minister for that response. I'm pleased to hear that our government is taking a solid stance to protect the hard-working individuals in our service sector. These dedicated workers often face long, unpredictable hours with high stress and financial instability. They don't deserve to have their wages deducted or see themselves put in harm's way. Our government must do all that we can to ensure service workers are paid what they are owed while having a safe and healthy environment to work in.

Speaker, can the minister please share how our government is ensuring all workers have every opportunity to earn a good living and provide for their families?

Hon. David Piccini: Again, thank you to that incredible member. I look forward to hopefully joining him in his riding at some of the great restaurants that are there.

I want to touch on two other measures we're taking. One, we're ensuring the disclosure of policies related to sharing of pooled tips in restaurants—that's another important measure we've heard from workers is important—and empowering those workers to take home more of their tip pay. We've seen in many restaurants they use apps on your phone now to access your tips, and that's taking deductions off of the hard-working pay of these workers. That's why we're empowering them to select where and how those tips get deposited into the bank accounts of these hard-working workers.

But I will just close saying, for these workers to work, you actually need to create the conditions for jobs. That's why our government has worked so hard. You've heard from the Minister of Economic Development the incredible conditions we've put in place to attract these high-paying jobs in Ontario that support our hospitality and service workers—

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

The next question.

ÉDUCATION EN FRANÇAIS

FRENCH-LANGUAGE EDUCATION

M. Guy Bourgouin: Ma question est pour le premier ministre.

Le contenu du rapport « PEQAB » que la ministre des Collèges et Universités a tenté de cacher et qu'on dit avoir influencé le refus du financement de l'Université de Sudbury est clair : l'université répond et même dépasse les critères pour recevoir du financement.

Monsieur le Premier Ministre, expliquez aux Franco-Ontariens pourquoi vous persistez à refuser de financer

cette institution. Êtes-vous simplement complètement indifférent aux besoins de la communauté francophone?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): To respond, the Minister of Colleges and Universities.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Thank you to the member for that question, but let me be clear: This government has done more for francophone post-secondary education in Ontario than any previous government. We stood up not only one but two francophone universities.

Let me be clear: The Ontario government was never directly providing funding to the University of Sudbury as it was never a stand-alone institution. But when the proposals were submitted to make the University of Sudbury a stand-alone institution, our government did a thorough assessment and concluded that it did not reflect the current demand, the enrolment trends or the existing capacity of institutions offering French-language programs in the Greater Sudbury area.

Look, over the past five years, domestic enrolment in francophone-language-education universities has declined by 30% in Ontario. So at this point, it would be irresponsible to stand up a third institution.

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

M. Guy Bourgouin: Monsieur le Président, c'est avec des réponses comme ça que la communauté n'a aucun respect pour cette ministre.

Le Droit a révélé que la ministre avait déjà dit oui à l'Université de Sudbury pour du financement. Ma question pour le premier ministre : qui est passé par-dessus les pouvoirs de la ministre pour retirer le financement qu'elle avait octroyé à l'Université de Sudbury?

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Thank you again for that question. But as I said, over the years, domestic enrolment of francophone education has been decreasing in Ontario, so it's absolutely irresponsible for us to stand up another institution.

We have done more for francophone education in this province. We respect francophone education and giving students the opportunity. We stood up not only the Université de l'Ontario français but also the University of Hearst, so two stand-alone universities. We are giving students the opportunity to study in francophone education in this province. That's why we are supporting sectors like health human resources by ensuring that Collège Boréal has the opportunity for stand-alone nursing not only in Sudbury, but also in Toronto. I also had the opportunity, with the Minister of Education, to announce more French-language teacher positions right here at the Université de l'Ontario français. So we are doing more for French-language university in this province than any other government has in the past, and we will continue to be responsible with the taxpayers' dollars.

1130

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I want to welcome everyone back, especially my new colleague from Kitchener Centre.

My question is for the Premier. Your government is not getting it done when it comes to the housing crisis. Instead of building homes ordinary people can afford, you've wasted time and money on backroom deals for speculators.

I've put forward a common-sense bill to quickly build more homes and lower costs without expensive sprawl onto farms, forests and wetlands. Speaker, will the Premier say yes to legalizing housing by ending exclusionary zoning, so we can build as-of-right fourplexes and four-storey homes that people can afford in the communities they know and love?

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

To reply, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I appreciate the opportunity to address the member's question. The member knows—I've said it on numerous occasions, and given his proximity to previous Liberal members and the previous government, he will know—that we inherited a housing crisis, ostensibly because of the obstacles that were put in the way of building homes across the province of Ontario.

Part of our housing supply action plan since we came into government back in 2018 has been to remove those obstacles, and we are starting to see, month after month, progress on that. Housing starts have continuously increased. I'm very confident that we will have met our target for last year, and we have seen some strong results in January despite the fact that a federal Liberal government with high inflation, high interest rate policies has obviously caused some challenges. We will overcome those challenges, Mr. Speaker. We will continue to build a strong foundation for building more homes across the province of Ontario and more homes across all categories. That's why we've been so excited by what we're seeing on the purpose-built rental side, Mr. Speaker. We're going to double down and we're going to continue to make progress, because all Ontarians need us to do that.

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

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Speaker, respectfully, the minister's claims don't match up with the everyday reality people are facing. Times are tough. Rents are going up. Housing starts are going down. Young people are tired of waiting. They are tired of working two jobs just to pay the rent, tired of being in their parents' basements, tired of driving until they qualify for a mortgage. They're losing hope that they'll ever own a home. Rosy rhetoric will not get it done.

Speaker, will the Premier say no to speculators by saying yes to homes people can afford, by legalizing fourplexes and four-storeys as of right in neighbourhoods across this province in the communities people love?

Hon. Paul Calandra: I certainly wouldn't call the actions of this government over the last number of years "rosy rhetoric." In fact, we're seeing housing starts continue to increase month after month, and we're seeing progress, certainly, on purpose-built rental. We have the highest levels in the history of this province.

In fact, a very good friend of mine, a young gentleman who is just starting off his career, Nicholas Quadrini, was talking to me just the other day about the importance of giving him the opportunity to be able to buy a home. It is a dream that his parents have had. It's a dream that Ontarians have come to this province for, Mr. Speaker.

But this is a member who talks about the costs associated with buying a home. This is a member who supports a carbon tax. This is a member who votes in favour of every single obstacle and tax that is in the way of people buying homes. The result—high inflation, high interest rates—is what is forcing people out of the market, Mr. Speaker.

We are going to do our best to make it more affordable. But more importantly, we're going to remove the obstacles that have gotten in the way of building homes. We have been doing that, and we're seeing the results of that.

TAXATION

Mr. Will Bouma: My question is for the Minister of Energy. We all know that the federal carbon tax is making life more expensive for everyone in the province of Ontario. Families and businesses across the province already feel the carbon tax's impact on their energy bills every single month. With another increase shortly approaching, people are angry that the federal government continues to ignore their concerns. They think it's unfair that the pause on the carbon tax doesn't apply to over 70% of Ontarians that use more environmentally friendly forms of energy like propane and natural gas for home heating.

The people of Ontario deserve to be treated fairly. Speaker, can the minister please explain the impact that the next carbon tax hike will have on Ontario?

Hon. Todd Smith: Thanks to the member opposite for the question. April 1 is the date of the carbon tax increase by the federal government, and that's no joke, Mr. Speaker. It's not just a carbon tax that's costing gas customers more, it's driving up the price of everything. The Minister of Agriculture knows just as well as anybody that it's driving up the cost of fuel for tractors. It's driving up the cost of fuel for drying the products as they come off the fields. It's driving up the cost of all those trucks that are transporting to the distribution centres and then the cost of the trucks to get them to the grocery stores. It's driving up the cost at the grocery stores because they pay carbon tax too.

There's one party in this Legislature that's opposed to the carbon tax, and that's Doug Ford and the Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario. On April 1, we have to, as a group here in this Legislature, pressure the federal government not to cause an increase to the affordability crisis for the people of Ontario and for the people of Canada.

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

Mr. Will Bouma: Thank you, Minister, for that response. Our government has been speaking up against the carbon tax since day one. We knew that this punitive tax would increase costs for everyone in our communities. The unfortunate reality is that it's only going to keep getting more

expensive because the federal government and opposition parties here want to nearly triple that tax by 2030. They are actually happy to see this tax go up once again in April.

Speaker, can the minister please explain why Ontario families cannot afford the tax hikes that the Liberals and the NDP are planning?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

The Minister of Energy.

Hon. Todd Smith: Mr. Speaker, again, on April 1, the federal government plans on driving up the carbon tax and making life more affordable for not just for the people of Ontario but for people right across Canada.

While the NDP have waffled around a little bit on whether or not we should be removing the carbon tax off the price of gasoline and home heating fuels, one party has remained steadfast in their support for the federal carbon tax, and that's Bonnie Crombie and the Liberal Party of Ontario. As a matter of fact, members have stood in this House from that caucus and said that the people of Ontario and people of Canada are better off as a result of having a carbon tax than they are in eliminating that carbon tax.

We will stand every day in opposition to this crippling carbon tax that's driving up the price of not just—

Interjections.

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

The next question.

ACCESSIBILITY FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

MPP Lise Vaugeois: According to the final report on the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, your government is failing on every measure to make Ontario barrier-free by 2025. Perhaps it's not surprising, then, that your government hid this report for six months. Frankly, it's unacceptable that you aren't going to reach this target, and it's unacceptable that you have been hiding the truth. You owe people with disabilities an apology and you owe them action.

Will the government finally agree to work with the AODA Alliance and make Ontario barrier-free for the nearly three million Ontarians with disabilities?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Minister for Seniors and Accessibility.

Hon. Raymond Sung Joon Cho: Thank you for the question. The AODA is driving change in Ontario every day. The feedback provided by the fourth legislative review is a great example of how Ontario is continuously working to identify barriers, to listen to feedback and make Ontario accessible.

Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to report that we are doing what was asked. Thanks to the feedback from the fourth legislative review, our government is taking action on new initiatives that will provide direct experience on AODA issues from people with those disabilities. This is exactly what the AODA meant for us to do.

1140

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

MPP Lise Vaugeois: Your government pledges equity and education, but the ministry doesn't set or track standards. Support for every single special-needs student is undermined every time this government cuts funding to education, and it has cut funding again.

Six months ago, your Minister of Education was again asked by Ontario parents of visually impaired children to address the serious shortage of positions for teachers of blind students in our schools and substandard training for them. They have not yet seen any action or received a response.

Premier, will you direct your Minister of Education to meet with this parent group and solve this problem that has festered for over half a decade?

Hon. Raymond Sung Joon Cho: Mr. Speaker, we are doing what the AODA meant for us to do. Our government is taking action on new initiatives that will provide direct experience on AODA issues from people with disabilities. We are building evacuation plans for all government buildings to ensure safe evacuation of people with disabilities. We'll ensure all government procurement complies with the AODA. We are using recommendations from the fourth legislative review to achieve and exceed the goals of the AODA. We are getting it done.

CHARITABLE GAMING

Mr. Graham McGregor: It's great to be here with everybody.

My question is for the Attorney General now. Thanks to the Liberal carbon tax and inflation, the cost of living is out of control. For many families in Ontario, the cost of programming is actually the biggest barrier in accessing physical activity programs for their children.

Organizations like the Jays Care Foundation, a Toronto-based registered charity, work to level the playing field for children and youth in the country. Over the years, kids in our province have enjoyed the safe and accessible programs Jays Care offers to build friendships and develop recreational skills.

It's important our government continues to support initiatives that enable children to stay healthy and active. Speaker, can the Attorney General please share our government's efforts in helping Ontario youth get active through collaborating with the jares care foundation?

Hon. Doug Downey: Thank you to my colleague from Brampton North for his question. Improving the health and well-being of our next generation has been our government's priority since day one and we remain committed to doing so.

Last Monday, the Minister of Long-Term Care and I joined our provincial colleagues in Halifax to announce the expansion of Jays Care to Nova Scotia. Our government is pleased to support the charitable works of the Jays Care Foundation and the interprovincial framework that expands access to the Jays Care 50/50 raffle. It's a raffle that uses the power of sport and play to improve the lives of

youth across the country. This is the first time Canadians outside of Ontario have been able to take part. This is a model that is a first in North America, Mr. Speaker, and I'm proud to say that this type of work can only be done when we come together as a team.

Speaker, our government is leading the way in helping more young people stay active and healthy in their everyday lives. Our announcement in Cole Harbour last Monday, along with Minister LeBlanc, is a first of a kind. I'll have more to say in supplementary.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary?

Mr. Graham McGregor: Gosh, Speaker, I think I'm so excited to be with my colleagues, I called it the "jares care." It's the Jays Care. I just want to clarify my record.

I want to thank the Attorney General for his response. It's great to see our government demonstrate outstanding leadership in connecting more children and youth to sport and recreation opportunities.

Physical activity plays a significant role in strengthening kids' overall well-being. However, many families are not able to enrol their children in sports programs due to financial constraints.

Jays Care creates programs that are accessible and provides pathways for kids to enjoy sports and play with their peers. I encourage everyone in this House to learn more about the Jays Care program and how you can help one more kid build their happy and healthy future.

Speaker, can the Attorney General elaborate on how this historic deal supports Ontario's children and youth in sports?

Hon. Doug Downey: I sure can. Thank you to the member from Brampton North for the question. He's a steadfast advocate and leader in his own community, Mr. Speaker, so it's great to see his enthusiasm for this historic agreement.

That's what it's all about: the children in our communities. Affordability is an issue these days, and this will help. Building strong communities and improving the lives of people, Jays Care supports 59,000 kids in Jays Care programs. Just last year alone, in 2023, 2,399 coaches and leaders were trained, 15 more baseball fields were refurbished or built, and the list goes on. This interprovincial agreement will allow more people to get involved in the big game. Whether you're in Ontario or down east in Nova Scotia, you can participate and support more kids and youth in sports.

By expanding access to Jays Care 50/50 in Nova Scotia, the Jays Care Foundation is supporting our mission and, likewise, the great folks in Premier Houston's government. Mr. Speaker, I think there's no doubt: We hit this one out of the park.

VISITORS

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

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I'd like to introduce my guests today. Our constituency team, our fresh group: Courtney, Patience and Eda are joining us from downtown Kitchener-

er. And my dad, Brendan Clancy, is here; my kids, James and Zidra; and my husband, Ryan.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): There being no further business this morning, this House stands in recess until 3 p.m.

The House recessed from 1146 to 1500.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

M^{me} France Gélinas: It gives me great pleasure to introduce the one and only, hip-hop artist from Ontario, Bishop Brigante. He's here with his wife Melanie McVey, his dad, Oscar Parra, and his friend Atiba Roach. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: I want to make two important introductions today: my policy adviser, Paulina Awwadeh, who has done an incredible job helping with the introduction of the next piece of legislation; and Dakota Brasier, who is also here to support and for all of her help with the media side.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: Today we're joined by the co-leaders of the Green Party of Canada, Elizabeth May, who is the MP for Saanich–Gulf Islands, an environmentalist, author, activist and lawyer, and the longest-serving female leader of a Canadian federal party; and Jonathan Pedneault, a human rights journalist and author-turned-politician. Thank you very much for joining us today.

Mr. Robert Bailey: I'd like to introduce two visitors from my riding of Sarnia–Lambton, here for the tributes later this afternoon: Mr. Dave Brown and his son Taylor, from Sarnia–Lambton and Toronto, respectively. Thank you, and welcome to Queen's Park.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: I beg leave to present a report on Value-for-Money Audit: Conserving the Niagara Escarpment, 2022 Annual Report of the Office of the Auditor General of Ontario, from the Standing Committee on Public Accounts and move the adoption of its recommendations.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Mr. Rakocevic presents the committee's report and moves the adoption of its recommendations. Does the member wish to make a brief statement?

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Yes, Speaker. Thank you. As Chair of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, I'm pleased to table the committee's report today entitled Value-for-Money Audit: Conserving the Niagara Escarpment, from the 2022 Annual Report of the Office of the Auditor General of Ontario.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the permanent membership of the committee and substitute members who participated in the public hearings and report-writing process. The committee extends its appre-

ciation to officials from the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry and the Niagara Escarpment Commission.

The committee also acknowledges the assistance provided by the Office of the Auditor General, the Clerk of the Committee and legislative research.

With that, I move adjournment of the debate.

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

Debate adjourned.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON JUSTICE POLICY

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

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Mr. Wai Lam (William) Wong): Your committee begs to report the following bill without amendment:

Bill 153, An Act to amend the Ontario Underground Infrastructure Notification System Act, 2012 / Projet de loi 153, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2012 sur un système d'information sur les infrastructures souterraines en Ontario.

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.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL POLICY

Mr. Brian Riddell: I beg leave to present a report from the Standing Committee on Social Policy and move its adoption.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Mr. Wai Lam (William) Wong): Your committee begs to report the following bill without amendment:

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): 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

GET IT DONE ACT, 2024

LOI DE 2024 POUR PASSER À L'ACTION

Mr. Sarkaria moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 162, An Act to enact the Protecting Against Carbon Taxes Act, 2024 and amend various Acts / Projet de loi 162, Loi édictant la Loi de 2024 sur la protection contre les taxes sur le carbone et modifiant diverses lois.

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 Transportation care to give a brief explanation of his bill?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: The Get It Done Act will allow Ontario to accelerate construction of transit, housing and infrastructure projects that we need to support our growing population. This bill will also make life more affordable for families and businesses across the province.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

RELIEF FOR RENTERS ACT, 2024 LOI DE 2024 VISANT À ALLÉGER LE FARDEAU DES LOCATAIRES

MPP Hazell moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 163, An Act to amend the Residential Tenancies Act, 2006 / Projet de loi 163, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2006 sur la location à usage d'habitation.

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

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'll invite the member to give a brief explanation of her bill, if she wishes to do so.

MPP Andrea Hazell: The bill amends the Residential Tenancies Act, 2006, to provide for a residential rent freeze for the calendar year 2025, subject to specified exceptions, and to provide that no landlord shall terminate the tenancy under sections 48 or 49 of the act during the same period, subject to specified exceptions.

PETITIONS

CANCER SCREENING

M^{me} France Gélinas: It gives me great pleasure to thank Mr. Bishop Brigante for this petition. He and his spouse wrote this up at a moment in his life when he really needed care. He now wants to care for other people in Ontario. In less than a month, they have collected 17,639 signatures on this petition. It reads as follows:

1510

"Lowering the Age Criteria for Colonoscopy Testing to Save Lives.

"Whereas colorectal cancer is the leading cause of death for men, and early detection is crucial for successful treatment; and

"Whereas we believe it is time to change the age criteria that doctors use to determine when patients should undergo a colonoscopy; and

"Whereas individuals are considered eligible for a colonoscopy at the age of 50. However, alarming statistics show an increasing number of young adults, both women and men, being diagnosed with this deadly disease; and

"Whereas screening at an earlier age can detect and treat colorectal cancer in its early stages, significantly improving survival rates and reducing the burden of this devastating disease; and

"Whereas expanding access to colonoscopies for men and women in their thirties can identify precancerous polyps and detect early-stage cancers that may otherwise go unnoticed until they become more advanced and difficult to treat; and

"Whereas it is essential to address the rising incidence of colorectal cancer among younger individuals and take proactive measures to protect their health;"

They petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

"To lower the age criteria for colonoscopy testing and promote greater public awareness of the importance of early detection of ... cancer."

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

I would like to thank again the family behind this petition, who joined us today, for all their efforts. Thank you for what you did.

WILDLIFE PROTECTION

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: It's nice to see everyone again after a long time in our ridings. I have a petition from the Animal Alliance:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas thousands of compassionate citizens bring wildlife to authorized non-profit wildlife rehabilitation centres;

"Whereas on September 26, 2023, according to traumatized staff and volunteers of Mally's Third Chance Raccoon Rescue and Rehabilitation centre, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry launched a massive military-style raid on the non-profit organization; and

"Whereas this is not the first time such unjustified actions have occurred; indeed in 2002, the ministry conducted a similar raid at the Ottawa-Carleton Wildlife Centre, seizing their raccoons;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"Explain why ministry staff conducted such a raid, if, as reported, there had been no site inspections for 18 months; and

"Transfer the raccoons seized from Mally's Third Chance Raccoon Rescue and Rehabilitation Sanctuary to a licensed rehabilitation facility at the cost of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry."

I will send all of these petitions with our new page, Max.

ADOPTION DISCLOSURE

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I would like to thank Kim Wilson from Bowmanville for submitting this petition:

"Extend Access to Post-Adoption Birth Information.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas current legislation does not provide access to post-adoption birth information ... to next of kin if an adult adopted person or a natural/birth parent is deceased;

“Whereas this barrier to accessing post-adoption birth information separates immediate family members and prohibits the children of deceased adopted people from gaining knowledge of their identity and possible Indigenous heritage;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to extend access to post-adoption birth information ... to next of kin, and/or extended next of kin, if an adult adopted person or a natural/birth parent is deceased.”

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

LAND USE PLANNING

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I want to thank members of my riding and communities across the province for sending this petition to legalize missing-middle and mid-rise housing in Ontario.

“Whereas Ontario is facing a housing crisis; and

“Whereas the government has a goal of building 1.5 million homes by 2031; and

“Whereas sprawl development has been shown to be more expensive and more environmentally destructive than infill development within existing urban boundaries; and

“Whereas current ... zoning laws prohibit the construction of most missing-middle and mid-rise housing developments; and

“Whereas we can address both the housing and climate crises by building missing-middle and mid-rise housing in existing neighbourhoods;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly to amend the Planning Act to allow for fourplexes and four-storey buildings province-wide and mid-rise housing ranging from six to 11 storeys on main streets and transit corridors as of right.”

Speaker, I support this petition. I will sign it and ask page Paras to bring it to the table.

SÉCURITÉ ROUTIÈRE

ROAD SAFETY

M. Guy Bourgoin: J’ai une pétition intitulée « Appuyez la Loi de Chad »—a petition to support Chad’s Law.

« À l’attention de l’Assemblée législative de l’Ontario / To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

« Attendu que l’Ontario est la seule province canadienne où il n’est pas interdit de dépasser un véhicule en passant par-dessus deux lignes jaunes pleines / Whereas Ontario is the only Canadian province that didn’t completely ban passing on double yellow lines;

« Attendu que cette manœuvre peut s’avérer mortelle et que son utilisation ne devrait pas être laissée à la discrétion du conducteur / Whereas this manœuvre can be fatal and its use should not be left to drivers’ discretion;

« Attendu que la Loi de Chad est appuyée par plusieurs municipalités, l’association des camionneurs pour la sécurité routière et des membres du service de police de l’Ontario / Whereas multiple municipalities, truckers for highway safety and multiple OPP officers support Chad’s Law;

« Attendu que la sécurité routière est l’affaire de tous et que le gouvernement de l’Ontario a la responsabilité d’améliorer la sécurité sur les autoroutes de l’Ontario / Whereas highway safety is a public concern and that the government of Ontario has the responsibility to make Ontario roads safer for everyone;

« Attendu que la Loi de Chad a été déposée à l’Assemblée législative de l’Ontario le 21 novembre 2023 et interdirait aux conducteurs de passer sur deux lignes jaunes pleines sur tout le territoire de l’Ontario / Whereas Chad’s Law has been introduced in the Legislative Assembly on November 21, 2023 and would prohibit drivers from passing on double solid yellow lines;

« Nous, soussignés, pétitionnons l’Assemblée législative de l’Ontario / We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

« D’adopter le projet de loi 152—la Loi de Chad—dès maintenant / To adopt the private member’s Bill 152—Chad’s Law—now. »

Ça me fait plaisir de signer cette pétition et la remettre à Sarah pour l’amener à la table des greffiers.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: This comes from many across Ontario who are fighting back against legislated poverty.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Ontario’s social assistance rates are well below Canada’s official Market Basket Measure poverty line and far from adequate to cover the rising costs of food and rent: \$733” a month “for individuals on OW and” \$1,308 for folks on ODSP;

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

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

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

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

I support this petition and will sign it and pass it to Mesapé, the page, to bring to the table.

1520

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ANDREW S. BRANDT

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I recognize the member for Chatham-Kent–Leamington.

Mr. Trevor Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If you seek it, you'll find unanimous consent to allow members to make statements in remembrance for the late Mr. Andrew S. Brandt, with five minutes allotted to the independent members as a group, five minutes allotted to His Majesty's loyal opposition, and five minutes allotted to His Majesty's government.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Mr. Jones is seeking the unanimous consent of the House to allow members to make statements in remembrance for the late Mr. Andrew S. Brandt, with five minutes allotted to the independent members as a group, five minutes allotted to His Majesty's loyal opposition, and five minutes allotted to His Majesty's government. Agreed? Agreed.

Today we are honoured to remember and pay tribute to a former member of our provincial Legislature, the late Mr. Andrew S. Brandt, who was the MPP for Sarnia during the 32nd, 33rd and 34th Parliaments.

Joining us in the Speaker's gallery are Mr. Brandt's friends David Brown and Taylor Brown. Also in the Speaker's gallery are David Warner, Speaker during the 35th Parliament; Steve Gilchrist, MPP for Scarborough East during the 36th and 37th Parliaments; Phil Gillies, MPP for Brantford during the 32nd and 33rd Parliaments; and Judy Marsales, MPP for Hamilton West during the 38th Parliament and chair of the Ontario Association of Former Parliamentarians. Welcome.

We'll begin by recognizing the member for Hamilton Mountain.

Miss Monique Taylor: I'm honoured to rise today to pay tribute to the late Mr. Andrew S. Brandt, who served as the Conservative MPP for the former riding of Sarnia, which later became the riding of Sarnia-Lambton, from 1981 to 1990. He was appointed the Minister of the Environment in 1983 and the Minister of Industry and Trade in 1985.

I'd also like to welcome Mr. Brandt's family and friends who are here with us today and watching from home. I know the Speaker has mentioned your names, but it's an honour to mention your names as well. We're joined by his friends David Brown and Taylor Brown and former MPPs David Warner, Judy Marsales, Steve Gilchrist and Phil Gillies. Thank you all for being here.

Andrew S. Brandt, affectionately known by many as Andy, served in many elected roles over the decades of politics in the city of Sarnia. He was known as a leader, a negotiator, and was well-respected by his constituents and colleagues.

Before entering the stage of politics, Mr. Brandt owned a music shop, the Academy of Musical Arts, which gave him the opportunity to share his love of music and his own talents in playing many musical instruments.

Prior to his service in the Ontario Legislature, Mr. Brandt had already garnered a rich career in politics and public service. In 1971, he won his first campaign and was elected to the city of Sarnia council, where he served until 1975. He then went on to be elected as the mayor of Sarnia from 1975 until 1980, MPP for Sarnia from 1981 until 1990, interim leader of the Ontario PC Party from 1987

until 1990, and then head of the LCBO from 1991 until 2006.

Mr. Brandt was truly focused on building relationships, strengthening voices at all levels of government and staying true to one's own morals and values. He rallied, during his years in municipal government, to raise issues that were important to his residents, who he always took time to connect with. He amplified their voices at many tables, including city council chambers, the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, where he was the former vice-president, and as a member of the chamber of commerce.

His accomplishments made lasting impacts in Sarnia, including the approval of Highway 402, downtown rejuvenation and the establishment of the Sarnia Bay Marina, which was later renamed in his honour.

As a former MPP, Mr. Brandt pushed back against the federal government's energy program, despite his party being largely in favour of it. He served as the Ontario PC Party interim leader during a difficult period and was credited with breathing new life into the party during his leadership.

Despite a tireless career in politics and community service, Mr. Brandt always approached absolutely everyone with a deep respect, no matter their challenges or their circumstances. He was admired for his calm nature, laid-back attitude and his jovial approach, including the many jokes he made to break the ice. Mr. Brandt was truly a dedicated representative, a man of community service and a dear friend to many.

He held several other prestigious roles, including head of the LCBO, as was mentioned, former president of the Kiwanis Club, former chairman of the United Appeal, over 20 years chairing the Lambton College Foundation and honorary member of Canada's three armed forces. Every role was fulfilled with dedication, determination and the highest level of engagement.

I'm honoured to pay tribute to Mr. Andrew S. Brandt and all that he has done for Sarnia and the province of Ontario. I would like to thank Mr. Brandt's wife, Patricia; his two daughters, Sheree and Lori; his grandchildren and his great-grandchildren all for sharing him with Sarnia and the province of Ontario. We all know that we're not able to do this job without the loving support of our families, so a big thank you to them.

Mr. Brandt lives on in his immortalized words in Hansard and in the many results of the accomplishments and achievements he made throughout his political career. Most of all, he lives on in the lives and memories of his loving and proud family and all who had the pleasure of knowing him and sharing his vision, laughter and leadership.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): I'll now recognize the member for Ottawa South.

Mr. John Fraser: It's an honour today to pay tribute to Andrew S. Brandt—or Andy, as he preferred to be called—who served the people of Sarnia in these chambers from 1981 to 1990 in various roles.

Although I didn't know Mr. Brandt personally, I've been told that he lived a life of service and leadership. He

always strived to make a positive difference and left a lasting legacy.

Born in London, Ontario, in 1938, Mr. Brandt discovered his passion for music at an early age. He spent lots of time on the music scene and went on to become a professional accordion player. He was a man of many talents and his renowned band, Andy Brandt and the El Dorados, gained wide recognition in the community. He always wanted to promote the importance of music to our youth, so later he founded the Academy of Musical Arts, where he taught and inspired many aspiring musicians.

Mr. Brandt had a calling for public service, and prior to being elected as an MPP, he first served as an alderman and then as mayor from 1971 to 1980. Shortly after taking office as alderman, he said he wanted to be remembered as the man responsible for changing Sarnia's direction. Accomplishments during this tenure included the approval for Highway 402 and working with private developers to rejuvenate the downtown core.

In 1981, he was elected as the MPP for Sarnia and joined the Progressive Conservative government of Bill Davis. During this time, he held various positions, including Minister of the Environment, industry and trade, and consumer and commercial relations. He was a strong advocate for his constituents and a respected voice in this Legislature.

1530

Mr. Brandt then took on the tough task of being the interim leader of the Progressive Conservatives in 1987 after the party suffered a devastating defeat, something I can relate to. Andrew led the PCs through some of the toughest times in their party's history and he brought new life to the Tories. What that tells me is, he was able to bring people together at a time when everything was there to drive them apart, that he had that special kind of talent to be able to do that. Now, it's said he wasn't shy when he got to the mike, and that's what I've heard. But no matter what the crowd, he was always cheerful and got a laugh. It's funny, I was talking to Sean Conway, another long-serving member in this Legislature here, and what Sean said is, he really could have been a stand-up comedian. Whenever a hospital was saying, "We want to do a fundraiser," he said, "Get Andy Brandt." So it says something.

After he served here at Queen's Park—everybody loved him here—he became the chair of the LCBO. He was appointed under my colleagues here on my right-hand side, who are actually on the left, and then reappointed under Dalton McGuinty. That says something about the kind of person that he was, that he could bring people together, that he knew what he wanted to get done. He revitalized the LCBO. I mean, all of us remember writing down those numbers and getting the brown paper bags. Things changed. That's a good thing.

He was a musician, a businessman, a mayor, a minister and a leader. And he brought integrity, compassion and vision to this Legislature. He's left a lasting legacy here in Ontario and beyond. I know that he will be dearly missed by his family, his friends and colleagues, who will always remember his kindness, his humour and his wisdom.

To all of his family who are here today, thank you for sharing him with us. We all know this: Our families give a lot to this place. We appreciate that, and I'm sure that Andy appreciated that as well.

Thank you very much, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Thank you. I now recognize the member for Sarnia-Lambton.

Mr. Robert Bailey: It's a great privilege to be able to stand here today. I only attended the visitation, the wake, in the last two or three weeks for Andrew S. Brandt. I never knew until his obituary what the S stood for: Steven. I asked many, many people, "What's the S in Andrew S. Brant?" And no one could tell me. I always thought it was for "success," but I found out it was Steven.

I'd like to welcome—he's already been introduced, but I will be introducing a special guest from Sarnia-Lambton today in the Speaker's gallery, Mr. Dave Brown, or "Brownie" as he's known back in Sarnia; and his son, Taylor, from Toronto. Dave is a long-time friend of the former member that we're honouring today. From time to time, each of us as members have the opportunity to stand in this place and speak about our former predecessors, colleagues and friends, and Andy was all three of those to me. It's a chance to recognize our former members for carrying out the responsibility that we're all sent here to do, and that is to best serve the people of our communities and the province based on our abilities and our talents and whatever else we can bring to this place in our own unique way.

Andy was known by many names back home: Action Andy, the Chairman—I think Brownie hung that on him—the Happy Warrior. Mayor Bradley referred to him as a Happy Warrior. I always think of Al Smith, mayor of New York, back in the 1930s. That was the way they referred to Al Smith, and Andy Brandt certainly was a happy warrior. He had many other endearing terms as well.

Andy was the perfect example of someone who did things his own way, in a unique way, and was deeply respected and liked by everyone who had the chance to work with him. I wanted to mention that the member from Ottawa South talked about playing the accordion. He certainly did. He came here from London. He always told me he was born on the other side of the tracks. I don't know, but he came to Sarnia and was successful.

He started the Academy of Musical Arts. He sold all kinds of accordions, gave lessons to people. Later, when he was on council, he was up in the council chamber one day and he was going to do some accordion lessons later, and he remembered he hadn't locked the car. He ran downstairs and he said, "I better go lock the car. I left an accordion in the backseat." And much to his surprise, when he got down there, someone had placed two more accordions in the back seat of the car. So I don't know whether that was a reflection on Andy's musical ability or what people felt about accordions, but we'll leave that to others to decide. I always laughed when he told me that joke—it might have been a story; you never knew with Andy.

He had a long, accomplished career, as others have talked about here, in politics and public service. I won't go into

all the detail, because you've all said it many times—the alderman, city of Sarnia mayor, MPP, cabinet minister, then the interim leader. It was a very tough time, as the member from Ottawa South knows, leading, I think, a moribund caucus at the time—16 members, if I remember right—in 1987.

He knew the challenges, serving both in government and opposition, of balancing local needs with provincial priorities, of dealing with personalities and personal agendas, of election victory and defeat.

As Andy always said, “I’ve won, and I’ve lost. Winning is far better.”

Yet, throughout it all—all the debates and the political rancour, the partisanship and posturing—Andy understood that relationships were the key to moving things forward to a better place.

Andy, as I said, had many nicknames over the years—the Happy Warrior, Action Andy, Mr. Chair—but to most of us back home, he was simply Andy.

I remember one campaign, probably the one that reduced the Conservatives to 16 seats, where he didn't even put a PC logo on his election signs back home—all it was in big letters was “Andy,” and everybody knew who to vote for. They voted for Andy and re-elected him, when a lot of others went to be defeated around that time.

I also had the great pleasure of knowing Andy for many decades, working for him. He was there the night I got nominated. I remember it just like yesterday—sitting right in the front row, beside me. I ran kind of a—I didn't think it was that great a campaign. I looked around at what the other people had—they had videos, they had this and they had that. Andy reached over and he said, “Don't worry, Bob. You'll work out”—and so it did; it worked out for me. And in every election since then, Andy has always been there to be the first person to call, give me advice, to let me know what we were doing wrong, what we were doing right.

He was very influential as the former mayor of Sarnia, helping build the petrochemical hub, and the redevelopment of Sarnia's downtown.

As the MPP for Sarnia, he also used his persuasive nature to secure funding for the Sarnia Bay Marina, now known as the Andrew S. Brandt marina, and the long-overdue completion of the Highway 402 between London and the Blue Water Bridge.

As the Minister of the Environment, Andy creating the drinking water advisory board, a first-of-its-kind committee of environmentalists who were tasked with commenting, criticizing and advising Andy and the Ministry of the Environment on their policy decisions. This is a quote from Andy: “Voice any and all of your concerns and my ministry will listen,” Andy told the committee members.

He was a rare politician who didn't take things personally and never shied away from criticism, but rather saw it as a function of political responsibility.

Following the historic end of the Big Blue Machine's dominance in Ontario politics, Andy was selected to be the steady hand on the wheel to guide, refocus and rebuild the party.

In his final days in the Legislature as the leader of the PC Party, he was lauded by three Premiers and three future Premiers for his humour, his humanness, his determination and dignity, and his commitment to both his party and the democratic process.

It has already been touched on about his career in the LCBO—15 years. He turned the once bland and outdated agency, as many remember—well, some of us in this chamber remember those days; I know there are too many younger ones who don't. Under Andy's leadership, the LCBO increased its annual sales by 94% and achieved 10 straight record dividends for the Ontario government. I think that's why he was so popular with all three parties and ended up being the government.

He also chaired the Lambton College Foundation from its inception until 2018. In 24 years, he was instrumental in raising over \$48 million for the college's multi-million dollar expansion project.

Andy will always be remembered for his gregariousness and being outgoing.

But I think the one thing I'd like to close with, on Andy's—some of his final remarks in the Legislature. He said that day, “In closing ... the unique democracy that we practise in this place is something that means a great deal to me. When we look at those things that are happening in so many parts of the world”—that could be true today—“and so many problems that have developed as a result of people not having this mechanism”—this place—“for vetting the various differences of opinion, and when you see that words are used in here as opposed to guns and violence in other areas, I believe you have got to appreciate that this is a very important ... and very critical process that just has to continue and one that we have collectively to protect to the extent that we can.”

Madam Speaker, it's been 34 years since Andy made those remarks, but his words ring just as true today. On behalf of Andy and his family that have been mentioned before, I'd like to say that the lasting impact that Andy Brandt had on this province will be here for a long, long time and he will be long-remembered in Sarnia-Lambton.

Applause.

1540

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Thank you to all the presenters and also thank you to the family and friends who have joined us today, either in person or maybe watching online.

ALBERT KOLYN

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): I will now turn to the deputy government House leader.

Mr. Trevor Jones: If you seek it, you will find unanimous consent to allow members to make statements in remembrance for the late Mr. Albert Kolyn, with five minutes allotted to the independent members as a group, five minutes allotted to His Majesty's loyal opposition and five minutes allotted to His Majesty's government.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Do we have unanimous consent to proceed with the tribute? Agreed.

I will now recognize the member for Humber River–Black Creek.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Thank you, Speaker—

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Sorry, I just missed introducing the visitors. I do apologize for the process.

I will start by acknowledging the people that have joined us today. We are honoured to remember and pay tribute to a former member of our provincial Legislature, the late Mr. Albert Kolyn, who was the MPP for Lakeshore during the 32nd Parliament. Joining us in the Speaker's gallery are Mr. Kolyn's daughters, Linda Helen Kolyn and Dr. Donna Marie Kolyn. Also in the Speaker's gallery are David Warner, Speaker during the 35th Parliament; Steve Gilchrist, MPP for Scarborough East during the 36th and 37th Parliaments; Phil Gillies, MPP for Brantford during the 32nd and 33rd Parliaments; and Judy Marsales, MPP for Hamilton West during the 38th Parliament and chair of the Ontario Association of Former Parliamentarians.

I will now turn to the first speaker for the tribute and will recognize now the member for Humber River–Black Creek.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: It is an honour to rise today on behalf of the official opposition and pay tribute to the late Albert Kolyn, formerly member of provincial Parliament for Etobicoke–Lakeshore from the years 1981 to 1985 in the 32nd Parliament of Ontario. We are fortunate to be joined here by his family and friends, including his beloved daughters Linda and Donna, and former MPPs David Warner, Steve Gilchrist, Phil Gillies and Judy Marsales.

Speaker, I never had the chance to know Mr. Kolyn, but as I learned about him in the preparation of this tribute, it painted a picture of the man I believed him to be. He was a fighter: someone who wouldn't give up. He ran several times before he successfully took his seat in this chamber over a generation ago.

He was a man of faith, an Orthodox Christian, which established his beliefs and his values. And he was proud of his Ukrainian roots and actively involved in the Ukrainian National Federation. He wanted to improve the lives of the people in the community he represented, as demonstrated by his help in securing investments for the Queensway General Hospital, now named the Queensway Health Centre.

He was a forward thinker, as demonstrated by the problems he sought to fix here a generation ago. He had concerns about the impact of changing technology on people's lives. With the growing use of computers and other similar technologies in the 1980s, he knew that proper ergonomics would be key to office workplace safety and efficiency of the rapidly changing present and future. As such, his private member's bill aimed to improve the health and safety of those using video display terminals, a technology that had grown in use during his time here in the Legislature.

He was a man of strong opinions and he wasn't afraid to argue them. He could dish it, but he could also take it, as well. When he won a bid to write an editorial column in the Sun, he praised the journalists of the time who pulled no punches in critiquing the government, of which Mr.

Kolyn was a part. Mr. Kolyn wrote at that time, "Those of us in politics need an occasional reminder of our responsibility to serve the people."

But above all, he was a family man, and I am sure of all the things that defined him, this was the most important. I know this because I had the pleasure to speak with his daughter Linda. She shared her sister Donna's eulogy for him and the obituary they both wrote together, the story of a man's life at its end, as told by his loving and devoted children.

From her words I saw a man that no newspaper clipping could capture: Sunday afternoons lying on the couch with his children, listening to classical music; patiently teaching them to ride a bike; reading to them and later encouraging them to pursue their highest education and to follow their dreams; big family dinners punctuated with good-natured arguing on the topics of the day, because being a politician is a lifelong condition and its symptoms present often years before onset of the bug; his transformation from loving father to loving grandfather, a role that he gave his all to and more; his love for his soulmate, his wife, Stephanie, together for almost 65 years, and the tender care he had for her in her last and most difficult years.

Mr. Kolyn, Al, lived a long and full life. He passed away at age 91, surrounded by his deeply loving family. We remember him here today, a man who pursued politics for the right reasons and made it because he never gave up, a man of conviction and faith, a man who raised a family and loved them dearly. May he rest in peace and may God bless his soul.

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

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Good afternoon, everyone. Today we gather to pay tribute to a remarkable individual who left an indelible mark on the political landscape of Etobicoke–Lakeshore and Ontario: Albert Kolyn, known to most as Al. I'd like to welcome Al's family and friends to Queen's Park: Linda Helen Kolyn and Dr. Donna Marie Kolyn, his daughters; David Warner; Steve Gilchrist; and Phil Gillies, who are in the chamber today. My dearest condolences to all of you and thank you for being here today.

As a former member of provincial Parliament for Etobicoke–Lakeshore, serving from 1981 to 1985 and representing the Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario, Kolyn's legacy is one of unwavering dedication to his principles and tireless service to his community. He passed at 91 years of age on January 17, 2024. He is remembered as a faithful son, brother, husband and devoted father, businessman, politician, adjudicator and friend.

Born and raised in Fort William, Al moved to Toronto to start his career as a businessman. He was proud of his Ukrainian heritage and served as a member of the Ukrainian national federation. He often connected with other Canadian Ukrainians at the St. Volodymyr Cultural Centre and his church. A man of quiet and deep faith, he was a guide for many of those in his life.

In his spare time he enjoyed reading, music, golfing, hockey and bowling. He was an active Freemason throughout his life, where he provided mentorship and support to

others. I know a little bit about that service group from my grandfather and father, but not too much.

As an MPP, Al worked hard for his constituents. He had a keen interest in politics and policy-making. During his years as MPP, he served as the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Consumer and Commercial Relations and the Chair of the Standing Committee on Administration of Justice.

While he was an MPP for only a few years, his passion for politics and his passion for Etobicoke was his life's work, and it showed. I thank you, Al, for your hard work and efforts, leading to positive change for our province and for the riding of Etobicoke–Lakeshore, which you so passionately served. Today and every day, you are fondly remembered and honoured here at Queen's Park and in the minds of all you touched. Rest in peace, Albert Kolyn.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): I now recognize the member for Etobicoke–Lakeshore.

1550

Ms. Christine Hogarth: It is an honour to rise and pay tribute to the former MPP for Lakeshore, Albert “Al” Kolyn, who served his constituents from 1981 to 1985 in the Bill Davis and Frank Miller governments. I also want to give a warm welcome to his daughters, Linda Helen Kolyn and Dr. Donna Marie Kolyn, as well as some of his friends who he served with and Speaker David Warner. Thank you all for being here today.

I must admit, while preparing this tribute, I had to dive into Mr. Kolyn's accomplishments and history. Unfortunately, I did not have the opportunity and privilege to meet Al, although I always hear good things about him when walking around the riding.

Al had unconditional love for his family. He liked fixing things, including classic cars. He was an avid reader and enjoyed playing hockey, bowling and golf. He loved politics. He was a force in the Ukrainian community, and he volunteered his time with the Ukrainian National Federation. And he was a respected Freemason.

I was charmed to discover that Al and I are from the same community in northern Ontario. Al was born and raised in Fort William, Ontario. For those of you who do not know, Fort William later amalgamated into the city of Thunder Bay, my hometown. In addition to Al and I both being from the same area and having had the privilege to represent Etobicoke–Lakeshore, our current federal member, James Maloney, is also from Thunder Bay, which I think is a very interesting coincidence.

Interjection.

Ms. Christine Hogarth: It is.

While learning about Al Kolyn's character, one quality stood out for me, and that quality is perseverance. Al was an extremely hard worker. His work ethic was reflected both inside and outside of his time in politics. When he was only 17, he moved to the GTA to make an income to support his father's medical bills. He was a businessman in the hotel and bar industry. In fact, he owned and managed the Beverley Tavern situated at 240 Queen Street West. The Beverley, like Al, was a unique Toronto icon.

Al's perseverance was reflected in his bid for political office. He ran for the federal Conservative Party twice in the late 1970s before he ran provincially under the Bill Davis and Frank Miller governments, where he finally secured his seat in Lakeshore. Al's time as a member was brief but accomplished. He worked closely with the former Minister of Consumer and Commercial Relations Gord Walker, as his parliamentary assistant. He was a deputy whip and was on various standing committees including administration of justice, public accounts and company law, among others.

When Al ran for his former seat again in 1987, due to his steadfast social beliefs, one paper described him as “the feisty former conservative MPP from Etobicoke–Lakeshore.” In my opinion, I think that's an accomplishment.

It has been inspiring to learn about this former member's boldness. That's what Mr. Kolyn was: bold in his beliefs. Al valued the quality of life we have in Ontario and strived to improve it, which I believe comes from being a Conservative, a Christian and a northerner. He spoke in the Legislature particularly about the importance of propane as an alternate fuel source, and he spoke about Ontario's world-class safety standards for nuclear energy.

I'd like to quote a stanza from *Good Timber*, a poem written by Douglas Malloch. Coincidentally, the stanza was also a favourite of the founder of Marriott Hotels, J. Willard Marriott, who I believe is quite fitting for Al Kolyn, considering his time in the hotel industry:

Good timber does not grow with ease:
The stronger wind, the stronger trees;
The further sky, the greater length;
The more the storm, the more the strength.
By sun and cold, by rain and snow,
In trees and men good timbers grow.

Al embodied the good timber that is only grown with resilience in the face of a challenge. On behalf of the PC caucus and the constituents of Etobicoke–Lakeshore, I'd like to give tribute to Mr. Kolyn and, of course, to his family for his service to his community. May God's eternal light shine upon him.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): I wish to thank the presenters as well as the family and friends who have joined us here in the Legislature for the tribute or if you're watching at home.

WILLIAM DARCY MCKEOUGH

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): I will now turn to the deputy government House leader.

Mr. Trevor Jones: Madam Speaker, if you seek it, you will find unanimous consent to allow members to make statements in remembrance of the late Mr. William Darcy McKeough, with five minutes allotted to the independent members as a group, five minutes allotted to His Majesty's loyal opposition and five minutes allotted to His Majesty's government.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Agreed? Do we have unanimous consent? Agreed.

Today we are honoured to remember and pay tribute to a former member of our provincial Legislature, the late Mr. William Darcy McKeough, who was the MPP for Kent West during the 27th Parliament, and Chatham–Kent during the 28th, 29th, 30th and 31st Parliaments.

Mr. McKeough's family and friends are watching from home, including his sons James and Stewart. Joining us in the Speaker's gallery are David Warner, Speaker during the 35th Parliament; Steve Gilchrist, MPP for Scarborough East during the 36th and 37th Parliaments; Phil Gillies, MPP for Brantford during the 32nd and 33rd Parliaments; and Judy Marsales, MPP for Hamilton West during the 38th Parliament and chair of the Ontario Association of Former Parliamentarians.

I will recognize the member for Hamilton West–Ancaster–Dundas for the first tribute.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: It is an honour to rise on behalf of the official opposition to pay tribute to William Darcy McKeough, who served as the member of provincial Parliament for Chatham–Kent for 15 years, from 1963 to 1978, for the Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario. Mr. McKeough passed away at the age of 90 on November 29, 2023. He is survived by his sons, Walker Stewart McKeough and James Grant McKeough; his daughter-in-law, Julia Jen; his granddaughter, Kate Reagan McKeough; and his sister-in-law, Eleanor Tow Walker.

I'd like to as well acknowledge the friends of Mr. McKeough who are here in the Legislature today: David Warner, Speaker during the 35th Parliament; Steve Gilchrist, MPP for Scarborough East during the 36th and 37th Parliaments; Phil Gillies, MPP for Brantford during the 32nd and 33rd Parliaments; and certainly Judy Marsales, a fellow Hamiltonian, a fellow MPP for Hamilton West. Welcome to the Legislature.

Mr. McKeough was born on January 31, 1933, in Chatham, and educated at Central and Cedar Springs public schools and Ridley College in St. Catharines. After receiving a bachelor of arts from the University of Western Ontario in 1954, Mr. McKeough returned home to Chatham to learn the family business.

Madam Speaker, remarkably, the McKeough family has a tradition of holding public office which dates back to 1847. That predates Confederation. It actually is older than the carvings above your chair on the walls here today. That is a remarkable family tradition of public service. So in 1959, at the age of 26, it was understandable that Mr. McKeough followed this fine family tradition when he became the sixth member of his family to hold public office, as a member of Chatham city council. It's really quite remarkable.

After four years serving on city council as chairman of the city's finance committee and on the planning board, Mr. McKeough entered provincial politics as the Progressive Conservative member for Kent West in 1963. Three years later, he was included in Premier John Robarts's cabinet as a minister without portfolio. In 1967, he became the Minister of Municipal Affairs. He was then appointed

Treasurer and Minister of Economics in 1971. In 1973, he was given the additional task of Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs. He was appointed the province's first Minister of Energy.

He was known as a workaholic, and certainly Mr. McKeough was given more and more responsibility during Premier Bill Davis's government, so much so that he was known as the "minister of everything." In his last three years as a public servant, he served as Treasurer and Minister of Economics and Intergovernmental Affairs. Wow—that's quite a record.

Mr. McKeough helped to establish regional governance during this time. Between 1968 and 1975, he helped pave the way for three restructured and 11 regional governments, and nearly 50 years later, many of these regional governments are still together—that's for the time being, anyway—so good work on his part.

He had a keen ability to steer Ontario through many turbulent economic waters, and he did this through his relationship with the Liberal Party's federal finance minister and future Prime Minister, John Turner. They collaborated across partisan lines in service of the greater good.

Mr. McKeough's son Jamie is quoted as saying that his father loved nothing more than to battle with NDP leader Stephen Lewis in the Legislature, "then go out for drinks with him ... afterwards. It was a different time, and that love of politics never left him."

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Mr. McKeough understood the important role elected officials played in upholding the values of democracy and our collective duty to represent not only our needs but the needs of those that we are all elected to serve in this House. In April 1976, Mr. McKeough quoted British Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli as saying, "I repeat ... that all power is a trust; that we are accountable for its exercise; that from the people, and for the people, all springs, and all must exist"—wise words for all of us here today.

In a time when we are facing climate change and losing precious farmlands, Mr. McKeough was ahead of his time with his recognition that, "Environmental quality must be enhanced and resources properly managed in the interests of both current and future populations." And in regard to farmland and the loss of farmland, he said that "we should in future, as we have in the past, protect the integrity of the use of fertile land for food production."

Mr. McKeough, after he retired from politics, was made an officer of the Order of Canada in 1994 for his successful business ventures and fundraising efforts on behalf of educational, medical, research and cultural institutions. He was known locally as "the Duke of Kent," and he was certainly loved and respected by many. As we can see here, he certainly made his mark on our province.

So on behalf of the Ontario NDP caucus, let me again say that it has been an honour to pay tribute to William Darcy McKeough. To his family, I will say I did not have the honour of meeting Mr. McKeough but, in researching this tribute that I paid, I learned very much from him, especially his commitment to public service and the honour

and the trust that we are all embodied with when we are elected in this House.

I also would like to say that I certainly hope your family keeps up that fine, fine tradition of holding public office. That would be the seventh generation, so that would be an incredible legacy to uphold, and I look forward to hearing that that is the case.

Let me say to his family and his friends, we give thanks for his life, and we offer condolences to his loved ones and his friends. Thank you so much for allowing me to speak on his behalf. May his memory be a blessing.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): I will recognize the member for Kingston and the Islands.

Mr. Ted Hsu: It's a great honour to rise today on behalf of the Ontario Liberal caucus to pay tribute to a former member for Chatham–Kent, nicknamed “the minister of everything,” Darcy McKeough.

Born in Chatham in 1933, Darcy came from a successful family in the Chatham community, with his great-grandfather and grandfather both serving terms as Chatham's mayor and running a business. He attended Ridley College in St. Catharines. He served three years as a city councillor in Chatham before his election to Queen's Park.

Darcy “the Duke of Kent” McKeough served Chatham–Kent for 15 years, from 1963 to 1978. There's a reason why Mr. McKeough was called “the minister of everything:” He served as the Treasurer, Minister of Economics and Intergovernmental Affairs, Energy, and Municipal Affairs, even at one point handling much of these portfolios at the same time under Premier Bill Davis. While Minister of Municipal Affairs, he implemented the regional governance system, a defining attribute of Ontario's municipal service delivery. He tabled budgets during times of troubled fiscal waters and made sure Ontario's economy remained afloat.

MPP McKeough was a man of principle and always made sure to pay respect to ones he cared for. Premier Davis's predecessor, John Robarts, was a close personal friend, so much so that Mr. Robarts was godfather to one of Darcy's children. Darcy would, paying tribute to his close friend, organize annual luncheons with his old colleagues and friends in the name of Premier John Robarts. Some of you may have even attended one or two of them.

Darcy was a keen and committed public servant who enjoyed problem-solving for the greater good of Ontario and was never afraid to do what he thought ought to have been done. He never backed down from a challenge and loved the vibrance of political life.

He was also a great colleague to many others across the aisle. He would spar with opposition members like the then-leader of the NDP and then go out for drinks after. The camaraderie was something that I think MPP McKeough missed after leaving Queen's Park. Even though we may not all agree on policy, one thing I think we can agree on is that this place is truly special.

After stepping away from the Legislature in 1978, Darcy became successful in the private sector, being the CEO and president of Union Gas and serving on the board of

directors for Hydro One. In 1994, he was made an officer of the Order of Canada for his business success and philanthropic efforts. Darcy always tried to put the well-being of Canadians first regardless of where life took him.

In November 2023, Darcy passed away after battling pneumonia at the age of 90. I want to extend my sympathies to his family members. May he rest in peace. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): I recognize the member for Chatham–Kent–Leamington.

Mr. Trevor Jones: It's an absolute honour and privilege to rise on behalf of His Majesty's government to offer these words and some of my personal memories.

As a lifelong learner and student of political science and history, I've always found it fascinating to listen to the tributes offered by our colleagues on behalf of our former members—larger-than-life people who work in this very place, serving their communities, trusted to make decisions of consequence, commanding attention and mobilizing others with their words and with their deeds.

Few members have served this province as well and as nobly as the Honourable Darcy McKeough. It's in this spirit I want to offer my sincere gratitude to one of our most esteemed past colleagues—a legend who contributed and shared his unique experiences with me and with countless others well into his 90th year. If you were sincere and interested in both listening and sharing your ideas and perspective and were prepared to debate and defend your position, Darcy would be more than pleased to offer you direct, sage advice on a wide variety of relevant topics and policy initiatives.

I feel so privileged to have had the opportunity to listen to, share with and learn from Darcy during our many personal conversations and particularly over our lunches and dinners, each appointment meticulously and diligently scheduled through the coordination of both our calendars—and Darcy's calendar was busier and more ambitious than my own.

Born in Chatham on January 31, 1933, Darcy remained active in his community and closely followed politics and current events from his home, Bally McKeough, on the beautiful shores of Lake Erie in Chatham–Kent.

Elected MPP five times between 1963 and 1977, McKeough was mockingly dubbed “the Duke of Kent” by MPP Elmer Sopha, the Liberal member from Sudbury who served from 1959 to 1971. Darcy found the first published reference to his nickname in the *Toronto Star* on November 23, 1967. Although the nomenclature was clearly meant to mock him, McKeough came to like the name. He recounted in his memoir, “After all, I know my roots, am proud of where I come from, and have a desire to help others that is becoming rare in an era in which the relentless search for materialism often substitutes for what really matters.”

As Treasurer of Ontario, Minister of Economics, Minister of Municipal Affairs, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and Minister of Energy during his time in office, McKeough coordinated the creation of regional governments to bring more efficient services to Ontario's

citizens and fought to achieve budget surpluses well before it was fashionable.

Although I knew of him from his work in our communities and through friends and contacts we had in common, I first met Darcy personally when I was a candidate in the provincial election of 2022. By then, I had already read his memoir, a gift to me by one of our friends in common.

On a sunny, cold winter afternoon, I knocked on the front door of Bally McKeough and was met immediately by the legendary lawmaker, confidante to Premiers, Ontario's minister of everything and the star character from the very pages of the books I had studied and enjoyed.

With a kind and disarming smile and, of course, the faint smell of sweet pipe tobacco in the background, he placed his hand on my shoulder and said, "Trevor Jones, my friend, you have a good name and a good reputation. I've asked around about you. I'm so happy you've come out here to see me. Now, let's get some refreshments." With that, Darcy pointed with his cane to his study down the hall and said, "Take a seat—not there, that's my seat, anywhere else—and make yourself at home, Trev." Our first conversation, like many more that followed, lasted for several hours.

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Darcy listened attentively to my story and generously shared of his own from, his early life in Chatham, to his time at Ridley College, Western University and graduating to learn business in a family business, to his time in elected office and his time after politics. At the centrepiece of each journey was his duty to public service and his love for his family.

He spoke often of the strong bond he had with his wife, Joyce. He beamed with pride when he spoke of his sons, Stewart and Jamie, and his granddaughter, Kate. I feel so fortunate for the friendship I shared with my honourable predecessor and privileged to glean some insights from the lived experiences of a gentleman who is delightful company in any social setting and who selflessly offered highly relevant solutions to contemporary matters with a level of competence, kindness, humility and charm that I hope to one day aspire to.

At our last lunch meeting in the fall of 2023, we met at one of our favourite restaurants in Chatham on the Thames River. Darcy was happy, energized and in a very spirited mood. He spoke with clarity and conviction on several timely and relevant local and provincial matters of concern—concern to him and concern to the people elected in this House. As I walked him to his car, he stopped momentarily, looked me in the eye and reminded me, "Opportunities come to those who are ready." Darcy, you were always ready.

Thank you, Darcy. On behalf of the government of Ontario, thank you for your service to the people of Ontario, for your integrity, your energy, your ideas and for caring to make meaningful contributions to all our communities.

Applause.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Thank you again to the presenters and to his sons, James and Stewart, who are watching from home and others as well. And thank you to those who are joining us in the gallery.

JOHN KEITH RIDDELL

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): I will now turn once again to the deputy government House leader.

Mr. Trevor Jones: If you seek it, you'll find unanimous consent to allow members to make statements in remembrance for the late Mr. John Keith Riddell, with five minutes allotted to His Majesty's loyal opposition, five minutes allotted to His Majesty's government and five minutes allotted to the independent members as a group.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Do we have unanimous consent? Agreed? Agreed.

Today we are honoured to remember and pay tribute to a former member of our provincial Legislature, the late Mr. John "Jack" Keith Riddell, who was the MPP for Huron–Middlesex during the 30th, 31st, 32nd and 33rd Parliaments, and Huron during the 29th and 34th Parliaments.

Joining us in the Speaker's gallery are Mr. Riddell's family and friends: his children and their spouses, Debbie Thompson, Hiram Thompson, Wayne Riddell, Debbie Riddell, Donna Overholt, Dan Overholt, Heather Riddell and Brenda Riddell; his grandchildren and their spouses, Jason Riddell, Amber Parker, Jon Parker, Lea Glavin, Marty Glavin and Kendra Bloomfield; and his great-grandchildren—that I see there—Dax Glavin and Ada Glavin. Welcome to Queen's Park.

We also have in the Speaker's gallery David Warner, Speaker during the 35th Parliament; Steve Gilchrist, MPP for Scarborough East during the 36th and 37th Parliaments; Phil Gillies, MPP for Brantford during the 32nd and 33rd Parliaments; and Judy Marsales, MPP for Hamilton West during the 38th Parliament and Chair of the Ontario Association of Former Parliamentarians.

We can now start with the presenter for the first review, the Minister of Agriculture.

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: It is an absolute honour to stand before you today to share tribute—and I'm much like Bob, our friend from Sarnia–Lambton. I wear my heart on my sleeve, and I have some amazing stories to tell. So bear with me.

It's a tribute to stand up in front of you today to talk about Jack—John, if you will, official name—Keith Riddell.

I want to welcome his family to Queen's Park. For those of you who are visiting for the first time, welcome to your House. Take time to soak it all in. And to Debbie, Wayne, Brenda, Heather and Donna, welcome back.

In preparation for today, I thought I could review important facts that are shared on the Internet and will forever immortalize Jack Riddell as a champion for rural Ontario. But I thought I'd take a different tack, Madam Speaker, and do something a little bit different, and I hope it will be appreciated by all who know Jack. It's based on some amazing stories, some amazing memories that I've been lucky to receive from Jack's five children.

You may have heard that Jack was a beloved auctioneer. So it's in that spirit, and knowing and loving the fact that while growing up, even though Brenda said they were not the von Trapp family of Huron county—Jack would regularly call upon them to sing at events when he was called upon, especially to sing the Auctioneer song. So it's

in that spirit, as I mentioned, that I would like to focus in on a couple of lines—three in particular—from the Auctioneer song. And why is it important? Well, Jack prided himself on being an auctioneer and serving people. I think it's important to recognize that even at his celebration of life in January, one of Jack's last requests of his family was to get up and sing the Auctioneer song.

The first line I would like to reference is "Gonna make my mark and be an auctioneer!" Not only did Jack achieve that position and the esteem of a beloved auctioneer, but he graduated from OAC with a bachelor of science—Ontario Agricultural College at the University of Guelph—and he went on to serve as assistant agricultural representative in the counties of Essex and Hastings. I believe Hastings came before Essex. I absolutely connected with Jack, because extension work matters, and I really valued everything that he would put into that position as an assistant ag rep. He also gleaned great experience as assistant manager for the Ontario Stockyards. He served as an agricultural specialist in the province of Saskatchewan before coming home, before coming back to Huron county, where, together with his family, they raised beef cattle and sheep prior to him winning the honour and making his mark as MPP for Huron–Middlesex from the years 1973 through to 1990. And he served as the 30th Minister of Agriculture and Food in Ontario, from 1985 to 1989.

Wayne noted, and I think it's important to share, that Jack's father, William Keith Riddell, was also a well-respected agricultural representative for the county of Middlesex, and he feels that his father had a profound impact not only on a career that was absolutely dedicated to agriculture, but he had a really important position to fill—shoes to fill, if you will—given what he learned from his father as an ag rep in Middlesex county. It really had a profound impact on the trajectory of Jack's career.

Growing up in the Riddell family meant helping in the barn, taking music lessons—and when they practised, according to Donna, Jack would join in and sing along. They also supported their dad and travelled with him, whether it was to Saskatchewan or to Toronto, when he served as the MPP and Minister of Agriculture. Heather noted that when they did make the trek to Toronto, they were sometimes treated to movies like *The Sound of Music* or a Maple Leafs game, when they joined him in Toronto.

As kids, Donna also shared that they became office support by cutting out birthday and anniversary notices from local papers that ultimately became the genesis, if you will, of a birthday card or a scroll recognizing a special anniversary. It's important to know that Jack took that role very seriously. He would be in Toronto all week, come home on Friday night and get at it. He would start attending events, meet with constituents on Saturday mornings, join his wife at events that evening. Then, Sundays, again, were dedicated to presenting scrolls, birthday cards, and then he took time for games with his family. Apparently, the children learned how to lose gracefully with Jack at the table. I think that's important because there are life lessons

everywhere we look, and Jack made sure his children had that opportunity.

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I'm glad to hear today that his grandchildren and great-grandchildren are here as well. Because again, I think it was Donna that mentioned if you learned how to speak in public, you'd be well set for life. Then, Debbie mentioned that even that premise, that thought, that value was extended to the grandchildren as well. There was one opportunity where grandchildren were flown from Centralia to Toronto for the opening of an agricultural exhibit at Ontario Place. While he was on stage, he called his grandchildren up to say a word or two. Like the old adage goes, you learn to do by doing, and Jack certainly presented opportunities for people to do that.

Growing up, the name Riddell was also synonymous with spending time with your dad. When working at the Ontario Stockyards, he bought a pony for his kids to ride. I heard from Wayne they rode that pony in the cement alleyways which, according to Wayne, proved to be a hard landing when they fell off. But in true dad style, he said he would pick them up, dust them off and put them right back on the pony. Heather noted that while their dad really didn't like the idea, they also learned how to ride sheep as well.

Jack liked to pull pranks in the barn, and his laughter filled that building to the rafters. Family was important. He never missed an opportunity to give a shout-out to his mom whenever he was at an event that she was attending, and he wasn't above letting a daughter dress him up in pigtails.

Brenda also shared, with an LOL in her email, Jack learned from his mistakes as well. For instance, Jack, appreciating the value of nutrients found in manure, used the tractor and spreader to fertilize the lawn around the house. She shared that he was quite proud of this until their mother got home, and she saw her beautiful white-sided house completely splattered and stained with manure. She wasn't impressed, but one could extrapolate that he really did make his mark in that instance.

The second line from the Auctioneer song I would like to reference today is, "You can take your place among the best." That's what Jack Riddell certainly has done. A successful MPP, and ultimately minister, understands the importance of maintaining a balance and never forgetting about local constituents. All five of Jack's children noted that working with constituents and assisting them to solve issues was what he prided himself on. In fact, it was common knowledge that it didn't matter what political stripe the person was, there was no problem too small for him to dig into and ultimately resolve.

We've heard many times how Jack would work really hard to make sure farmers had their voices heard, and as his dedication as the 30th Minister of Agriculture and Food, whether it was in legislation that he founded—for instance, the legislation on the table we know as the Farm Practices Protection Act that he worked hard on, and it has legs today—or assisting farmers when interest rates were

heading above 20% in the 1980s, or being responsible for shepherding over 30 programs through to fruition when he served as minister, he never stopped working.

For all he did prior to being elected and as a long-serving MPP and ag and food minister, Jack was inducted into the Ontario Agricultural Hall of Fame in 2017 and locally in the Huron agricultural hall of fame in the same year. He also established a scholarship from the Avon Maitland school board for a student that showed leadership and pursued an education in agriculture in Canada.

In the end, my takeaway from learning more about Jack Riddell through his children reaffirms how I felt as a young 4-H member in Huron county. He always maintained a striking pose when attending 4-H events. For instance, at our awards night, it was commonplace to see him in a fedora and suit, and he really did have a presence. When I joined him and his family on the occasion of his 90th birthday, I found his eyes still sparkled and his passion for agriculture was alive and well. We compared notes as the 30th and 40th Ministers of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, who just happened to share the same birthdate and pride in representing the breadbasket of Ontario at Queen's Park.

To close, I would like to just share some direct comments, again from Jack's children. They all concurred that representing Huron and Huron-Middlesex and serving as Minister of Agriculture and Food was the highlight of his career. They shared, "Dad loved his job! He loved helping people and making lives better in any way he could. As a family, we had him to ourselves before politics and after retirement." But they learned to share him with everyone, and though it wasn't always easy, they understood his passion. He was a man to be reckoned with, both as a father and as a politician. To be proud is an understatement.

To remember Jack Riddell today, I would like to share another message from his family: He showed what hard work was, what honesty was, what integrity was, what passion to do your best was, but also what fun was and what love of family was.

So to close, there's one last line from the Auctioneer song, and it's perfect: "Now he's the best in all the land / Let's pause and give that man a hand." God bless Jack Riddell.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Next presenter? The member for Timiskaming-Cochrane.

Mr. John Vanthof: It's an incredible honour for me to be able to stand in the House today and pay tribute to John Keith Riddell, who no one in the rest of Ontario knows as John Keith Riddell; it's Jack Riddell. I never had the opportunity to meet Jack, but as you'll see in my remarks, we owe him a lot.

He was an auctioneer, and proud of it. There's one thing about a livestock auctioneer that you need to understand: They perform a transaction between the owner/the seller and the buyer, and at the end of that transaction, both parties have to feel well treated. It's an incredible skill, and if the auctioneer doesn't do that, slowly the auction will fail. That's how it works. It's an incredible skill, and that's something that is transferrable to politics, that skill of

being able to make a deal, because an auctioneer makes a deal every time the gavel falls. That's an incredible skill, a skill that when I read through Jack's bio—a skill that he had.

He served from 1973 to 1990, and became agriculture minister in 1985. As the minister said, he brought forward legislation like the protection of farm products act and the Farm Implements Act. He actually brought forward the Ontario Farm Products Marketing Commission; he revamped it.

But to truly understand the impact that Jack Riddell had on agriculture and on the province, you have to think back to the 1970s, because the 1970s were golden in farming. Prices were high; interest was manageable. My father ran the farm at that time, and we bought and we bought and we bought. Then the 1980s hit, and everything stopped. Interest went to 20%, and that's when Jack Riddell became Minister of Agriculture. You cannot imagine—I don't think any of us can imagine the pressure of that.

I was just starting then, and those were the days of your neighbours getting foreclosed. The feds stepped in to stop foreclosures. And penny auctions: Your neighbours would gather around and stop the auctioneer, stop other people from bidding, because the whole neighbourhood was falling apart.

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One thing I noticed in reading about Jack Riddell: He said at a local meeting that we won't be able to save all farmers. That took guts to say that. It did. But he was the spokesman within cabinet that brought forward, first, temporary interest relief; then, more permanent interest relief; and a transition program for farmers who had to transition out of agriculture, which is a nice way of saying "who lost their farms." It was incredibly tough. That's why I'm so honoured to be able to recognize that—so honoured.

On behalf of the official opposition, and I think on behalf of thousands of farm families, of farms that Jack Riddell saved, including ours—we sold half our land. I took over the farm. I got my interest capped at 13% for five years—13%—but we made it through. We made it through because of representatives like Jack Riddell.

Thank you very much. We all know that no one does this alone. It takes a family; it takes a community. Families give up so much for family members who help everyone else. We know how much you've given up, but we can't, on behalf of farmers all over Canada, express our gratitude enough. Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): I'll now recognize the member for Ottawa South.

Mr. John Fraser: It's an honour to pay tribute on behalf of our Ontario Liberal caucus to John Keith Riddell, or Jack, as he was known, and to welcome his family to the Legislature. It's actually one of the biggest contingents I think we've seen. There are a lot of you, and that says something.

I want to mention something else—and I've never done this at the beginning of a tribute. But I listened to the minister's words and my colleague from the NDP, and that's a tribute: When people on all sides say the kind of heartfelt things they do about your dad—your father, your

grandfather, I should say—it's incredible. It is truly, and I want to thank them for their remarks, because they were very, very thoughtful. I'll try to match them, but it will be hard.

He was a member of the Legislature for 27 years. He was first elected in 1973, in a by-election, and it was a big win. He went on to win five more elections, and in the 29th, 30th, 31st, 32nd, 33rd and 34th Parliaments, he represented the ridings of Huron and Huron–Middlesex. He served as our party's agriculture critic for 12 years—12 years. He was a farmer, teacher, owner and operator of a livestock sales business, and he was also an auctioneer. I heard my colleague's comments on the skills that auctioneers have. Well, there's another skill we have here that would be helpful if you had had training as an auctioneer, which is, I think we get paid by the word here, and so—

Interjection.

Mr. John Fraser: It's true. It would seem that way sometimes.

His record of commitment to Ontario farmers and to agriculture and the rural way of life was unwavering. It's unmatched. He became minister of agriculture at a time when interest rates were at 20%. People weren't ready for it. People were going to lose everything. And it's one thing to be the critic—it has its challenges—but then when you have to deliver after you've been the critic, there's a lot of pressure. That's hard. People have high expectations for what you're going to deliver, and they were hurting. And as you heard from my colleague in the NDP, he did a lot to save a lot of people's livelihoods, their lives, the things that mattered most to them.

I like to try and speak to members of the Legislature who sat with the member we're paying tribute to. So I had to dig down deep, and luckily we have Jim Bradley and Sean Conway. I spoke to Jim Bradley. Here's what he had to say: "His election was a big win, and it came at a time when there were a lot of Liberal members in southwestern Ontario in rural ridings, and it was known as the rural rump. He was a vocal defender of Ontario agriculture and farms, and he wasn't shy. He was always ready to talk to any of his urban colleagues about the challenges that rural Ontarians and farmers and farm families face. He was outspoken and never shied away from sharing his view."

I also had a chance to speak with Sean Conway, another long-serving member, who in fact shared an apartment with Jack for, I think he said, almost 10 years here at Queen's Park. Here's what Sean said to me—and there are a couple of things. Sean is never at a loss for words, so the call wasn't quick. Sorry, Sean. Here's what he said: "When you shook Jack's hand, you knew he worked the land, because you'd feel it after you walked away. He had a great voice, and he spoke firmly."

Sean also had a couple of colourful stories that I can't mention right now. He said Jack was a big guy with a big smile and an even bigger heart.

Now, I know Jack's family is here today, and I do like to mention in these tributes, thank you for sharing him with us. Representing that riding in the 1970s and 1980s, the highway infrastructure wasn't quite what it is right

now. There were no planes. There might have been a train from London, but I'm sure if that was ever taken. It's a lot to be away and then to be home on weekends and doing all the work—because he wanted to help people. So I want to thank you for that.

I know, after listening to both the minister and to my colleague the House leader, that he didn't forget where he came from. He didn't forget who sent him and what they sent him to do, and that is the most important thing that we can do here.

Thank you very much for your time.

Applause.

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

I want to thank all the presenters this afternoon for their really heartfelt words. Thank you to the distinguished guests who have joined us today. Thank you to the families that have joined us here in person or remotely to watch the tributes. Those are very important, usually moving moments here in the House, and we all appreciate that. I hope you enjoy the rest of your day and that you appreciated the words that were spoken this afternoon about your loved ones.

AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH
INSTITUTE OF ONTARIO AMENDMENT
ACT, 2024

LOI DE 2024 MODIFIANT LA LOI
SUR L'INSTITUT DE RECHERCHE
AGRICOLE DE L'ONTARIO

Resuming the debate adjourned on November 28, 2023, on the motion for second reading of Bill 155, An Act to amend the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario Act / Projet de loi 155, Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'Institut de recherche agricole de l'Ontario.

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

Mr. John Vanthof: It's always an honour to be able to speak in the House and, today, speak for a whole hour on An Act to amend the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario Act. One of the changes to this act is, instead of "institute," it's going to be Agricultural Research and Innovation Ontario. So be prepared for an hour on that slight change.

Interjections.

Mr. John Vanthof: No. But it does provide a unique opportunity to actually talk about—now, it's still the agricultural institute—what it actually does, and I think that's relevant for the people of Ontario.

ARIO, as we know it, those in the agriculture community know it, is the owner of 16 agriculture research sites in the province. That's really what its meat and potatoes are.

1640

Agriculture is a big industry, and particularly agri-food is a big industry. Agriculture is a big part of it: the actual growing of the crops, the raising of the livestock. It's dependent on research, and to do research, especially in

agriculture, you need places to do it. I'm going to go through a list of a few of the things and what they do, just so you gain an appreciation. As I'm meandering through Ontario, I might stop at a few places that aren't ARIO, but we're going to do that.

We were just talking about a former agriculture minister, Jack Riddell. The first one on my list is the Ontario Aquaculture Research Centre in Alma. That was established when Jack Riddell was the Minister of Agriculture. It was also interesting for me, because I've been in agriculture my whole life and I didn't know that all of these places existed. I'm going to be honest: This is a learning experience for me as well.

Alma is about aquaculture. It's the fish research centre. I didn't know that we had a fish research centre, and I certainly didn't think it would be in Alma, but it's in Alma. In Alma they have 10 buildings and 365 fish-rearing units for production and research of a full range of fish, from eggs to brood stock. The quarantine unit has successfully introduced Atlantic salmon, Arctic char and new strains of spring-spawning rainbow trout to the Ontario aquaculture industry. Since 1993, more than 170 research studies involving species have been conducted. Maybe everybody else knew this; I didn't. It's good that we all know it.

The next one—

Mr. Graham McGregor: What else?

Mr. John Vanthof: Oh, I'm just getting started. In Arkell—Arkells is a band in Hamilton, right?

Interjection.

Mr. John Vanthof: Yes, see? But at Arkell, they do horses: standard-bred, thoroughbred and a few ponies as well. They do reproductive, respiratory and locomotion performance studies. They also do poultry and some swine at Arkell.

Then there's—I'm sure everybody can guess what they study here—Bradford. I bet you the Minister of Colleges knows what they do at Bradford. They do research on vegetable crops. Who would have thought? Who would have thought they do research on that? But they do.

Cedar Springs: That's 25 kilometres from Chatham. I've never been there, actually. I've been to Chatham, but not to Cedar Springs. There, 16 acres are used for crops, mainly apple orchards, but lately they've gone to hazelnut and ginger.

About 200 different crops are grown in Ontario. We hear that once in a while. It's really important. In the agri-food sector, I believe there are close to 800,000 people working in it. It's big. It's one and two with cars, and you can't eat cars. I wish that was my line, but it's not.

Elora has got a few. There are some really big research stations in Elora: the beef station, the dairy; the swine was just opened. There's also 400 acres of crops. I'll give credit where credit is due: The current government has put a lot of funds into Elora, as have the commodity organizations. If you go to the beef or particularly the dairy—I know dairy; I've been in dairy my whole life—you'll see some of the most modern facilities in the world at the Elora station.

I think generally the goal of research in years past has been to increase production, and that's still the goal. But

now there's also a focus on minimizing impact to the climate, so minimizing your carbon footprint, protecting other resources: water, soil.

I didn't have time in the tribute to our former minister, Minister Riddell, but actually his focus when he was minister—what he wanted his focus to be—was on foreign ownership of land, which is still a big deal, and soil erosion. But as often is the case in political life, those two issues kind of went—not by the wayside, but the focus on those two issues—when farmers were losing their farms to the banks, they weren't as worried about soil erosion or foreign ownership.

Quite frankly, in Mr. Riddell's time, he got lots of criticism. I think the current Tory government will feel for this. The former minister had lots of criticism because he opposed farmers selling pieces of their farms. We, on our farm—we had separate farms, but we had to sell pieces of our farm to keep the main one running. But if you had to sever a piece of your farm, he was opposed to that. That was, then, controversial, as it was very controversial when the current government put out a policy that they were going to allow three severances per farm lot. And guess what? They didn't have to rescind that one. That one didn't actually get fully to the light of day, I don't think. But it's a case where current events overtake the long-term goals of the industry.

So it's safe to say that Elora, getting back to the—what are we talking about? Oh, ARIO—getting back to talking about that.

Interjections.

Mr. John Vanthof: You see, all the people on the other side who do speeches like “da da da da,” they're laughing at me for forgetting the occasional word.

But the focus on Elora—I think it's obvious that it's livestock-focused. There was some controversy over Elora as well, because we used to have—and I'm going to get to it later—beef research in New Liskeard, and they moved the cows from New Liskeard to Elora—or moved the research. But if you really think about it, and especially the previous government, the current government talking about, “The future of the beef industry is in northern Ontario,” then you would think that the future of beef research would be in northern Ontario, because I'll guarantee you that not everything that works in Elora works in my colleague's riding of Kapuskasing. So that was a bit of a controversial move. There are some things that work. I'm not saying that you can't do research, that all research has to be done where you want the industry, but some things make sense, so that's still a bit of a head-scratcher that that was so centralized.

But I do believe that Beef Farmers of Ontario were in favour at the time, so I'm not criticizing them. They know more about raising beef than I do, so there could very well have been good reasons for that, but locally, we are still scratching our heads. You would think that beef research should be moving north as opposed to moving south—but that's a whole different ball of wax.

1650

There's one, and I've been to this one; I bet you not too many other people have: Emo. We have a research station

in Emo. That's a long ways away from here. There's a movie, I think, called Finding Nemo. I bet you more of you could find Nemo than find Emo.

Interjections.

Mr. Guy Bourgoïn: Fort Frances area.

Mr. John Vanthof: Yes. I'll tell you a little story about Emo. When I was on the board of Dairy Farmers of Ontario, we did the whole northern tour. There are eight committees, and we took a week and did them all. Myself and the fieldman stayed at a motel in Emo, a really nice place. This was a few years ago. We wanted to upload something or download something, so I went down to the front desk to see if we could hook up to the Internet. They looked at me and said, "Well, if you want to make a long-distance phone call, let us know." They had no clue what we were talking about regarding Internet. But the sad thing is—and I'm taking the government at its word, that by the end of 2025, everybody will have Internet; I sure hope that's the case, because it sure isn't the case now. It really isn't.

When we talk about agriculture research, you need stable Internet. So if you're going to run—the Minister of Mines has a few robotic barns, one for sure, and one in mine. But for robotic dairy barns, you need stable Internet, not just satellite Internet that cuts out once in a while when one too many people hook on. That's not what we need. And I'm not sure that that's going to be able to be the case by the end of 2025, because if all we get is satellite, there are still going to be all kinds of places in the province that aren't going to support the modern types of agriculture that we all know are what we need. It's really important. I can't stress that enough. We talk about it, and I don't think any of us disagree. We all need it, and we all know we need it. That's not a point of disagreement; it really isn't.

Just as an example, there's the interactive map where you can see where the projects are going in your riding. So I look at my riding and I have, where I live outside the town—I don't know the term, but anyway, I can see the tower from my house, and that's the kind of Internet I have. It works great. We also have a bit of a hunt camp where we would like to work a lot more, but there's no Internet there. So now, on the infrastructure map, they're putting fibre optic cable to my house, where I already have Internet, but to that lake where the hunt camp is, where there are many people who live full-time, there's no project on the docket. What they're going to get is satellite, likely. And I'm not dissing satellite. I'm not dissing anything, but it has its limitations. If that's what's promised, that's not what people think they're going to get. So if at the end of 2025, "Hey, discount on Starlink"—everybody is ready, and that's not exactly what was promised—it wasn't—and the deadline is coming very quickly. It's 2024 now, and this is all supposed to be done by 2025.

One of the issues with the way the internet program was rolled out, and this is pertinent to a lot of things: By dividing Ontario up into 40—I think it's 40—and then saying, "Okay, so you have to bid on the whole region," what you're doing is eliminating a lot of the small players who are actually the ones who were trying to provide the service in the first place. I believe Bell won our region, but

Bell had no interest in providing it in the first place, so now the locals who were trying to get it from Bell, to get it from their trunk lines—now Bell is directly competing with them with subsidized dollars.

I got a call from my local recycling guy. He has got a good little business. He recycles. Lo and behold, the government is changing how recycling is done in Ontario. That's great, but they're doing the same thing. He has to bid on a region bigger than he can ever service. What does that do? That eliminates the little guy and puts the big guy in control.

This government believes that the big private sector guy, the big private sector companies, can do things more efficiently, and all that happens is the big private sector bids on those contracts and then they take their cut, and they still farm them out to the people who are actually doing the work, over and over again.

I can remember—this was before this government took power—the same thing happened with school buses. They made the areas for school buses much bigger, so you no longer could bid on three bus routes in your local town; you had to bid on half a district, and that shut out all the little school bus companies, every one. Now we've got three or four big school bus companies, and a lot of school bus runs can't find drivers. That's part of the problem, because they've totally lost the local touch. This government has done this on steroids. Every time, it's bigger, bigger, bigger.

I took a little bit of a detour there by Emo. The next one is Huron, and Huron is just north of Centralia, with 125 acres of crops. For research, it focuses on weed control. Good.

I know quite a bit about the next one, New Liskeard. It's not quite my hometown; I farmed just a little bit north of New Liskeard. The experimental farm in New Liskeard used to have dairy, used to have beef and had crops. Now it focuses mainly on crops, rightfully so.

There is a bit of a backstory, though, to the experimental farm in New Liskeard. This is how politics are supposed to work, and I give credit where credit is due. We heard a rumour that the University of Guelph, when I first got elected, wanted to get out of New Liskeard and do all the research at Guelph, kind of à la beef cow, and shut New Liskeard down. The local community heard this, and at the time it was a Liberal government. The Minister of Agriculture was Minister McMeekin, and we arranged—our office, the office of an opposition member—a tour of that centre for the minister. We got all of the players in agriculture, the 20 movers and shakers in New Liskeard, and we organized a dinner.

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We came to an agreement to put a hold on that for two years, while local people could come up with some kind of accommodation to keep ag research in New Liskeard. That deal was the reason that the Northern Ontario Farm Innovation Alliance was created, and it's still a body that has a big impact across the north. During those two years, people realized how big the future was in agriculture in northern Ontario, and it became more of a focus.

But we did cut a deal. They sold part of the experimental farm and built a new crop research station across the road, one that was more modern. But that was the way we moved forward, and that's something that I'm pretty proud of. I've said many times to the minister, there hasn't been an official opening yet of that centre. I've told the minister this, if and when the minister comes to Timiskaming, we will treat her as a minister of the crown should be treated, with respect, and we sincerely hope that I'm invited to that—and it wasn't me; it was our community.

But there's one more step that needs to be taken—well, there are a few more steps, but one more that needs to be taken as soon as possible, on the part of the agriculture station that was sold, there is something called the SPUD unit. The SPUD unit does work with potatoes, garlic and strawberries, and what the SPUD unit does is they take the seeds—potato seeds and whatever seeds—and they break them down so there are no viruses on those seeds. Then they reintroduce those seeds back into the commercial market.

There was something that went through PEI—I believe potato wart, potato scab or something. It's to stop things like that. The reason that it was built in New Liskeard 40 years ago is because of the way the climate works, and the jet stream, and all the viruses and stuff. You southern guys have all the viruses; we're nice and clean where we are. But it's 40 years old. It's worn out, and they're spending a lot of time and effort just keeping the lights on. Everyone agrees: the potato growers, the garlic growers—all the people use it. What we need to do is move it across the highway—move a new SPUD unit across the highway next to the new ag research station, where it can keep doing its job for Ontarians for the next 40 years. Talking about this bill gives me a chance to talk about that.

While I'm talking about highways: Highways are important for moving agricultural products and moving a lot of stuff. My colleagues from northern Ontario and the people of northern Ontario will know that we spend a lot of time talking about highway safety. The member from Mushkegowuk–James Bay is putting forward legislation—I believe it's Toby's Law—to make it illegal to pass on a double line. It's great legislation. Every chance we get, we talk about highways in this House. Today I'm talking about highways' importance to agriculture, but highways in general.

On February 1 and 2, the Ministry of Transportation, the Kirkland Lake police detachment and the detachment in New Liskeard and Temiskaming Shores held a highway blitz of commercial vehicles. They pulled over 75 commercial vehicles that they did a full inspection on. Thirty-six of the 75 were pulled off the road for safety infractions—36 of 75. I'd like to thank the OPP and the MTO for that blitz, I really would, because everybody noticed, everybody was happy. But my question to the House, my question to the Minister of Transportation is, what about the other 363 days? If in those two days half the commercial trucks that were inspected were taken off the road for safety infractions—half—there's a problem.

Mr. Guy Bourgoïn: And yet we have the safest—

Mr. John Vanthof: There is a problem. The member from Mushkegowuk–James Bay is heckling his own member, Speaker, but he brings up a very, very good point. It very well may be that Ontario might statistically have the safest roads in North America, but I can guarantee you that Highway 11 north of North Bay is absolutely not the safest road in North America.

So while the food that feeds people—while we transport it across that strip, and the highway is continually closed, it's a big issue. Health care—the lack of health care, access to health care—is the number one issue in my riding but followed very closely by highway safety. I can tell you, Speaker, that when the OPP put up that post—that info doesn't come from me; that comes from the northeastern OPP, that almost half the trucks pulled over had to be kept off the road—that didn't make the residents of northern Ontario feel a lot better, because that's our main street. That's our main street.

Before I go to the next research station—we're almost halfway down the list—I'd just like to—one other statistic about Highway 11. If your car is registered in the district of Timiskaming, so where the New Liskeard Agricultural Research Station is, you are four times as likely to die in an accident on a provincial highway than if it's registered in Toronto—four times as likely to die, and yet we have to listen to “We have the safest highways in North America.” Again, I give credit where credit's due. I see that MTO or someone is doing some testing along some of our worst corners because they're planning on putting in a 2+1. I give credit where credit's due. The 2+1 is a pilot project that hopefully will make a difference, and if it makes a difference on those 14 kilometres, hopefully they keep going.

But you know what else would make a difference on Highway 11—a big difference—and not just to the people driving regular vehicles, but to truckers? Places to pull off the highway. Like, there's signs on Highway 11: “Fatigue kills.” But if you're driving a truck and you're fatigued, there's no place to pull off, so what good is the sign? What good is the sign?

We've had a terrible year, winter-wise. I think anybody from northern Ontario—it's been a really weird—

Interjection.

Mr. John Vanthof: I'm not going to repeat what the member from Sault Ste. Marie—I kind of like it, too, but do you know who benefits? When you drive now—I drive basically weekly, and because there's hardly any snow, every snowplow turnaround has got two trucks in it, because the snowplows, except for this last storm, aren't having to do much. But other than that, you can go miles and miles and miles—or kilometres and kilometres, whatever system you use—with no place to stop.

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Highway 11: You can't just pull over on a nice paved shoulder, because there isn't one. You pull a truck over on Highway 11, and unless you stay on the highway, you're not getting back on the highway. Everybody knows this, and we all laugh at the people who don't know this and end up flipping over into the ditch—and this happens a lot.

But it's not wholly that. We need better training for drivers in Ontario or drivers across Canada, no doubt, but we also need better roads.

There are big chunks of Highway 11 that were designed 50, 60 years ago, and there hasn't really been a big change. They changed the pavement, changed the culverts, but you look at the traffic—I drive around here a lot lately, and there are lots of country roads I drive here, country highways, nice roads. They're basically as good as Highway 11 except they don't have 1,800 transports a day. That's the difference. And it's just so frustrating. The government has promised, oh, for years, so maybe this is year they actually build rest stops or even parking lots, just a place to pull over.

There are big chunks that—my favourite, and this isn't in my riding. It might be in the member from Mushkegowuk—James Bay's. But anyway, when you go from Cochrane and you go west, there's a big sign. I did this a couple of years ago, so maybe it's changed now. There's a big sign that if you need towing, here's the number you have to call, but there's no cell service on either side of that sign for a long ways. So again, it's kind of like “Fatigue Kills,” right?

Now, I think it's just because—there's a lot of problems down here. I'm not saying—but it's the Trans-Canada Highway. It's the Trans-Canada Highway, and I think we all know that it's substandard, but we don't see it every day. But we do; we do. I had an MTO enforcement officer call me. He was talking about the blitz, what they did, and he goes, “Yeah, I spend most of my time in southern Ontario, but when we went on that blitz, you wouldn't believe the things that happen on Highway 11 north of North Bay.” I said, “Oh, no, we believe, because we live it.” We live it. And that's something that has to change and something that I've been talking about for the last 12 years. Maybe that blitz came because we bothered the minister enough, and that's what we're going to keep doing on behalf of the people of Ontario.

Before I go from New Liskeard to—where's the next one on my list? Oh, Ponsonby. I haven't even heard of Ponsonby before, but we're going to talk about Ponsonby. But before I go to Ponsonby, I just want to talk about climate change for a second, because climate change has a lot to do with agriculture. I'm finding this winter has a big impact on all kinds of people, short-term—basically, now we're having a bit of a winter, but usually our winter starts a lot sooner. There are a lot of people who rely on winter for their livelihood: skidoos, the people who run restaurants, servicing, the people who rent out cabins for skidoos. I have a lot of them in my riding. There was one—I stopped at their place a couple of days ago—the Tomiko restaurant on Highway 11. They put out an urgent call on Facebook: Could people help them out? Because they were just about done.

I stopped in at Temagami Shores. Tomiko has great food. Temagami Shores—great food, great rooms.

Man, it hurts when you don't have a winter, right? We have to realize those things. I don't know how we're going to address that, but changes in climate—and whether you

agree on how it's happening or how quickly it's happening, it's happening. If you want to debate me on whether climate change is real, man, I think we've got to back up a few steps. But it's impacting a lot of people, and we're going to have to come to some kind of—on how we deal with people who are losing their livelihoods through no fault of their own.

It used to be, if you bought a business or you ran a business in northern Ontario, every year is different, but you could kind of depend on winter. The one thing about living in northern Ontario: You can kind of depend on winter. That's no longer the case.

I was talking to the owner of Canadian Tire in Cochrane. He moved, I believe, from the Woodstock area. I don't know exactly if it was Canadian Tire in Woodstock, but he moved to Cochrane. When I was kid, we came from the Woodstock area too. And I asked him, “Enlighten me. Why did you pick Cochrane?” There's a pretty stringent system for Canadian Tires. You just can't show up. You have to prove your management capability. So I said, “So, why did you move to Cochrane?” And his answer: “Because Cochrane has four seasons. If you stock up on snow shovels in Cochrane, you know you're going to sell them.” I never really thought about that before. If you have a snowmobile sales shop in Cochrane, you're pretty sure: “Well, this year, they've got snow,” but it's nip and tuck. That's not just, “It happens once in a while.” This has never really happened to us at this level. I'm not trying to be the Chicken Little person, but this has never really happened to us at this level.

And I was thinking, too, as someone in agriculture, we haven't had really the cold weather either in northern Ontario that protects us from a lot of the insects and bugs, right? So, do you know what? The pine beetle might be coming to northern Ontario a lot quicker than we thought, because before, we were protected by cold weather.

So, now, I'm going to get back to ARIO. Ponsonby is a general animal facility, but it specifies—no. Focuses—we'll use “focuses.”

Mr. John Fraser: Specializes.

Mr. John Vanthof: Specializes—that's the word I'm looking for. I'm using up so much of my own air in here that—no, anyway.

Mr. John Fraser: I'm glad you said it. We're all enjoying it.

Mr. John Vanthof: So am I, actually.

Okay. They specialize in—they have a unique flock of sheep: a pathogen-free flock of sheep. And that's really important, because the sheep—okay. We already talked about the horses.

Interjection.

Mr. John Vanthof: Okay, no, the sheep—so I've had cattle my whole life.

Hon. Doug Downey: We're aware. Just remember that whatever you say is on the record.

Mr. John Vanthof: Yes, I will. A really good friend of mine—and I'm going to quote him. He's not NDP at all. Craig Connell from Wickethorn Farms, close to Lambeth

is a really good guy. I served with him on the board of Dairy Farmers of Ontario. He is definitely not NDP. He calls me his only NDP friend.

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Anyway, I'm going to quote him. He has got a beautiful farm. I think his son runs most of it now, but it's a very well-run farm, very progressive. He also has sheep. We were touring through the barns—and I know nothing about sheep. I know a lot about cows; I know nothing about sheep. There was one sheep in the corner away from the rest of the flock, and I said, "Craig, I think you've got a sick sheep." He said, "No, there's no such thing as a sick sheep. There's either a healthy sheep or a dead sheep. There's no such thing."

With cattle, if you get cattle that are big enough, substantial enough, if they get something and if you help them, they can work their way through it; sheep, not so much. Sheep are small. That's why it's really important to have a pathogen-free flock: because if a sheep disease hits, you need to be able to test what the sick sheep have that the clean sheep don't. It's much more scientific than this, but that's why it's important to have a pathogen-free flock of sheep.

Mr. John Fraser: I learned something.

Mr. John Vanthof: Yes, I learned something that day, too. I learn something almost every day. I don't use it that often, but I learn it.

Anyway, Ridgetown: Almost everybody knows Ridgetown. There's also an ag college there. A lot of people go to the Ridgetown ag college. It's pest research and soil management.

Simcoe is fruit and vegetables. Vineland is what everybody thinks: It's orchards, vineyards, greenhouses and mushroom production.

I'm almost running out of time. Can you believe that?

Winchester is specifically for eastern Ontario crop producers, because, again, in different climatic conditions, you use different methods. As an example—and some people aren't going to like this; some farmers might not like this—there are different ways of tillage for crops. Most of us have been to the IPM, the International Plowing Match, where they plow. There are very few farmers that actually plow anymore, right?

Some farmers use minimum till, so they use a machine with tines that disturbs the soil, and then when they plant, they use another machine to make it flat and then they plant. Some farmers use no-till. For no-till, you don't disturb the soil at all. You use a different seeding machine and it goes right into there. No-till is beneficial because it's really good for erosion, because you don't disturb. It's good for animals in the soil, the worms and stuff.

But it has been our experience that in northern Ontario, I think because our season is shorter, if you do minimum till—the ground is darker; there's nothing covering the ground, so it warms up much quicker in the spring, so we

do it. We minimum till to warm the soil up. You do some tillage in the fall to rough up the soil, so in the springtime, when the sun hits it—there are people who do no-till successfully in northern Ontario, but most don't. So that's an example of how a different tillage system might work fantastically in Ridgetown, and you bring it to Cochrane and it might not.

I'd like to quote someone—he departed. His name is Rod Inglis. His grandson still runs a tile drainage business in the New Liskeard area, and Rod Inglis brought tile drainage to our area.

My dad tiled his first farm with Rod in 1971. Rod was a great guy. At a public meeting—and when he brought tile drainage to northern Ontario, a lot of people didn't believe in tile drainage because we thought that tiles, or my predecessors thought the tiles would freeze out of the ground. No, because at our place, we can't have frost go deeper than tiles. Two feet of frost is not a big deal, right? So it took a while. But anyway, at a public meeting, someone asked—when he was bringing people in northern Ontario, someone asked, "So what exactly can you grow in northern Ontario?" And this still holds true. He got up and he said, "You can grow anything in northern Ontario. Harvesting, that might be a different story"—and that's still the case.

Getting back to research, why research, why New Liskeard is so important, why Emo is so important is, if you want it, research has to be, especially crop research, site-specific. One of the things about research is that farmers do a lot of research themselves. It's mostly through trial and error. Most farm research is, "Okay, we'll try to do this," and the next year you go, "No, we're not doing that again." That's why you need actually organized research, and not just research but—again, I'm not dissing anybody, but research done solely by input, companies that sell input, is always going to favour input.

When we were paying tribute to Mr. Riddell, in the tributes, his father was an extension agent, an ag rep, and he was an assistant ag rep. We don't have ag reps anymore, but we should, because something that ag reps did that's really important—I can remember when the extension agent came to our farm. Because they see so much, they provide unbiased—have you tried this or have you—and again, I am not dissing any company, but when you get an extension agent who comes from a company, their advice could be very good, but it's not always unbiased, and it shouldn't be. If you're getting paid by the company to go visit farmers, you're not going to say, "Well, no, you shouldn't use our product because you don't really need our product. You should use X." But extension agents were very good for that.

Specifically, as we talk about agriculture in northern Ontario, that would be something very important to think about: Who provides the research? Because some of the things I see that are happening in the new agricultural

areas in Ontario are some of the things—we're repeating the same mistakes we made before.

So again, I'm going to go back to Minister Riddell, who was very focused on soil erosion. Soil erosion is a huge issue. Where soil erosion becomes an even bigger issue is with tile drainage. Tile drainage, if you put systematic tile drains in your field—necessary in northern Ontario. You can't farm without it, just can't farm without it.

Most of northern Ontario is sitting on 100 feet of clay. On my farm, there's 100 feet of clay and then you get bedrock. If you don't tile—if it's not tiled—it doesn't drain, right? Clay doesn't drain, and we face this in Timiskaming. So you have 200,000 acres in Timiskaming on the Ontario side and 200,000 on the Quebec side of clay that doesn't drain. It originally had trees on it, and the rain falls—and the rain doesn't really go anywhere. It takes a long time for it to get to the lakes, right?

1730

You take all the trees off, clear all the land, put drains in and dump all that water into a few gully systems that run to the lake. So that water that used to take a month, two months, to get to the lake at a slow speed now gets there in three days—with pipes this big or this big. If you don't have measures in place to make sure that that doesn't erode, you are going to have massive erosion problems—massive. We've had them in Timiskaming. We didn't know about it. Honestly, we didn't know better. But we do know better now. But I'm not seeing any better responses. It's an issue.

I have townships in my riding, two or three—I'm going to get this trouble for this—not family farms, but big corporate farms, basically, people who invest in land for agriculture, control the township. There are huge drainage problems and they're fighting the township to fix them, and there's not really any funding to fix that. But there are huge areas farther north that are being cleared, are being tiled, and we're going to run into exactly the same problem.

And it's understandable. When I was a farmer—I'm still a farmer, but when I farmed full time to make a living, it cost a lot of money to tile drain. I'd like to commend the government. In northern Ontario, the heritage fund has a program to make it a bit more affordable. I did a lot of work before I was elected MPP to get that program going in northern Ontario. It costs a lot of money to tile your farm. But it also costs a lot of money to protect the outlets. There is a municipal drainage program to help protect the outlets, but often in unorganized territory, they don't get protected, and it causes huge issues, and it shouldn't have to. We should be able to make the changes so that we know when we get too close to water courses. We used to, if there was a gully in the way, just bulldoze the gully, and then we wondered why we had erosion problems. Now we know these things. And that's why there needs to be site-specific research, even on something as proven as tile drainage—something that could work with tile drainage and we haven't really ever thought about.

Right now, in northern Ontario—I always talk about northern Ontario; it's something I know. This probably

applies to other parts of the world and other parts of southern Ontario. All tile drainage does in northern Ontario, where we are, is it lowers the water table. So you put the tiles in the ground two feet below and the water table no longer goes up. And it takes some of the rain, but it's mostly the water table.

What happens if it gets too dry? That might happen, right? Weather is weird. We could be doing research to see if we could plug up the tiles, if we could regulate the tiles to actually irrigate it if we ever needed to. Now, farmers themselves don't have the money to do that, to figure out if that's going to work. Neither does a tile drainage operator, but that's something that could be done at a research station in northern Ontario, in the riding of Mushkegowuk–James Bay.

It's stuff like that, if you're serious about—we are losing agriculture land every day. We are. We can argue about how much we're losing, how little we're losing, but we are. Every time I drive down here, I see a building on something that used to be a field. I'm not anti-development. I'm not saying you can't—no, I'm not anti-development. But we need to make sure we do it correctly—to develop agricultural land.

We also have to realize that no matter how great a job we do at farming in northern Ontario—I'm proud of this: I have some of the best farmland in northern Ontario, and around Earlton. I don't think anybody would disagree, because a lot of people want to buy it. I'm really proud of that piece of land. But if somebody said that I could trade that land for half as much land in Oxford county, the smart money would go to Oxford county, because we're never going to grow in Timiskaming what you can grow in Oxford county, ever, and anybody who tells you that we are is wrong.

I think eventually the government is going to say, "Oh, no, we're not losing land; we're gaining, because we're clearing twice as much as is being paved over." You're still losing productivity, and we have to realize that. For every tillable acre of class 1 land, the goal of that should be—and I've put this forward in the Legislature, and I'll put it forward again: It should go through an agricultural impact assessment. And for every tillable acre, the best use is to grow food. If there's a better use—and there might be. A vegetable sorting facility in the Holland Marsh might be a better use of those acres of agricultural land, because it services the rest of the area, right? A beef processing facility in Bruce county: You can make a pretty good argument for that. But highways and houses? You can make the argument, but you have to show that that's a better use than actually growing food—because in this, we are given a gift, and that gift is going to become more and more precious as the world becomes more and more unstable.

I've got one minute left to talk about Woodstock. That's the last of my tour of ARIO. I was born in Ingersoll, so I know a little bit about Woodstock. My uncle Mr. Hardeman has been the MPP for Oxford county for a long time. Woodstock is where they have the outdoor farm show. That's actually where the research station is in Woodstock. Woodstock is a great place to farm. Oxford county has also been

one of the hardest places to get a severance, because they know how great a place it is to farm. Does that mean there's no development in Woodstock? Absolutely not. There's all kinds of development in Woodstock, in Oxford county, but they're very selective, and that's what we need to be. Whenever I hear the government say we need less rules—we need responsible rules, because without responsible rules, we're going to end up slowing everything down.

Thank you very much, Speaker, for allowing me to ramble for this hour.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): We're going to move to questions for the member.

The member for Ottawa South.

Mr. John Fraser: I just have to say that I am in awe of my colleague here, who just filled the full hour and took us on a tour and entertained us at the same time. So thank you.

My question is a lob, because that was such a good hour: If there's only one wish that you could be granted to change this bill or do something in this bill, what would that be?

1740

Mr. John Vanthof: Scary as that sounds, in this particular bill—we are in favour.

So an hour on a name change is quite a bit, and there's a few other things changed, but I haven't heard anything back from the agriculture organizations. But this is an example where you take a piece of legislation by itself and it goes before on its merits, whereas a lot of other bills have good things and bad things and then we focus on the bad things—and they're usually terrible things—and then you have a couple of good things and you focus on those, and that's the difference. This is a reasonable piece of legislation that actually won't take long to get through the House—thank you.

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

Mr. Guy Bourgoïn: I want to thank my colleague for his presentation. He spoke about Chad's Law. I think you called it Toby's law—but Chad's Law. Northern Ontario and the highways that we have—I come from the forest industry, I come from northern Ontario, so I'm not really a farmer, but you did speak about how sometimes these roads have been closed. We're lucky this winter, to be honest with you; we've had a really mild winter, but we still had road closures that took quite a while. So, how does that affect animals that are being transported? I've seen two days of road closures, so how does that affect—because there is no other bypass that you can take. They're stuck there, and it can get cold. So I'm very curious what happens in this situation.

Mr. John Vanthof: Thank you very much. That's actually a really good question. A lot of—particularly beef gets transported from west to east. So there are a lot of feedlots. The final stage of finishing beef cattle is in the east—they're fed corn—and a lot of the calves come from the west. Actually, there's one in Kapuskasing, a stop, and there's one in Thunder Bay as well. So you can only transport an animal so long and then you need to stop, let it out to have water and rest. But if your highway is stopped

for 10 or 12 hours, those animals are stopped there, too. How I know that happens is because in our part of the world, when the highway is stopped, people are trapped too, not just the animals, right? So it's a really good question.

We're not opposed to, when the highway is not safe, that it should be closed. But we need to have adequate highways, adequate training on those highways—that they're not stopped needlessly. It's the Trans-Canada Highway. Each time that highway is stopped, our families are in danger, but—

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Thank you. That's time. I'm going to move to the next question.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: In London, agri-food is a big industry. At the London Economic Development Corp. we employ more than 7,000 people in 90-plus companies in London agri-food. The act, ARIO, was created in 1962, and you had mentioned there wasn't a lot of feedback from OMAFRA, so I think maybe the government did do some discussion on this bill.

My question is, in the current scope of the bill, the research is limited to agriculture, veterinary medicine and household science. It doesn't really adequately address the current research needs that farmers are anticipating, such as new technologies, robotics, digitization and data management. How do you think this new act will keep Ontario, number one, as the world leader in agriculture and food and share best practices and make sure that we actually thrive more in Ontario, keep the sector alive?

Mr. John Vanthof: Again, a very good question. Man, I hate to make the government look good but—I think, actually, there's no guarantee that the changes will, but the fact that they're putting in innovation gives them more the opportunity to do that, to look at the future, because the rural institute or rural innovation—and there are a few other tweaks they're making, but it is focusing more on that, yes, agriculture isn't the same as it was 50 years ago and the research shouldn't be either but, as always, the devil is going to be in how it's actually administered. But the bill itself we're supportive of.

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

Mr. John Fraser: A technical question: I come from a city where we have a gigantic farm—well, maybe not gigantic by your standards—in the middle of the city. It's an experimental farm. So, how does that connect with the ARIO? What are the connections between—

Mr. John Vanthof: I think that's federal, isn't it?

Mr. John Fraser: I know it's federal, but I'm just trying to understand how that connects.

Mr. John Vanthof: I believe the experimental farm in Ottawa is federal, and that's a good question. I will get back to you on that. Since I'm not the minister, I don't have to be responsible for that answer and I don't know it. I'm sure they work together, but honestly, it's something I haven't thought of.

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

Mr. Tom Rakovec: I want to thank my colleague and mentor, actually, for speaking for an hour, making us laugh at times and always providing important and interesting information.

Being in the GTA, we complain—and I know the Brampton member there in the back was complaining about what it feels like to be in gridlock on the roads here. But when I hear my colleagues from the north talk about the challenges they face as drivers, it's very difficult to hear: accidents, as I see it mentioned, that result in four times more likelihood of death as compared to other parts of the province. We talk about gridlock. People are stuck in traffic in the dead of winter, sometimes for half a day, a day, or even more.

And so, my question is, what do you think it's going to take for this government to adequately bring the investments to make the roads safer and where they need to be in the north? Or is it going to be lip service forever from them?

Mr. John Vanthof: That's actually a very good question. What's it going to take for a government to actually tackle this issue? What's it going to take? It's actually going to take strategy: short-term, medium-term and long-term. Short-term, there are things we can do; there are things we can do in the next year. We can actually increase vigilance on driver training. We can put in the rest areas. There's all kinds of things.

Mr. Guy Bourgooin: Pass Chad's Law.

Mr. John Vanthof: Yes, pass Chad's Law.

There's medium-term things we can do to fix the roads, and we need a long-term strategy to—okay, is this the Trans-Canada Highway or not? And are we actually going to invest in it like it's the Trans-Canada Highway, that it's

not the only two-lane goat path in Canada? Everywhere else is four-lane, and we've got a two-lane goat path. We have to realize, at some point: Is it or is it not?

When northern Ontario heard that the government was uploading the Gardiner and uploading the Don Valley, you know what? We thought, "Great. They're not really Toronto roads." And they seem to have no problem spending—they're going to spend billions. So why don't they spend money on the Trans-Canada Highway, the highway that they already control?

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): We don't have time to go to another round of questions.

Further debate? Further debate? Further debate?

Ms. Thompson has moved second reading of Bill 155, An Act to amend the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario Act. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Shall the bill be ordered for third reading? No.

Is there somebody on the government side? Oh, the deputy government House leader.

Mr. Trevor Jones: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Please refer it to the Standing Committee on the Interior.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): The bill is therefore referred to the Standing Committee of the Interior. Orders of the day? Deputy government House leader.

Mr. Trevor Jones: No further business.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): There being no private member's public business designated, pursuant to standing order 100(e), this House stands adjourned until 9 o'clock tomorrow, February 21, 2024.

The House adjourned at 1750.

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