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Assembly  
of Ontario



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Jeudi  
22 février 2024

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Speaker: Honourable Ted Arnott  
Clerk: Trevor Day

Président : L'honorable Ted Arnott  
Greffier : Trevor Day

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## LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Thursday 22 February 2024

## ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 22 février 2024

*The House met at 0900.*

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

*Prières / Prayers.*

### ORDERS OF THE DAY

#### WORKING FOR WORKERS FOUR ACT, 2024

#### LOI DE 2024 VISANT À OEUVRER POUR LES TRAVAILLEURS, QUATRE

Mr. Piccini moved third reading of the following bill:

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

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** I recognize the Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development.

**Hon. David Piccini:** Thank you, Speaker. I'll be dividing my time with my parliamentary assistants, the member for Mississauga–Malton and the member for Scarborough Centre.

Before we speak about the proposals included in this bill that will make the lives of so many Ontario workers better, I want to thank those workers for their advice—the stakeholders, the associations, the unions, the employers, the first responders, and so many more.

Speaker, this bill that we have before us today straddles two members of this Legislature, and I'd like to acknowledge and thank my predecessor, the former minister Monte McNaughton, for the work that he, his team and the incredible team we currently have at labour, immigration, training and skills development—the entire ministry—did, and especially, my gratitude to Premier Ford for his leadership and unwavering support of Bill 149 and our ongoing efforts to support the lives of workers across Ontario. Under his leadership, we will always, of course, work for workers and have their backs.

I stand here today to discuss this piece of legislation that is crucial for the welfare and prosperity of our province: Bill 149, the Working for Workers Four Act, 2024. We're taking decisive action to promote opportunities and good jobs for workers, address labour shortages and fuel economic growth across the province of Ontario. This bill, the proposed Working for Workers Four Act, builds on the successes of its predecessors, acts passed in 2021, 2022 and 2023. Together, they form a comprehensive strategy

to strengthen workers' rights and to support economic competitiveness and foster a fair and thriving job market. It's part of our commitment to create a stronger Ontario that reflects the values of fairness, opportunity and prosperity for all.

Under the leadership of the Premier, we've made significant strides in reducing the critical labour shortage that has loomed over our economy. We often hear about jobs without people, people without jobs. From a peak of 377,000 job vacancies in April 2022, we've made significant progress in filling job openings, with more than 100,000 more people securing good jobs today.

But we're not sitting on our laurels. There are still 250,000 estimated jobs going unfilled across the province of Ontario.

The Working for Workers Four Act is designed to address the evolving landscape of work and more while addressing the impact of emerging technologies such as apps and artificial intelligence. This legislation focuses on four key areas:

- clarifying rules and safeguarding employees' income in the hospitality sector;
- boosting fairness in hiring and employment procedures;
- strengthening protections for workers and first responders; and
- removing barriers for newcomers and foreign-trained individuals during the licensing process.

These changes are rooted in one fundamental principle, putting workers first, because an economy that doesn't work for workers does not work at all. Our proposed measures are practical, common-sense changes that are designed to help people succeed, ensuring Ontario is a place of opportunity, of good jobs, where one can thrive and grow.

Before I elaborate on this bill, Speaker, I want to take a moment to reflect on the journey that's brought us here, the journey of working for workers that has brought us to today.

Our first Working for Workers Act introduced measures to ensure our labour laws kept pace with new technology, automation and changes in how and where we work. It addressed changes in our economy and society that have been under way for some time but whose pace of change dramatically accelerated. With changes happening faster and faster, we had to ensure protections for workers kept up. Notably, it streamlined processes to make it easier for internationally trained workers to practise their regulated professions in Ontario.

For too long, we've heard the story that your cab driver is a doctor or that someone delivering your food is an

engineer. We understand that we have to do more to address foreign credential recognition, and this government is taking action. And it's already working, Speaker. We've had a record number of nurses enter the profession this past year, doctors—and so much more.

The bills of the past recognized the importance of personal and family time, and the Employment Standards Act now requires larger employers to have a written policy on disconnecting from work. That legislation passed by this House also gave delivery workers the basic human dignity of accessing restrooms at businesses that they're serving.

Working for Workers Act, 2022, introduced the measures to protect the privacy of employees by mandating disclosure of electronic monitoring. It enhanced worker safety by increasing fines for workplace safety violations to among the highest in Canada.

To protect workers and make sure workplaces are prepared to respond quickly to cases of an opioid overdose, at-risk workplaces must now have life-saving naloxone kits on site and workers trained for their use. I'm pleased to say, today, tens of thousands more Ontarians are now trained to administer those naloxone kits. It's an important step in saving the lives of Ontario residents.

Last year, the Working for Workers Act, 2023, increased the maximum fine for corporations convicted of Occupational Health and Safety Act violations. This is now the highest in Canada. We'll always put worker safety first. This sent a clear signal. Previous governments could have raised these fines to send a clear message to those violating that it's not okay. They didn't. We did. That act also established the highest maximum fines in Canada for employers and recruiters convicted of retaining a foreign national's passport or work permit.

Speaker, I'm from rural Ontario, and I've met a number of farmers. I think of fond trips out to Wilmot Orchards, where temporary workers—I see you nodding; I know you know this well in your own community, where foreign nationals are vital to putting food on the table. Farmers quite literally feed cities, and those foreign nationals do such an incredible job. But we know from stories in the GTHA and beyond that there are instances of unscrupulous recruiters seizing foreign nationals' passports. That's never okay, Speaker. We're the first province in Canada to take meaningful action to crack down on that.

The Employment Standards Act was amended to ensure employees who work solely remotely are counted for mass termination provisions. This means that those employees would receive the same notice and protections as their in-office counterparts.

Additionally, as a part of Working for Workers 3, regulatory changes stepped up protections for construction workers, who help build our province. We did simple things, like requiring well-lit and properly enclosed washrooms on all construction sites, woman-specific washrooms on larger sites and properly fitting personal protective equipment that properly fits one's body so that they can be protected on the job site. This makes construction

work safer and enables more women to get into the skilled trades.

#### 0910

I look beside me here and I see Minister Williams, who's been a champion for these very women. We just had a skilled trades round table to hear anecdotal stories of how this has protected women on the job site. We know we have more to do to address the culture to ensure that all job sites are places where women can thrive and achieve their full potential in the skilled trades. But facts do matter, and the facts are that 30% is the increase in women registration in apprenticeships. This is the largest in Ontario's history. And I'm proud to say, Speaker, a 116% increase in women in the building trades. So what we are doing is working.

Now, I'd like to speak first to the bill before us today to an area that's really close to my heart and very important for me. I'd like to speak about the everyday heroes who work in fire departments across our province. At any given time, firefighters may receive a call to rush to an emergency. It could be a house consumed by flames. It could be any number of emergencies, and they're there for us, these firefighters. Firefighters perform brave tasks that most would shy away from: entering smoke-filled buildings to rescue individuals, using the jaws of life, which I've had the opportunity to see first-hand, to free motorists from mangled wrecks. Speaker, they run into fires as we run from them. When they aren't responding to emergencies, they're actively engaging to prevent fires in their communities, educating the public on fire safety and doing so much more—conducting inspections.

I value, and I know I speak on behalf of all members of this place—we value their work they do. Their work affects each and every one of us in Ontario. With courage and valour, they step into uncertainty, into emergencies that are both unpredictable and perilous. Without hesitation, they put their lives on the line to rescue others. We owe them an immense debt of gratitude, and in moments of our greatest need, they are there for us.

Today, Speaker, I'd really like to pause and have this entire Legislature acknowledge the presence of the Bowman family: Alisen Bowman, who is here today; her daughter, Alexis Bowman; Colin Bowman; Adam Whalen; Joe Bowman; Johnny Bowman; Matt Braun; and I believe Greg Horton is here. If you could just stand up for the Legislature—Megan and Donald as well, please.

*Applause.*

**Hon. David Piccini:** Speaker, this is the face of Ontarians, why we serve in this place. The Bowman family—I didn't know when I became labour minister, but I recall walking home one night and having a conversation with Alisen Bowman, and I'd like to thank that family for being here today. She told me the story of her husband. Captain Craig, affectionately known as Opie Bowman, who served at the Welland fire department with courage, skill and professionalism. He was a true hero who went into harm's way to save others. He was a husband, he was a father, he was a brother and a brother to the men and women who served the Welland fire department. He



tragically passed away after a battle with cancer at the far-too-young age of 47.

Speaker, cancer is the scourge that has affected many in this place I'm sure, but why did Craig get cancer? We know that firefighters are at far greater risk of occupational exposures. In fact, in fighting one fire they could be exposed to chemicals that we wouldn't be exposed to in a lifetime.

To help firefighters and their families like the Bowmans, we've expanded cancer coverage for firefighters, assuming any thyroid or pancreatic cancer is related to their jobs. That means they get faster access to benefits and supports, and we made our changes retroactive to January 1, 1960, in this legislation. We'll always work to support firefighters, Speaker.

When I spoke to Alisen and her daughter, who's been a remarkable advocate for the well-being of firefighters now across Ontario—I remember I went down with Megan, who is standing up there, who has worked very hard for this Ministry of Labour for a number of years. We went down to the Welland fire department, and I had an opportunity to meet and speak with the family whom I had spoken with on the phone. I think when we all kiss our loved ones goodbye in the morning, we expect that they'll return home healthy at the end of the day. As I said, we know firefighters are exposed to greater perils on the job than many of us and, I would say, than any of us here in this place.

Speaker, what was cruel and what was wrong about Craig's case was that the esophageal cancer that he passed away from—you had a requirement previously to serve for a minimum of 25 years before that would be a presumptive exposure and therefore be guaranteed WSIB benefits. He served 24-plus years, just shy. He was so close to that mark.

In the spirit of non-partisanship, I know from conversations I've had with MPP Burch and others—Sandy Shaw, who's across the way. We've had conversations about this. I think we all recognize that we can and must do more. I'm really glad to say, in that spirit, that we all stand behind the Bowman family in making these changes.

We will never get that hero back. We won't get Craig back, sadly, tragically. But what he leaves behind is a legacy. He leaves behind a legacy that will affect firefighters and their families across Ontario forevermore. I don't think there can be any greater purpose in life than leaving behind a legacy that will touch the lives of all firefighters in this great province.

This bill, if passed, would make changes that would be retroactive to 1960. The Workplace Safety and Insurance Board would be required to re-adjudicate those denied claims in accordance with the proposed changes and to consider new claims that meet the shortened employment duration that I mentioned. The employment service time before diagnosis would now be reduced to 15 years, down from the current requirement of 25 years of service. As I said, that will be retroactive to January 1, 1960.

We owe it to our province's firefighters and their families to make this right, and that's exactly what our

government intends to do. This legislation builds on past measures.

But I have to, again, thank the Bowman family. Thank you for your advocacy. Thank you for keeping Craig alive in this place, in this province. His spirit lives on, and his advocacy and the advocacy of this family are ensuring that firefighters and their families will be protected across Ontario. Thank you.

Speaker, we're incredibly grateful, and I look forward to a prolonged relationship with the Ontario Professional Fire Fighters Association: Greg, Bob, Gavin—I don't know if Gavin is here as well—and the team. They have been incredible to work with and such strong advocates for firefighters. I'm very grateful for the relationship that all members of this place have with the OPFFA. My door will always remain open for those firefighters who serve on the front lines, who keep our communities safe. We're grateful for them.

Speaker, this bill also takes measures to protect service employees. Today, we're building on our government's Working for Workers momentum and continuing to put workers first. Service employees are essential to many businesses, and the work they do makes all of our lives better and easier. Recent data show that Ontario's restaurant and service industry is made up of more than 400,000 employees, more than 6% of the province's workforce.

But often, these same people, the ones who do so much to make sure we have a good time with family and friends—we're on the heels of Family Day weekend, and I'm sure many in this place enjoyed time with family and friends at one of many restaurants across Ontario. We know that when they're out, those men and women who work in the service sector are falling behind, and it's through no fault of their own. Dining and dashing can be a big cost to businesses. Gas-and-dash thefts cost Ontario businesses over \$3 million in 2022 alone. I know my colleague from Mississauga-Malton has been a champion on this issue. He has been an advocate on Ontario drawing attention to this theft, and we're taking action.

#### **0920**

While Ontario's Employment Standards Act generally requires employees to be paid at least minimum wage for all hours worked and prohibits pay deductions for stolen property, the fact is unpaid trial shifts and punitive deductions for stolen property are still all too common in the restaurant and service industries. The fear of wages being withheld has led to tragic consequences while trying to stop someone from running out on their meal or not paying at the pump.

No employee should have to forfeit part of their paycheque when a bad customer dines and dashes. We're making it explicit in the Employment Standards Act that no employee should be asked to work for free in an unpaid trial shift. These situations are unacceptable, and they must not continue. That's why we're proposing changes to the Employment Standards Act to better protect restaurant employees and other employees in the service industry, to clarify that employees must be paid for work performed

during trial shifts, and make clear that employers can never deduct an employee's wages in the event of a dine-and-dash, gas-and-dash, haircut-and-dash, or in any other situation where a customer leaves without paying for goods or services.

Speaker, these employees do much to ensure we are looked after when we go out for an evening on the town or when we get gas. We need to ensure they are paid for their work. It's the right thing to do. This legislation would, if passed, provide that work performed during trial periods must be paid. I spoke to some workers in the restaurant sector, just the other day, about this, Speaker, and I know clarity from this place, clarity from this government is welcome in that sector. When someone steals from a store or runs from a restaurant or gas pump, that's a matter for the police.

But we're not stopping there. Speaker, many service industries operate at a fast pace. Employees can be required to work long hours and endure gruelling physical demands, like being on their feet all day. On top of this, they obviously deal with the occasional difficult customer, but no matter what, these employees must smile and put on a positive attitude because tips can significantly impact the success of their shift. The last thing they need to do is to deal with the added stress of worrying about unjust treatment affecting their tips.

If passed, this legislation does some important things. It will require employers to post in the workplace a copy of any existing policy related to an employer, a director or shareholder of an employer sharing in pooled tips. Many good employers already do this, but we're ensuring that this happens across Ontario. These people can only share in a tip pool if they regularly perform, to a substantial degree, the same work as their staff. Again, in many small businesses, owners do do this, and this is a practice that they gladly post and share to their employees. This would help everyone know how tips are divided. As well, this legislation would, if passed, require employers to post the policy in a prominent spot in the workplace, in a place where every worker can see it. Everyone from the newest hire to the seasoned pro would see exactly how things work, empowering them with this information.

But that's not all, Speaker. Tips and gratuities would need to be paid using cash, cheque or direct deposit. We know artificial intelligence is affecting the workplace. Speaker, I've met a number of service workers who have told me that apps, things on your phone now, are being used to pay out tips. Those apps deduct and charge a fee for every time you deduct your tips. Speaker, that's not fair. We're proposing common-sense changes in response to the rise of digital payment platforms on phones and in the service industry, which include fees for those employees to access their tips—again, it's unjust—as well as potential technical and security issues.

Workers in the service industry should not have to pay to access their own hard-earned money for going above and beyond in the service of their work. The proposed changes would require employers who pay tips through direct deposit to allow their employees to select which

account they want them to be deposited into. This would help employees avoid fees that they did not agree to. This would also help employees manage their money by choosing the account that works best for them.

Speaker, it's all about fairness, clarity and giving employees control over how they receive their well-deserved tips if their employer pays them by direct deposit. We want employees to be able to focus on their work, not on possible unfair treatment involving their tips and wages.

Far too often, those who put in an honest shift, those who save every day to build a better life for their family, who deliver services to make our lives better and help drive our economy, are struggling to get ahead. We see them. We hear them. That's why we're also proposing changes to put them in the driver's seat. How many times have we spoken to someone—in the first few months of being labour minister, speaking to people who are working hard? I spoke with a single mother, a newcomer, the other day, working very hard to provide for her family, her two beautiful children. That better job, that elusive bigger paycheque, requires you to apply to another job. You go through those hurdles. It's sometimes like an Olympic marathon race just to get to that finish line—the job offer—just to find out that the salary and compensation is nowhere near what you had thought.

That awkward conversation about salaries and wages—if you do it and ask those questions too soon, you may be viewed in ill light by your employer; if you wait too late, you might not know and you go through all that process. But we're saying, Speaker, especially for those working jobs in the middle class, that we recognize those challenges. We're recognizing that employees are facing other challenges as the workplace evolves, so we need all hands on deck to solve these challenges.

So we're proposing legislation here, Speaker, that would require employers to disclose salary ranges of these jobs, putting these workers in the driver's seat so that they can know before they apply if the salary range of that job they're applying for is the job that they're looking for and is in the compensation range that they want and that they feel they deserve.

Despite 250,000 jobs in Ontario going unfilled recently, job seekers face that discouraging cycle, as I mentioned, applying for that job just to find out at the end that that job is less than you earn today. And, Speaker, as an added by-product of this, we know from feedback and round tables that I've had as minister that this also is an important step in tackling the gender pay gap. It's not a silver bullet, Speaker, and I'll say that right now, but it is an important step.

Providing transparency for job seekers helps enable them to make better decisions about their future and about job moves. To put it simply, giving out this information about jobs right at the beginning is a win-win for everyone involved.

In addition, Speaker, I would like to talk a bit about non-disclosure agreements—another initiative we're bringing forward. Sometimes, workers, through no fault of

their own, are sexually harassed or subjected to mistreatment or violence in the workplace. Unfortunately, seven in 10 report experiencing some form of harassment or violence in the workplace. To help end workplace misconduct and hold abusers to account, we're proposing to consult on ending the use of non-disclosure agreements in the settlement of cases of workplace sexual harassment or violence.

I had a woman come into my office who works a job in the city, Speaker, and she said, "You know, when you said that the day for these creeps is over, I wanted to share my story." So if this consultation does but one thing in enabling them to share their story, it's a win.

But we're also recognizing that NDAs are far too often used to silence victims. We know from consultation with the legal community that they support these consultations. We understand and want to empower victims. In the cases where NDAs will support and put the victim first, we, of course, don't want to remove that ability. But by launching consultations on this and making it clear that corporate executives and senior employers in companies will not be protected—their day is numbered if it comes to harassment, in particular sexual harassment in the workplace—we're going to empower victims by ensuring they are never muzzled or silenced by a non-disclosure agreement.

Speaker, we recognize, as I mentioned, that we'll continue to engage the legal community, employers, and above all, survivors, like that remarkable woman who stepped forward and came into my office. We'll work with them over the coming months and ensure that what we bring forward has the support of all those communities. We'll continue to listen to survivors, legal experts throughout this consultation process and hold bad actors who want to evade accountability to account.

Speaker, this bill does so many things, and I see from the clock that I'm running out of time, so I just want to pause and say that Ontario is changing. We're not immune to the broader economic headwinds, but this is a government that has launched the largest Skills Development Fund. This is a government that recognizes that measuring employment services, measuring social assistance supports solely by the metric of the size of a cheque cut to an individual or the number of people being serviced is not a metric to measure success. It's a metric that was used by previous governments. But what inspires me the most is going to the newcomer centre, talking to an asylum seeker who was callously left on the streets of Toronto by this federal government but who, thanks to our Skills Development Fund, now has the dignity of a job, but more importantly than that, Speaker, has found a sense of purpose, contributing to the Canadian dream, her Canadian dream, contributing to her community.

**0930**

We're empowering those people to earn better jobs, bigger paycheques. We're doing it through enhancing the Employment Standards Act, ensuring health and safety is protected, supporting the front-line heroes that keep our community safe. Yes, we can talk about community safety

and have the backs of our front-line officers, our front-line firefighters, our front-line first responders and paramedics.

Speaker, I'm grateful to live in this great province, this country that's given so many, so many newcomers. But we recognize that artificial intelligence and technology is disrupting the workplace, so we're taking action. We recognize that for young people trapped in their parents' basement, the dream of home ownership just too far away—giving them the skill sets, giving them the leg up, giving them access to a better job and a bigger paycheque, having the Skills Development Fund that is targeting the hardest-to-place people, breaking down, bashing the glass ceiling in the skilled trades for women, empowering them on job sites, ensuring that as we build an Ontario that actually builds hospitals, actually builds subways.

You know, the previous government studied stuff to death. We're actually getting the job done, getting shovels in the ground. We have 50 hospital projects under construction today. We're empowering men and women on the front line of the building trades, technical trades and so much more. We're a world-class destination for life sciences and STEM, a world-class destination where people from foreign shores look to Ontario for opportunity and a better future, and this government is giving them that leg up, Speaker. This government is getting shovels in the ground, building an Ontario not for yesterday but an Ontario for tomorrow.

We can't do it without talking to workers, and I'm grateful for the opportunity on every job site. I'm grateful for the opportunity I've had to sit down with educators, to sit down with health care professionals like those nurses I just sat down with at NHH, to sit down with men and women in the skilled trades, to break down barriers for racialized, for marginalized individuals, and then to ensure everyone can achieve their full potential in this great province that is Ontario.

I want to close by once again thanking the Bowman family, thanking the firefighters of this province. This is a big move in this legislation that will forever enshrine Captain Craig Bowman's legacy. I want to thank them for being here today once again, and for your advocacy. You're going to continue doing that advocacy, and I know your dad would be incredibly proud looking down on you doing that.

Thank you, Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to speak. I'd like to turn it over to my incredible colleague the member for Mississauga–Malton.

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

**Mr. Deepak Anand:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's always a pleasure to see you in that seat.

Today I'm proud to be rising in the House to talk about the third reading of Bill 149, the Working for Workers Four Act, 2024. As always, Madam Speaker, I want to start by thanking the supreme God for giving me the ability to stand in this place. Thank you to the residents of Mississauga–Malton for giving me an opportunity to serve. Thank you to my family and friends for always supporting me. And thank you to the staff; you're always

ahead of us, so that we can stand up and be the voice of our riding and our government.

Madam Speaker, it is an honour to join the Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development—and my fellow parliamentary assistant who will be speaking after me—in highlighting the important measures this bill is going to have in place. We will be talking about AI, improving oversight and helping the newcomer, through my speech.

I want to begin by saying that in a few short months in the new portfolio, our minister has done an incredible job by bringing these policy solutions forward to address the issues facing workers across our province. At the same time, I want to take an opportunity to thank our leader, our Premier, for his support for standing up for the workers. Without his leadership, this is not possible. That is why, Madam Speaker, the changes we're making under these acts are helping millions of workers in our province, and we'll continue to support them.

Talking about AI in job postings, Madam Speaker: Our government's focus has been to help not only workers in our province, but also the job seekers. The Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development spoke earlier and talked about the importance of disclosing salary ranges, but we must also consider that the ways we look for employment have drastically changed.

Once upon a time, I do remember, when I came to Canada on January 15, 2000, we used to have a paper-based résumé. We'd go door-to-door and we'd ask for a job. Things have changed since then, Madam Speaker. We know, in the last few decades, with the changes in technology, there has been a very rapid shift in how people look for and apply for jobs. With the rise of Internet and the modernization of our world, most job ads are now posted online. By the way, back then it was even harder for us as a new job seeker to go and find a computer. Now we have computers everywhere. In fact, we have that power in our phones, as well.

While this makes job postings more accessible, it does come with challenges. More specifically, there have been recent technological developments in the artificial intelligence space. Technology and life have to move on. There are advantages of technology. Yes, there is always trouble and the constraints that comes with it. The use of AI has been skyrocketing in virtually every aspect of our professional lives. In fact, in February 2023—just look at the data: five, 10, 15 years back—it was almost zero; today, almost 7% of all businesses in Ontario were planning to adopt some level of AI assistance over the next 12 months. It may sound as a little bit as 7%, but think about it: If you go back 10 or 15 years, nobody used to do online shopping. Today, online shopping is normal. And that is why, Madam Speaker, rather than waiting for the time to come, we are taking decisive action today. With that, our government is making sure to change our laws and protect the changes in the workplace so that job seekers do not have to go through the trouble.

While the application of AI promises greater efficiency and accuracy, it can also adopt harmful biases and

decision-making practices without the employer's knowledge. That is why the use of AI in recruitment generates high volumes of personal data about job applicants and the employees. For a worker who applies to an online ad, within the fraction of a second of hitting send on their résumé, a recruiter's AI system can choose the applicant as a preferred candidate and screen out thousands of other applicants. AI systems are able to determine age, sex, race, religion, political affiliation and can even evaluate social media accounts to see if someone's personal traits could be a fit or not fit for the company's culture. That level of information is deeply concerning. Everyone should have a fair and equal shot at a job, and things like age, sex, race, religion should not be a barrier for employment.

That is why, Madam Speaker, in response to growing concern about the ethical, legal and privacy implications of AI, our government is also proposing to require employers to disclose in job ads if AI is being used in the recruitment process. If the legislation is passed, it would make Ontario the first jurisdiction in Canada to require businesses to disclose on publicly advertised job ads if AI is used. It is critical that we strike a balance between transparency and also supporting technological innovation, and that is what we're doing here through this bill.

As I said, I came to Canada on January 15, 2000. Like any other newcomer, I do remember the time when we came here, the jobs were there, but the support structure was not present. Now, Madam Speaker, the government of Ontario, with its open arms, has long been a place where people from all corners of the globe can seek new opportunities and start a fresh life. Immigrants bring a wealth of culture, knowledge and experience, and many of our caucus members are immigrants and we do know that. Many of us could be working in professions and skilled trades we desperately need as engineers, architects and teachers, but at the same time, we continue to face barriers. This is simply unacceptable, especially when we talk about Ontario having a labour shortage with over 200,000 jobs going unfilled.

**0940**

Madam Speaker, when I came to Canada, I had an undergrad in chemical engineering, but I was not able to find work in exactly what I was doing. Thankfully, by God's grace, I was able to start my career in a similar industry. But not everybody gets that chance. The data shows only a quarter of internationally trained immigrants in Ontario work in their regulated professions, compared to 50% of those who are domestically trained. What does that mean? It means that with these unfair barriers we are losing a lot of opportunity.

Scotiabank, for example, in a 2021 report, estimates that bringing immigrant unemployment and labour market participation rates in line with the Canadian-born population could increase Ontario's GDP by \$12 billion to \$20 billion per year, and if you look at a five-year span, it could be as good as \$100 billion. With that what comes is it gives the newcomers and residents of Ontario more prosperity. Plus, at the same time, when we're increasing

the GDP, everyone thrives. The government gets extra revenue; the government can use it to serve more people.

It begins, at the same time, with addressing barriers internationally trained individuals may face when having their qualifications assessed. That is why regulated professions sometimes rely on third parties when conducting assessment of qualifications for newcomers. What are we doing? We're making sure that with the proposed changes to the Fair Access to Regulated Professions and Compulsory Trades Act our government would have the authority to be able to put rules in place to improve transparency and accountability for the assessment of qualifications by regulated professions, especially when they work with third parties to conduct these assessments. These amendments, if passed, would provide authority to make a regulation to ensure that the regulated professions work transparently with their third-party partners to be able to assess newcomer qualifications with more accountability and stronger oversight. We're making sure that our system is more efficient and improves the experience for immigrants. It would also help them transition into good jobs right here in Ontario while meeting our province's labour standards.

Madam Speaker, it's not just that we're doing; we're actually making sure we are going the extra mile to support our newcomers by prohibiting Canadian experience requirements in job postings and application forms. There's another barrier that newcomers face in recruitment places that screens them out of the job opportunity. When we talk about the chicken or the egg: For anyone to get a job, every time they go to an employer, the employer will ask for Canadian experience, and to get Canadian experience, they need a job. If they don't have a job, they don't have Canadian experience, and if they don't have Canadian experience, they don't get a job. That is exactly, Madam Speaker—we're making sure that we are prohibiting Canadian experience requirements in job postings and application forms.

This bill, if passed, would help ensure that newcomers with the right job qualifications are not screened out of job postings before those qualifications are even considered. This new legislation would also make Ontario the first in Canada to prohibit the inclusion of any requirements related to Canadian experience in publicly advertised job postings in employment standards legislation.

Connecting a newcomer with a job that they are qualified for means that it's not just a paycheque; it is prosperity. It allows them to unleash their full potential in careers that are meaningful and personal to them and allows them to contribute as a community in their new home. It is a win-win situation.

Madam Speaker, in closing, I want to say thank you to the workers of Ontario. You're the driving force for our province. We've seen in our province, when we started as a government in 2018—more than 700,000 new workers are working today. The revenue of government increased from \$150 billion to over \$202 billion in the last five years. Thank you for all your hard work. Thank you for making sure that we, together, are able to build Ontario, push innovation and contribute to economic growth.

Ontario, as we know today, is leading the way in putting workers first. Our latest Working for Workers bill, if passed, will help workers find good jobs, while helping to build a stronger Ontario that works for all of us.

I call on all members of this House: Let's join hands. Let's support our workers. Let's support Bill 149, the Working for Workers Four Act, 2023, and let's build a better and a stronger Ontario.

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

**Mr. David Smith:** I'd like to start by thanking the minister that spoke early on and my PA colleague, Deepak Anand, for his gracious statements.

I'm pleased to rise in the House today for third reading of the Working for Workers Four Act, 2023. It has been an honour to work with the Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development on this bill to further support and protect workers and their families. I would also like to add my thanks to our Premier for his tremendous leadership and support for the Working for Workers acts that have been passed by this House over the last three years.

Madam Speaker, I stand before you today with a strong sense of purpose as I talk about important changes to our employment laws and workplace safety initiatives we are proposing in the Working for Workers Four Act that would further the evolution of workplace health and safety. These proposals embody our commitment to fostering fairness, transparency and support, and to ensuring we keep up with the way work is changing in Ontario and around the world.

Speaker, today I am here to share with you the remaining pieces of Bill 149, as well as some related measures. The first area that I would like to speak on is relating to vacation pay provisions. Too often, employers do not understand the ins and outs of the vacation pay provisions, and employees may lose out because of that. That is why, Madam Speaker, we are proposing to take steps to clearly explain vacation pay provisions, to make sure employers and employees know their rights and responsibilities. We want to ensure that both employers and employees are aware of the rules on vacation pay.

This bill aims to ensure that employees are fully informed about when vacation pay must be paid and that a written agreement is needed in cases where vacation pay is paid in any other way than a lump sum before the employee begins their vacation. This change would protect the interests of both employees and employers. It would help emphasize the importance of clear communication between employers and employees, underlining the need for mutual understanding of the terms governing when vacation pay is paid.

This is about providing a fair and transparent process for everyone involved. By ensuring that everyone is on the same page regarding vacation pay, our goal is to foster transparency and promote fairness in the workplace. We will continue to use every tool in our tool box to ensure Ontario is a province where hard work pays off.

**0950**

The next area of concern is enabling super-indexation of WSIB benefits. Madam Speaker, our mission is to build a province that leaves no one behind, because every worker deserves to come home safely to their family at the end of their shift and every workplace injury and occupational disease should be preventable.

Our ministry invested \$100 million annually in workplace health and safety for this very reason. But we know 134,000 workers rely on the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board for long-term compensation as a result of physical and mental injuries or illnesses they have suffered on the job. Madam Speaker, while our number one goal is always to give these workers the support they need to return to work, to support their families, contribute to Ontario's economy and to build their communities, we know it is not always possible. That is why this legislation will, if passed and proclaimed into force, support injured workers by enabling additional indexation increases to WSIB benefits over and above the annual indexation, which is based on indicators of the rate of inflation.

Under the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, benefits are annually indexed based on change in the Consumer Price Index over a period of 12 months, providing a cost-of-living adjustment. The proposed super-indexing amendment seeks to allow indexation increases beyond the regular annual adjustment. If passed, the amendment would empower our government to set these additional indexation increases and would require the WSIB to apply those increases on the specific dates, responding to economic factors and ensuring fairness during times of rising costs.

This proposal represents a significant step in delivering on our government's commitment to supporting injured workers. For example, for an injured worker who earns \$70,000 a year, if a 2% indexation increase is prescribed, it could mean an additional \$900 annually to top up the cost-of-living adjustment, which is 4.4% in 2024. This change is a testament to our government's dedication to ensuring the well-being of workers and their families in the face of evolving economic conditions.

Regulation for additional three poisonings to the WSIA: Madam Speaker, I am pleased to share with you our government's continuing commitment to expediting access to compensation and services for injured workers. I want to take a minute to tell you about another measure we have recently taken to help Ontario's workers that complements our Working for Workers legislation. With new regulations under the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, our government has added chlorine, ammonia and hydrogen sulphide poisoning—when associated with related work, such as chlorine poisoning in the pool industry—to the list of presumed work-related occupational diseases. This will make it easier and faster for injured workers and survivors to get access to WSIB support and compensation.

Previously, these claims were adjudicated based on establishing the workplace relatedness of occupational diseases, but the new regulation streamlines the process.

This regulation will ensure that if a worker gets sick from contact with chlorine, ammonia, hydrogen sulphide at work, they will get faster access to the support and compensation they need from the WSIB.

By presuming that workers' illnesses are work-related, we are speeding up the process to make decisions and getting them the benefits they need. This change is not just about efficiency, it is about recognizing the challenges faced by workers in specific industries and providing them with a more straightforward path to compensation and support. The board regulation reflects our government's commitment to creating a workplace safety and insurance system that reflects the current knowledge about occupational diseases.

Personal critical illness job-protected leave consultations: Madam Speaker, our commitment to the well-being of workers also extends to those facing personal critical illnesses. I would like to bring your attention to the planning consultation that speaks to the needs of this population. Our government understands the challenges that individuals living with critical illnesses face. This planned consultation on unpaid personal critical illness job-protected leave seeks to address a significant issue, potentially leading to legislation that would create a new unpaid job-protected leave for employees facing critical illnesses.

The Employment Standards Act currently provides three days of unpaid sick leave per year for personal illnesses. However, it is falling short when it comes to personal critical illness. We recognize the enormous toll receiving a diagnosis of a critical illness such as cancer can take. In addition to the stress of managing their illness, workers need to deal with the potential need for unexpected time off. While there are financial supports available through the federal government insurance sickness benefits, it should be a given that someone's job will be waiting for them when they return, which, unfortunately, isn't always the case.

This consultation is about creating a new unpaid job-protected leave that aligns with the length of federal employment insurance sickness benefits, which is 26 weeks. The federal medical leave that applies to employees working in the federally regulated industries and workplaces covers a wide range of reasons, including personal illness or injury, organ donation or medical appointments during working hours.

**1000**

Our aim is to ease the burden on those facing critical illness and offer the protection they need during challenging times. Our government consultations would be aimed at exploring a new leave under the ESA for personal critical illness, because nobody should be stuck at home or in the hospital battling cancer or another critical illness and have to worry about losing their livelihood.

As we examine the evolving nature of work, this proposal aligns with our ongoing efforts to support workers facing personal critical illness. It is a realization of our commitment to understanding and responding to the diverse and changing needs of Ontarians. We can all agree

that anyone dealing with a personal critical illness should be able to focus on getting better, with the certainty their job will be there for them when they are ready and able to return to work.

Speaker, because of Bill 149 representing our government's ongoing efforts to shape a future where both employees and employers are supported and successful, if this bill is passed, Ontario would take significant steps to improve clarity around vacation pay.

I want to end—because it seems like my time is running out here. The additional regulation will ensure expedited access to benefits by adding three poisonings to the list of presumed work-related occupational diseases, and the planned consultation would explore a new unpaid leave under the ESA for personal and critical illnesses. Each piece of this bill and related measures is a step toward a more supportive, equitable Ontario.

I call on all members of this House to join me in supporting Bill 149, the Working for Workers Four Act, 2023.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** It is now time for questions and answers.

**MPP Jamie West:** Thank you to my colleagues for their opening debate on third reading of this bill. My question is for the Minister of Labour, Speaker. As he knows, there are three schedules of this bill that are already existing laws. One of them is wage theft. One is work performed through trial shifts, unpaid work. These are both already existing in the Employment Standards Act. The minister is aware of nearly \$10 million which has been reported in wage theft that isn't being followed through on. The other one is Canadian work experience, which is part of the 2013 Ontario Human Rights Code. There are 9,000 people waiting for hearings. If you were to put in a complaint today, there would be a five-year backlog.

My question to the minister is, since we're putting through these laws that already exist as laws, will you commit to actually following through and collecting the almost \$10 million that's owed to people? And what will you do to address that 9,000-people backlog?

**Hon. David Piccini:** Well, Speaker, we wouldn't be strengthening the act and be the first to explicitly reference trial shifts and others if we didn't think it was already working. That's why we're doing this.

When it comes to Canadian work experience as well, I was recently at a federal-provincial-territorial meeting—in fact, that member would speak to their NDP colleagues across Canada who spoke to us about our leadership in this and lauded us for taking steps on Canadian worker experience.

He does raise an important point about enforcement. Yes, we have more enforcement officers coming online today than we did yesterday and are working diligently to hire them.

As for cases on tribunals and quasi-adjudicative bodies, I also recognize that more needs to be done there. We've tackled massive backlogs from OLT, the landlord and tenant—you name it. We're working to address it by

bringing on more adjudicators and tackling the backlogs that, quite frankly, the previous Liberal government let fester for decades.

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

**MPP Jamie West:** My colleagues I don't think spoke about the Digital Platform Workers' Rights Act in this bill and also in a previous Working for Workers bill. What happens with the Digital Platform Workers' Rights Act is that it allows these gig companies, these large companies like Uber—Uber is worth \$141.99 billion right now. It allows them to misclassify workers as independent contractors.

We tried to pass an amendment to have these workers recognized as regular workers so they have Employment Standards Act and Ontario labour relations protection. These workers are making six bucks an hour—that's before deductions, before they pay for gas, wear and tear on their vehicles and maintenance.

My question is, why is the government standing with billion-dollar companies like Uber and standing against workers who are making less than six bucks an hour?

**Hon. David Piccini:** I appreciate what that member is saying. The world is not black and white—I know the member tries to paint things into black and white boxes—and when I speak to workers, they recognize the nuance. They recognize that the experience of one worker is different from the experience of others. We're the first to enshrine rights for these workers in Canada. If we have more to do, I've always shown, as has this government, a willingness to do more with successive Working for Workers legislation.

If that member always wants to just absolutely kill ride-share in its entirety, which is putting all of those workers completely out of work, then just come clean and say it in this place. Say you don't want them. You don't want them in Ontario. You don't want them in Toronto. Stand in your place, be clear and say you want them out of a job.

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

**Mrs. Daisy Wai:** I just want to ask our minister—*Interjections.*

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** I apologize to the member.

I recognize the member for Richmond Hill.

**Mrs. Daisy Wai:** I would like to ask the minister—I really am very thankful for what you are doing for the members of fire services. Thank you for introducing the Bowman family to us. I would like to ask: When you talk to the fire services, how do they feel about this bill that will, if passed, affect them? How does that up their spirit?

**Hon. David Piccini:** Thank you to the member opposite. Thank you for the question from my colleague. I appreciate that important question. First responders: You recognize the important work that they do. You have been a champion for non-profits. I also want to acknowledge that today. Thank you for your leadership.

First responders deserve WSIB supports, and we recognize that we need to do more to support that. We've

strengthened the WSIB, put it in a solid financial position so that we can do more for injured workers, and that's what we're doing. Thyroid, pancreatic cancer, esophageal cancer—these are all things previous Liberal governments could have done, but they didn't. They didn't because WSIB, under their watch, was a mess, quite frankly. They didn't because they didn't prioritize this. We are, and I value the advocacy of the OPFFA. I value the firefighter advocacy to get us to this place, and I thank them for what they've done.

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

**MPP Jamie West:** I want to remind the minister that people should make at least minimum wage. His bill is enshrining that these workers are able to be paid less than minimum wage.

I also want to recognize as well that the Ontario Superior Court of Justice and the Ontario Ministry of Labour employment standards officer have both indicated that these app workers may be misclassified as independent contractors. The Ontario Superior Court of Justice certified a landmark \$400-million class-action lawsuit against Uber that was filed on behalf of Uber drivers. As well, officer Katherine Haire found several violations of the Employment Standards Act. Employment lawyers and advocates say the ruling sends a clear message on the issue of employment status that gig platform workers have long fought for.

The minister is telling these workers—some of them who make nothing because they're waiting for an app to come in and they don't get an order. He is telling these workers, and there's many of them across this province, that they are worth less than minimum wage. Our party, the Ontario NDP, thinks that people should at least make minimum wage. How can he not stand with us and stand up for workers who should be at least making minimum wage?

**Hon. David Piccini:** That member wants them out of a job.

Speaker, what we're doing by banning Canadian work experience—I was in an Uber the other day, and that Uber driver recognized that by banning Canadian work experience requirements, something this bill has done, something that member would have asked about but didn't because he's got no leg to stand on—is empowering newcomers, newcomers like Shanny, who we met at the Canadian newcomer centre. That member would rather she live off social assistance than actually have the dignity of a job and to provide for her family. He wants misery. He wants poverty. He wants to push a minimum-wage economy. We here are going to stand for better, because we know Ontarians deserve better. He wants them out of a job, living off government handouts.

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

**Mr. Adil Shamji:** My question to the minister: How does he reconcile the stated purpose of this bill against his own track record of attacking health care workers with Bill

124, attacking collective bargaining with Bill 28 and then, of course, explicitly voting against extending WSIB coverage to PSWs and DSWs?

**Hon. David Piccini:** I think we always have to do more for workers in the province of Ontario. We've got to do a lot. That's why we've brought these bills before. I don't know how that member stands in this place, quite frankly, when he slashed residency positions, when they cut nursing positions, when they underfunded rural hospitals like mine, leaving them on life support. That member's party systemically dismantled health care and then ran off in a minivan and disappeared after. That's the size of their party today.

You destroyed health care. Quite frankly, as a health care professional, how you even stand as a member of that party is shocking.

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

**MPP Jamie West:** One of the amendments that we tried to move on this act was to bring in anti-scab legislation, which the Conservatives had voted against. We're aware of many workplaces using scabs already, more than happy to have these workers languish on picket lines.

I want to read this here. It was about workers hit by scabs on picket lines. The article says, "Doug Ford's Conservative government must ban scabs if there's any sincerity to his claims of supporting workers...."

"Two equipment operators were hit by two different scabs driving a pickup truck through picket lines on Wednesday. These are the second and third incidents of a motor vehicle being weaponized to attack Black River-Matheson's 14 municipal workers who were, at first, locked out in October ... and have been on legal strike since January" of 2024.

"We've been locked out or on strike for 124 days. That's a third of a year," said Serge Bouchard, president of CUPE Local 1490. "As it stands now, it seems Doug Ford and all of Ontario's Conservative MPPs are okay with a worker being the victim of a hit-and-run every 41 days."

Tell me—

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** Back to the minister for a response.

**Hon. David Piccini:** I'm proud to say that 98% of deals are done in Ontario at that table. That member will do anything to not just simply answer the question. He wants a minimum-wage economy, wants to push a minimum-wage economy, wants to—in his black-and-white viewpoint—just drive out jobs, not understanding the nuance that when workers succeed employers succeed, and that conversely, there's a flip side: that employers have to succeed for workers to succeed. That's why—

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** Unfortunately, that is all the time we have for questions and answers.

*Third reading debate deemed adjourned.*



## MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

ONTARIO LEGISLATURE  
INTERNSHIP PROGRAMME

**Mr. Deepak Anand:** The things we learn the best are the things we learn by doing. Research shows experiential learning has the highest rate of knowledge retention, at 90%, as it provides an opportunity to see, feel and experience as you're learning.

Since 1975, the Ontario Legislature Internship Programme has been a distinctive example of how experiential learning prepares graduates to be job-ready. Each year, from September to June, 10 motivated university graduates complete paid internships on all aspects of the Legislature with MPPs from both sides. In the last 48 years, 307 MPPs have hosted 416 non-partisan interns.

OLIP opens the door for its alumni to have distinguished careers in many fields, with former interns becoming architects, academics, lawyers, public servants, public relations, as well as members or even becoming elected officials. For an example, Tim Murphy became an MPP in 1993, became chief of staff to Prime Minister Paul Martin. Here at home, Patrick Sackville, the current chief of staff to Premier Ford, was in OLIP as well.

So I want to say thank you to my OLIP interns, Gurkamal, Habon, Esmā and Bridget, for being part of my office, learning by contributing and bringing a new perspective.

## HOME CARE

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** People in Ontario want to age at home. They do not want to move into a long-term-care home. We know how to support people in their own homes, where they want to be. We have the knowledge, we have the skills, but frail, elderly Ontarians face a broken home care system. In Ontario, for-profit home care companies are more interested in making a profit than in providing people the care they need in order to stay home safely and respectfully.

A personal support worker was in my office a few days ago asking how he can continue to service the clients in Dowling and Onaping, two northern rural areas of my riding, after Canadian Shield cut his mileage in half, to 25 cents a kilometre. Most home care workers do not get paid between clients. In my riding, they will drive for 30 or 45 minutes between clients, all on their own time, for 25 cents a kilometre. It doesn't matter how hard they work; it is impossible to make enough money to survive.

Many PSWs love their clients. They are good at what they do, but they have no choice but to leave the home care system in order to feed their kids and pay their rent. Right now, ParaMed, a for-profit home care company, is withholding money that the government sent for PSWs in order to gain concessions from their PSWs. This is happening under this government's watch. It is a shame.

## SCARBOROUGH SUBWAY EXTENSION

**Mr. Aris Babikian:** As part of our government's promise to build more transit in Scarborough, the government allocated \$1 million to start studies on extending the Sheppard subway line from Don Mills to McCowan. Accordingly, Metrolinx organized public consultations in November 2023.

On December 6, 2023, MPP Raymond Cho, MPP David Smith and I organized a town hall meeting to seek input from community organizations, residents and stakeholders. The town hall participants unanimously spoke in favour of the extension of the Sheppard line to be a subway and not LRT.

The following community organizations—the Sheppard Subway Action Coalition, the Agincourt Village Community Association, the Heathwood Ratepayers Association, C.D. Farquharson, the Pleasant View Community Association, the Federation of Asian Canadians, the MTCC 872 condo board, the Chinese Cultural Centre of Greater Toronto, the Scarborough Rosewood Community Association and the Filipino Centre Toronto—presented their studies and analysis in support of subway extension. During the town hall and in their written submissions, the community organizations made persuasive and well-supported points to extend the subway line on Sheppard Avenue East.

In addition, during the January 20, 2024 pre-budget consultation in Scarborough, a substantial number of Scarborough organizations also advocated for the subway option.

ANNUAL FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL  
SIMULATION

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Yesterday I attended the federal-provincial conference simulation in Waterloo. Waterloo region students come together to simulate the annual federal-provincial meetings where they discuss solutions to the problems the country is facing. We are fortunate to have teachers who believe it is imperative for students to truly understand the operations of the Canadian federal and provincial system and step into the shoes of politicians.

In partnership with the University of Waterloo, the first conference was launched in 1965, with Steven Langdon from KCI serving as the Prime Minister. Interestingly enough, Langdon went on to become an NDP member of Parliament.

Since then, Fed-Prov has been a highlight of the academic year for students across Waterloo, and they just celebrated its 59th year. Yesterday was also the inaugural launch at Wilfrid Laurier University, and this is the beginning of a truly progressive partnership with the Waterloo Region District School Board and WLU.

Speaker, this simulation is a unique opportunity for youth to gain deeper understanding of the decision-making process and the complexities of governance, something that we in this room know all too well. It fosters a sense of

civic engagement and prepares young people to be informed and active citizens, which we need more than ever.

### 1020

Thank you to the educators who continue to ensure that Fed-Prov continues year after year. I'm sure the future politicians that you are mentoring and supporting thank you, as do we in this Legislature.

## ONTARIO TRILLIUM FOUNDATION GRANTS FOR DURHAM REGION

**Mr. Lorne Coe:** I am pleased to share with my colleagues that \$476,000 from the Ontario Trillium Foundation will be directed toward five non-profit organizations in the town of Whitby and other parts of the region of Durham, ensuring safe and accessible programming, activities and spaces for local residents. Whether it's purchasing the equipment, building new spaces or completing renovations, these grants will have a positive impact on the region of Durham.

Now, the organizations receiving these grants—Wind-Reach Farm, the Sunrise Developmental Support Services group, County Town Singers and the Whitby Curling Club—all play a pivotal role in enriching the lives of Whitby residents and contributing to a strong and prosperous region of Durham.

Speaker, these grants go beyond financial support. It's about making life better for people in the region of Durham. It's about creating opportunities for communities to thrive.

## ED BROADBENT DARYL KRAMP

**Mr. Joel Harden:** The House has reconvened, but since we were last here, two great Canadians have passed away. I had an opportunity to attend a celebration of life for both of them, so I want to talk about Ed Broadbent, and I want to talk about Daryl Kramp.

I had occasion to be at the Dominion-Chalmers centre with current and former elected officials to celebrate the life of Ed Broadbent. Many people don't realize, but Ed won by 15 votes in a close three-way race in his hometown of Oshawa in 1968; went on to serve this country; led our party federally for 14 years; was a friend to people from all caucuses. It was wonderful to be in that room and to remember Ed as a human being. Ed was someone who believed Canada could be a place of opportunity for everyone.

I want to say, Speaker, politics is also full of surprises, because I found the same to be true of Daryl Kramp. Mr. Kramp was the chair of the government caucus for 2018 when we were both elected to this House, but he had served Canada in other capacities federally before that.

I had occasion in this building, after a very difficult debate in this House, to be up on the third floor where both of our offices were, hanging my head. Mr. Kramp came

over, put his arm on my shoulder and said, "What's wrong, Joel?" I said, "I'm having a hard time with the heat in this place." He said, "Take the heat, and let it power you to work for your people."

One of the things that was said at his celebration of life I take to the bank: "You can get a lot done in politics," Daryl used to say, "if you don't worry about taking credit." Amen to that.

Rest in peace, Ed. Rest in peace, Daryl.

## GROUNDHOG DAY IN WIARTON

**Mr. Rick Byers:** Good morning, colleagues. I want to tell you about a great Ontario event I had the pleasure of attending this past February 2: Groundhog Day in Warton.

Groundhog Day started back in 1956, when Warton resident Mac McKenzie donned a fur hat, dug a burrow in the snow and made a weather prognostication. The next day, the picture was in the paper, and the annual tradition was born.

The morning began with a beautiful display of fireworks at 7 a.m. Warton is nestled right on the shores of Georgian Bay, so the fireworks were very special. At 7:40, the McLaren Pipe and Drum Band led us to the stage. The sound of bagpipes is also extra special on a frosty winter morning. Town criers Bruce Kruger and MacGregor Tannahill were both dressed in their bright red uniforms, and their message to the crowd of 500 was clear and loud.

I was in the group known as the shadow cabinet, which included Mayor Jay Kirkland, Ronnie Ottewell and Regan McKenzie, the daughter of founder Mac McKenzie. We were all in white tuxedos and top hats.

Warton Willie then joined us on stage with his amazing handler, Gord Glover. Willie looked great and was in a chatty mood. Mayor Kirkland listened intently, considered what he'd heard and proudly announced Willie's forecast: an early spring.

Colleagues, this is a great event for Warton and for our province. Thank you, Willie, for your great work. See you next year.

## RICK BOON

**Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady:** I rise this morning as a Delhi girl to honour a hometown boy who served and protected members and staff at Queen's Park for nearly 32 years, up until his recent retirement. That hometown boy is none other than Rick Boon, here in the gallery today with his wife, Gina, and dad, John.

A tireless worker, Rick was passionate about the assembly's responsibility in supporting the function of Parliament, and he did his utmost to uphold the critical importance of this assembly's autonomy, independence and neutrality.

Although his illustrious career saw him wear many hats, Rick is most proud of serving as a member of the armed response unit, as well as operations manager within

precinct properties branch and commander of the service's public safety unit.

Alongside his countless accomplishments within this building, Rick was awarded the Diamond Jubilee Medal and Peace Officer Exemplary Service Medal. When I arrived at Queen's Park on the heels of the 2022 election, it was Rick who first knocked at my door to ensure I was settling in and to ask if there was anything I needed.

Rick sends gratitude to the members who improved security and building services, and he conveys special thanks to former Sergeant-at-Arms Dennis Clark and director Jelena Bajcetic for their support and inspiration. He offers thanks to the MPPs that he had the honour of serving, even those he had the pleasure of arresting.

Speaker, I've known the Boon family since I was a child—a family that is loved and respected in our neck of the woods. I think we are truly blessed that the Boon family shared with us their son, husband and father for so many years.

Rick Boon: an exemplary employee and a very true friend. Enjoy retirement, Rick.

#### BLACK HISTORY MONTH

**Mr. Stephen Crawford:** Thank you, Speaker. It's great to be back in the House.

Today, as we celebrate Black History Month, I'd like to reflect on the deep roots and contributions of Black Canadians.

Today, I rise to honour that heritage beginning with the historic town of Oakville, a symbol of hope and freedom in the journey of the Underground Railroad. Oakville became one of the main critical end points to the Underground Railroad network in the mid-19th century. There are many untold stories of courage and determination of individuals who, despite their peril, found sanctuary within our community. Their journeys from slavery to freedom, aided by the support of Oakville's residents, embody our town's spirit of inclusivity, compassion and justice. It is crucial to recognize and celebrate the vibrant organizations that continue to uplift and support Oakville's Black community.

I want to thank Evangeline Chima, founder and CEO of Black Mentorship Inc., for her outstanding leadership and dedication to Black professionals within our community. The work done by BMI is building pathways of success and resilience.

Furthermore, I had the privilege of experiencing the Canadian Caribbean Association of Halton's Black History Month art exhibit. This event, under the expert curation of Joan Butterfield and the talented artists who shared their profound expressions of heritage and identity, has been well received in Oakville. Your dedication to celebrating Black heritage and promoting inclusivity and understanding in our community is amazing.

Let us all continue to support and participate in these valuable community initiatives during Black History Month and, just as importantly, throughout the entire year.

#### DARYL KRAMP

**Mr. Ric Bresee:** As was already mentioned in the House today, and as most of you know, we lost a great Canadian this month. Daryl Kramp was a member of this House in the last term. He was also a federal member for 11 years and a member of municipal council for two terms. It was Daryl who encouraged me to run and to seek this role as he was retiring.

Over the past many years, I've heard a particular phrase from Daryl many times in his speeches and in general conversation. It was a piece of advice that he gave to me, and I believe it was a mantra in his own life. He said, "Lead with your heart." With the love of his life, Carol Ann, at his side—always at his side—Daryl led with his heart in his faith, in his love for his family and his community, and in absolutely everything he did.

#### 1030

A few minutes with Daryl and you knew he was genuine. A mutual friend once described him as "a man who you instinctively wanted to follow because of the warmth of his voice, and the twinkle in his eyes." He worked to improve whatever he set his mind to, and he always worked well with all of those around him engaged. He achieved many great things for his beloved country, province and his home. I personally am better for having known him, for having learned from him, and I will miss him dearly.

On behalf of my wife, Heidi, myself and the people of Hastings-Lennox and Addington, I would like to express our greatest condolences to the entire Kramp family. Thank you so much for sharing Daryl with us for so many years.

#### INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** As the Speaker of this provincial Parliament, I'm pleased to have a colleague at the far side of the chamber today. In the lower gallery is my friend the MLA from Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, Speaker Nathan Cooper of the province of Alberta. Speaker Cooper is currently one of the longest-serving Speakers in Canada. He is joined by the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, Shannon Dean; his chief of staff, Lianne Bell; and parliamentary and engagement coordinator Andrew Koning. Welcome to Queen's Park. We're delighted to have you here.

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** It gives me enormous pleasure to welcome members of my family, the Bowman family. I want to welcome Alisen, Lexi and Colin. They are the family of our fallen hero, Captain Craig Bowman.

I just would like to share that my dad and your dad, Carol, came together on the boat when they first came from the UK, so we have long ties, and it's really wonderful to see you here. I'm going to thank the minister for the work that he's done on behalf of firefighters.

**Mr. Sheref Sabawy:** I would like to welcome page James Teng from the great riding of Mississauga-Erin Mills and his parents, Jeniffer Teng and Michael Teng,

who are here today in the gallery of members. Welcome to Queen's Park.

**Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady:** Again, I'd like to welcome back to Queen's Park long-time assembly staffer Rick Boon; his wife, Gina; and Rick's dad, Mr. John Boon, who at 90 years young has many talents and gifts, but above all, is an incredible musician. Welcome back to Queen's Park. Enjoy your day together.

**Ms. Chandra Pasma:** I'd like to welcome Astrid Krueger, who has been my OLIP intern for the past few months. Team Ottawa West–Nepean is really, really going to miss you, Astrid. Thanks for all your hard work, and good luck in your next placement.

**Mr. Vincent Ke:** I want to give a warm welcome to École élémentaire Paul-Demers from my riding of Don Valley North. I hope you enjoy your trip at Queen's Park.

**Mr. Lorne Coe:** I'd like to welcome to the Legislature some journalism students and staff from Durham College in my riding. Welcome to Queen's Park.

**Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon:** Good morning, powerful people. It's lovely to see you all again.

They're not in the chamber but they're coming, so hopefully we're behaving when they come. It's my clever and creative kids from sensational Secord public school in the east end.

**Hon. David Piccini:** I, too, want to join in welcoming the Bowman family who are here this morning for Bill 149 third reading, in addition to members of the Welland firefighters who are here. We value the work that they do.

Greg Horton, I believe, just joined us, from the Ontario Professional Fire Fighters Association. Under Greg's leadership, firefighters have done so much over the last few years in presumptive coverage, and I thank him for his advocacy. Thank you for being here today.

**Hon. Graydon Smith:** I wanted to welcome Torin Peters-Millar from Huntsville in my great riding of Parry Sound–Muskoka. He's joining us today. He's up in the gallery, and I think he's one day away from a birthday tomorrow, so happy birthday in advance, Torin.

**Ms. Jennifer K. French:** As I look around the gallery, I see Peter Garrett here with a crew of students from Durham College. He, of course, works in the office of the president. As always, glad to welcome you to Queen's Park.

#### DECORUM IN CHAMBER

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** I'm going to ask for the attention of the House for a moment so that I may remind members of one of the standards of decorum in the chamber. It has long been the established practice of this House that members should not use props, signage or accessories that are intended to express a political message or are likely to cause disorder. This also extends to members' attire, where logos, symbols, slogans and other political messaging are not permitted. This Legislature is a forum for debate, and the expectation in the chamber is

that political statements should be made during debate rather than through the use of props or symbols.

### QUESTION PERIOD

#### GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

**Ms. Marit Stiles:** Good morning, Speaker. Our public colleges and universities are nearing the breaking point after decades of underfunding, while for-profit career colleges have been seeing a massive expansion under this government.

Yesterday, we got a hint about why in a report that was done by Trillium. They found out that government members have raked in more than \$151,000 in political donations from private college operators since 2018. One of the biggest beneficiaries? The local campaign of the Minister of Colleges and Universities herself. That's thousands of dollars in donations from the very same insiders who stand to benefit directly from her decisions as minister.

To the Premier: Is it acceptable for the Minister of Colleges and Universities to take donations from people lobbying her office on behalf of private colleges?

*Interjections.*

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

Minister of Colleges and Universities.

**Hon. Jill Dunlop:** I'd like to talk about the international students and the chaos that the federal government has caused in the post-secondary sector across Canada—absolutely no consultation with the provinces or the institutions themselves.

I am hearing from ministers on this side about the impact that this is going to have in their ministries. In fact, the Premier and the Prime Minister just signed a historic health care deal. Where do you think the PSWs and the nurses are going to come from that the Minister of Long-Term Care and the Minister of Health are going to need? Where are we going to find the skilled trade workers that the Minister of Labour and the Minister of Infrastructure are going to need to build the houses, the roads, the schools, the hospitals in this province?

Mr. Speaker, absolutely no consultations with the provinces or these institutions themselves—absolutely disgusting from the federal government.

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

**Ms. Marit Stiles:** Speaker, it gets even sketchier. Most of the donations came from a single event hosted by the minister in March 2022. Nearly a third of the attendees were connected to these private corporate colleges, all paying a thousand bucks a pop for an audience with the minister.

Private colleges have existed for years, but under this government, they have exploded, so much so that even the

Auditor General flagged it. Speaker, is this really how things are going to be done in today's Ontario?

*Interjections.*

1040

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

Minister of Colleges and Universities.

**Hon. Jill Dunlop:** I don't know if the Leader of the Opposition has done anything to lobby for additional seats in this province, but we on this side have been working hard at that. In fact, I've met with the tourism industry and the Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport. The number of workers that your ministry needs alone—look at March break coming up: the resorts, the front desks, the ski hills. The workers that we need in this province—it's absolutely incredible.

We are disgusted with the federal government for dropping this on the provinces with no consultation. The Minister of Labour and I tried to meet with the minister months ago and were not able to because they kept cancelling on us. We have been there, working with our stakeholders, the colleges and universities, to ensure that we have a pathway forward as we deal with the disgrace that the federal government has dropped on us.

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

**Ms. Marit Stiles:** Speaker, it's pretty clear who can get it done under this government: anyone willing to fork over the cash. They started handing out licences to private health care companies after receiving thousands of dollars in donations from clinic owners and investors looking to set up private hospitals. And now, here we are. We can connect the dots again: massive donations to the PC Party, massive expansion of private colleges.

How can the Premier defend a return to the bad old days of Liberal cash-for-access culture, where policies are decided by how much you're willing to hand over to the governing party?

*Interjections.*

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

I'm having difficulty hearing the Leader of the Opposition ask her question, so I'd ask the House to come to order so that I can.

Restart the clock. To respond for the government, the government House leader.

**Hon. Paul Calandra:** Mr. Speaker, I sympathize with the Leader of the Opposition. She is correct that under the previous Liberal government, these types of programs became endemic, and we didn't see, of course, any results with the previous Liberal government.

I remind the Leader of the Opposition that she and her party supported the Liberals throughout that time when they actually held the balance of power. What is so disappointing about that is that during that time of support, we didn't see investments made in health care, transit, transportation. We didn't see investments made to build new subways. In fact, they left us the most indebted sub-sovereign government on the planet. They left us the most over-regulated jurisdiction in Canada. They scared away

300,000 jobs. Throughout all of that, the NDP supported them. That's the legacy of the previous Liberal government.

I'm glad the Leader of the Opposition finally recognizes the destructive nature of the—

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

#### GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

**Ms. Marit Stiles:** Speaker, even while they are under an RCMP criminal investigation, this government continues to dig into a cash-for-access culture—and it gets so much worse. While communities across Ontario are doing absolutely everything they can to support people who are struggling with addiction, with recovery, with mental health issues, the Minister of Mental Health and Addictions is hosting a \$1,000-a-ticket fundraiser called, unbelievably, a “mental health mixer.”

My question is for the Premier. What exactly are attendees getting out of spending \$1,000 to attend the minister's mental health mixer?

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** I'm going to caution the Leader of the Opposition on the choice of words that she's using in her questions.

The government House leader will respond.

**Hon. Paul Calandra:** The reality is that since we came to office, we have been pouring money into mental health and addictions. Do you know why, Mr. Speaker? Because under the previous Liberal government, supported by the NDP, like so many other sectors across the province of Ontario, mental health and addictions were completely ignored. They closed down beds. They laid off nurses. They didn't build hospitals. They did absolutely nothing.

There are so many people who have come to me—and I'm very passionate about this—and talked about the failings of the previous Liberal government which have left their families, their children without the ability to get care. And through it all, the NDP supported them.

**Mr. John Fraser:** It's six years of failure, Premier.

**Hon. Paul Calandra:** Now, the Liberals scream and holler over there, but you failed the people of the province of Ontario. You failed children; you failed adults; you failed anybody who needed mental health and addiction support, because you did nothing, absolutely—

*Interjections.*

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Stop the clock. I'm going to ask the member for Hamilton Mountain to come to order and the member for Ottawa South to come to order.

Start the clock. Supplementary question.

**Ms. Marit Stiles:** This government is putting a price tag on mental health. That's what they're doing. Wait-lists for mental health services are out of control. It takes up to a year—more sometimes—for people to access treatment. Just last week, 17 people in Belleville experienced an overdose in just one day. The mayor is absolutely begging his local Conservative MPP and the minister—anyone—to help. But instead this government's priority is hosting a fundraising mixer with the minister—so out of touch.

To the Premier again, and I hope he answers this question: Why is this government and this minister playing a cash-for-access game with the mental health of Ontarians?

*Interjections.*

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

The Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions.

**Hon. Michael A. Tibollo:** We answered this question yesterday, but I'm going to try to answer it again. One of the first things we did was speak to the mayors, speak to the first responders, speak to CMHA to find out what the immediate needs were. And we were there. We made those investments.

We also went out to Belleville and had the opportunity to meet with all the first responders and with the mayor and we discussed a plan that needs to be put in place. I drove out to Belleville and I spent the time with the mayor and the other service providers. Where were you? Where was the NDP at that point in time? You were busy making cat videos, I assume.

But let's just talk about the reality of what's happening in Belleville and everywhere else in the province. We are the first party that is making substantial investments in creating continuums of care in the communities, looking after everyone, and we're doing it in a culturally safe way, not just in southern Ontario but—

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Thank you. The minister will take his seat.

The final supplementary.

**Ms. Marit Stiles:** That is a very disappointing and, I would say, shameful response to that question.

I think the government needs to wake up. Ontarians have caught on to this government's backroom deals and their insider favours. There are communities all across this province that are waiting for an answer from this government about funding for critical services, and that minister is holding a mixer tonight—\$1,000 a pop—to raise money for his own campaign coffers while the mayor of Belleville is so desperate they're willing to go it alone.

Is this how people are supposed to finally get action on the mental health crisis facing their communities, or the education crisis, the university students? I mean, my goodness.

My question to the Premier is, what next? Are toddlers going to have to give up their toys for child care spaces? What is next? That's my question to the Premier.

**Hon. Michael A. Tibollo:** Once again, I cannot believe how out of touch the Leader of the Opposition is. We have spent time going back and forth, criss-crossing the province speaking to service providers and community-based organizations that are in need of support and help. Where are you and where are the other people in your party? We are speaking with people. We're meeting with them. We're hosting round tables and we're making investments with real dollars: \$525 million a year, an Addictions Recovery Fund of \$90 million that opened 400 beds and 7,000 treatment spots. Where were you? I know where you were: making cat videos, sitting here critiquing

what we're doing and not standing with us and actually supporting the decisions that this government is making, which are to the benefit of the people of the province of Ontario.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** I will remind the members to make their comments through the Chair, not directly across the floor of the House.

1050

#### GOVERNMENT ADVERTISING

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** My question is to the Premier. In the Auditor General's annual report released last December, it was revealed that this Conservative government spent about \$25 million on partisan ads. "The primary objective of these ads ... was to foster a positive impression of the government," the report stated—\$25 million spent on ads while Ontario experienced 203 emergency department closures; \$25 million on ads while 2.3 million Ontarians did not have a family physician; and \$25 million on ads while regions across northern Ontario declared a health state of emergency.

This government added insult to injury by opting for a Super Bowl ad, the most expensive ad on television, Speaker. Will the Minister of Finance or will the Premier please tell the citizens of this great province exactly how much of their money was spent on these fictional Super Bowl ads?

*Interjections.*

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Stop the clock. Again, I'm having difficulty hearing the member who has the floor, who was duly recognized to ask a question. I'd ask the government side to allow me to do so.

Start the clock. The Premier can respond.

**Hon. Doug Ford:** Mr. Speaker, I got a call this morning from someone who landed in LAX, and they said they got off the plane and all they saw is Ontario ads running all the way down the terminal. It's in Chicago. They're all over the US. Do you know why they're all over the US? They're our number one trading partner, Mr. Speaker. And when governors and senators coming up to me, when they come here—and said, "Wow, what are you doing? You're eating our lunch." We created more manufacturing jobs than all 50 states combined.

We saw an EV auto sector that both these parties, the Liberals and NDP, absolutely destroyed, chased the whole sector out of the province—\$28 billion of investment, more to come this year; \$20 billion in tech; \$3 billion in life sciences. That's the reason. They basically chased 300,000 jobs out of the province, and there are 700,000 more people working today than there were five years ago.

You need a lesson on market—

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Again, I'd ask the members to make their comments through the Chair.

*Interjections.*

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Order.

The supplementary question.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** This Premier needs a lesson on how to govern with integrity in the province of Ontario; that's what you need.

Speaker, not just one commercial from this government was aired during the Super Bowl; there were several commercials, which he's bragging about.

In Waterloo region, I had—

*Interjections.*

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Stop the clock. I apologize to the member for Waterloo.

The member for Carleton will come to order. The member for Sault Ste. Marie will come to order. The member for Kitchener–Conestoga will come to order.

Restart the clock. The member for Waterloo, I apologize once again for interrupting.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Thank you, Speaker.

Not just one commercial, Speaker; several. Money was flowing out of the Treasury Board from this place instead of people having access to doctors or to education.

In Waterloo region, I have a constituent who's been waiting six months for a mammogram. Mammograms save lives. Is that a priority of this Premier? No, it is not. There are almost 300,000 people on a wait-list for mammograms. These tests save lives.

So I want to ask this Premier, who's bragging about commercials in the LAX airport, can he explain to Ontario why he's spending public money praising himself over the people of the province who you are elected to serve?

*Interjections.*

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Stop the clock. The member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke will come to order. The member for Sault Ste. Marie will come to order. The member for Niagara West will come to order.

We'll start the clock. The Premier can respond.

**Hon. Doug Ford:** Mr. Speaker, you know something? We have seen massive growth. We are now an economic powerhouse around North America. The world is talking about Ontario—that they never talked about Ontario before.

Mr. Speaker, we're investing \$28 billion in transit. In one sector alone, we're building \$70 billion worth of transit across the province. We're investing \$28 billion in highways and roads and bridges. We're building hospitals. We're building schools.

This is the place to open up business. Everyone knows it in the US. Again, Mr. Speaker, we're eating their lunch. This is the place. If you want to do business, the world knows you come to Ontario. We have another \$30 billion of investment coming to Ontario this year alone. Hundreds of thousands of people are going to collect a bigger paycheque, a better job because of what our government is doing. Thank God you guys are never going to be in government.

*Interjections.*

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** One more time, I'll remind the members to make their comments through the Chair. The member for Hamilton Mountain will come to order.

The next question.

#### PUBLIC TRANSIT

**Mr. Aris Babikian:** My question is to the Associate Minister of Transportation. In my riding of Scarborough—

Agincourt, constituents have raised concerns over the steep transit costs. At a time when many individuals and families feel like they are struggling to get ahead, paying a double fare is another added expense to their household budgets.

Speaker, commuters who travel daily to make a living are looking to us to make public transit more convenient and affordable. We must act now to lower transit costs. Can the associate minister please share what our government is doing to make transit more affordable across Ontario's fast-growing communities?

**Hon. Vijay Thanigasalam:** Thank you so much to the member from Scarborough–Agincourt for that question. Speaker, our goal has been always to provide Ontarians with affordable, reliable, and convenient transportation across this great province. That's why, starting this coming Monday, February 26, under the leadership of Premier Ford, we are introducing eliminating one fare. That will save \$1,600 every year.

Mr. Speaker, this program, the one-fare program, is fully funded by our provincial government, and this program will boost the ridership by nearly eight million new riders per year. That means eliminating gridlock and taking cars off the roads.

Our government will continue to put more money back into peoples' pockets, and that's exactly what we're doing. We'll get it right.

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

**Mr. Aris Babikian:** Thank you to the associate minister for his response. It is exciting news that our government is once again putting money back into the pockets of public transit riders. Speaker, many of my constituents in Scarborough–Agincourt need to take the TTC and the GO train to work each day. Having more affordable transit options is essential to save commuters time and money.

Our government must remain committed to delivering real, tangible relief for Ontarians. Speaker, can the minister please elaborate on how one fare will keep costs down for the hard-working people in my riding and across Ontario?

**Hon. Vijay Thanigasalam:** With the one-fare program, Ontarians can use any form of payment method, for example, Presto card, debit card, credit card, and Google Wallet on mobile phones as well. This program is coming across the GTHA starting from Durham region, York region, Mississauga, Brampton, Barrie, Hamilton, Burlington, Oakville—right across GTHA, the one-fare program is going to eliminate the double fare.

When a transit rider is going from one transit agency to another, moving from one city to another, no more do they have to pay this double fare. They are going to have an affordable payment, as well as a seamless transition between one transit agency to another.

We want to make sure—the Premier made it crystal clear: We want to stand for affordability. We will work with all the municipal boundaries, all the municipal leaders to make sure one-fare goes beyond—

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Thank you very much.

The next question.

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#### NORTHERN HOME CARE

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** My question is to the Premier. Howard Meshake of Sioux Lookout is one of my constituents. His wife, Jeannie, had a stroke back in 2018, leaving her paralyzed and needing 24-hour care.

Speaker, he had presented to the pre-budget committee in 2020, and the government promised to help him access home care. So I ask this government: What is Ontario doing for Jeannie and others in the north who haven't been able to access proper home care support closer to home?

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** To respond, the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Health and the member for Eglinton–Lawrence.

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** Thank you to the member opposite for the question. Our government has recognized that the status quo was not working and that more needs to be done, and that is why we launched our Your Health plan. We're taking bold and innovative action to eliminate surgical backlogs, reduce wait times for publicly funded surgeries and procedures. That plan is working.

We want to have a strong home and community care sector as a key part of our plan, and we want to make sure that these resources are available across the province, including in northern Ontario. That's why recently, as the minister said yesterday, we've announced new inter-professional primary care teams in the north, including in Sault Ste. Marie, Timmins and others. So we're making sure that the care is there for the people who need it.

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

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** Thank you for the answer, but, Speaker, it's not working in the part of Ontario where I'm at—Sault Ste. Marie is 2,000 kilometres from where I am in Sioux Lookout.

Howard has spent the last five years trying to navigate a badly broken health care system, and things are just getting worse. His family continues to be ignored and abandoned by this broken system.

Speaker, this government made big promises in 2020, saying Jeannie would get the home care she needs to live in dignity, and nothing has changed. Will they ensure families in the north get the access to the home care they need—yes or no?

*Interjections.*

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

The member for Eglinton–Lawrence.

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** Our government has made a commitment to make sure that people get access to the care they need when and where they need it, and that is everywhere across the province, including the north. We're making sure we make those investments, and we've made a \$1-billion investment in the home care sector over

three years, accelerated those investments so that \$569 million was in the budget for 2023-24, including \$300 million to support wage increases to stabilize personnel in the home and community care sector, including immediate funding to support community programs such as Meals on Wheels.

We passed legislation recently to further modernize the home care sector, integrating it with our Ontario health teams—Ontario health teams that are also being established in the north. Ontario is taking steps to have integrated care coordination, flexible care planning and delivery and needs-based care. We're not focused on hours of delivery. We're focused on patients, and we're going to make sure that they get the care they need in the north and across Ontario.

#### HEALTH CARE

**Mr. Sam Oosterhoff:** My question is for the Minister of Health. We saw the previous Liberal government here in Ontario stretch our hospitals to a breaking point in Niagara West and across the rest of this province. We saw that hallway health care, reckless mismanagement, out-of-control spending and scandals define their management of our health care system.

Since I was elected in 2016, I've been advocating on behalf of my constituents and all the people of Ontario for an improved health care system. I know that this Premier and this government are getting it done by prioritizing investments in our patients' care when and where they need it.

So my question to the minister, Speaker, is: What is this government doing to ensure that every person in the province of Ontario has access to primary care when and where they need it?

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** The parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Health and the member for Eglinton–Lawrence.

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** Thank you to the exceptional member from Niagara West. Under the leadership of Premier Ford, our government has been making record investments in health care. We also recognized early that when it comes to your health, the status quo is not working.

For over a decade, the NDP propped up the Liberals as they cut medical residency positions, cut the number of physicians practising in family health teams and cut access to care, creating the longest health care wait times in Ontario's history.

That's why, one year ago, our government introduced Your Health, a comprehensive plan to make bold, innovative and creative changes to strengthen all aspects of our health care system, making it easier and more convenient for Ontarians to connect to the care they need closer to home. And we're already starting to see results: We're moving on over 50 hospital developments, including Niagara. That will add over 3,000 new hospital beds to the 3,500 we have already added since 2020—adding



more beds in four years than the Liberals added in 14 years.

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

**Mr. Sam Oosterhoff:** I think we can see in the parliamentary assistant's response that the contrast behind the broken record of the Liberal government and our government taking advantage of the way that we can move forward the transformation for the people of Ontario couldn't be more stark.

It's encouraging to see that this government is making record investments to help people in my community and so many others. I was pleased to see that 11 primary care organizations in the Niagara region actually received funding as part of a historic announcement into our area. From Wainfleet to Port Colborne, from Fort Erie to Grimsby, Niagara is going to be getting the convenient care that the people in our region deserve. A \$2.4-million investment will mean that an additional 7,600 constituents are going to be receiving primary care. We know that every person in Ontario should have access to well-connected care when and where they need it, and that is exactly what this minister is working on.

Could the minister please elaborate on what this government is doing to connect people in every corner of our province to the care they need?

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** I want to thank the member from Niagara West for his question again.

Ontario currently leads the country with over 90% of people connected to regular health care providers and we have added hundreds of medical residency positions specifically for family doctors across the province, but we can do better to improve access for people in Ontario not connected to primary care. That's why, on February 1, the minister announced an investment of \$110 million to connect over 300,000 more people to primary care teams. This will add over 400 new primary care providers as part of 78 new and expanded interprofessional primary care teams, and these teams will help people currently without a family doctor connect to primary care.

Together with Ontario's largest expansion of medical school spots, while breaking down barriers for internationally trained doctors, Ministry of Health modelling shows that all of these initiatives together will connect up to 98% of people in Ontario to primary care in the next several years. We won't stop until we get it done.

## HOUSING

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** After six years of this Conservative government, the housing crisis has gone from a fire to a raging inferno. People are struggling, and yet Conservatives made new roadblocks for municipalities to access provincial housing funding. Conservatives even admitted that, to the government, building affordable housing is like "taking power away" and would "destroy the integrity of the free market."

This Legislature is full of words about housing and little action. Speaking of words, at a time when no one can

afford housing, would the Premier please provide a definition for his term "attainable housing"?

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

**Hon. Paul Calandra:** I know the member must be grateful for the 21% increase in homelessness funding in his riding, Mr. Speaker—not something that he asked for, but something that was delivered by the Associate Minister of Housing.

Let's get this straight: The NDP sat here while the Liberals presided over obstacle after obstacle after obstacle in the way of building homes. The NDP have become so irrelevant in the discussion, really, haven't they? Because they supported a decade and a half of inaction by the Liberals.

When it comes to building housing, people know that it is this government that's going to get the job done. That is why, since the housing supply action plans that we brought in place, we have seen housing starts at their highest level in decades. And, Speaker, get this: Purpose-built rentals are at their highest ever in the province of Ontario—ever.

So unlike the Liberals, who put obstacles in the way, we remove obstacles and we deliver for the people of the province of Ontario and will continue to do so.

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

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** Speaker, through you to the government House leader: I've been asking for emergency homelessness funding for my community of London since I was elected in 2018.

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Back to the Premier: Across the province, the finance committee heard from municipalities who are breaking under the burden of providing affordable and supportive housing, yet this government has spent 18 months trying to figure out what their own words meant. It's pretty embarrassing that this government uses slogans that literally mean nothing—literally nothing, even to themselves. It kind of reminds me of the kid who tries to give themselves a cool nickname, and nobody—and I mean nobody—actually uses that name.

When will this government stop using empty words and make good on their promise to make municipalities whole?

**Hon. Paul Calandra:** Speaker, do you know who is very supportive of the work that we are doing to build more homes, to get roadblocks out of the way? It's the mayor of London, who recently at a council meeting talked about how good the Associate Minister of Housing has been to help unlock housing in that community. Speaker, you will know the reason that London is in such a crisis is because, for far too long, Liberal and NDP members of Parliament have been there. But of course, with the Associate Minister of Housing on the job, we have been able to deliver a 63% increase in the member's own riding when it comes to homelessness prevention.

The member talks about definitions. Well, I'm not sure what he's talking about, because he actually voted in favour of our definition not long ago in a bill that was

presented in front of this House—the “affordable” definition of housing, which he and all members unanimously voted in favour of.

What they’re worried about is that we’re actually delivering for the people of the province of Ontario, Mr. Speaker. I say to the member, don’t worry. Despite your inability to get the job done, we will.

#### NORTHERN HOSPITAL FUNDING

**Mr. Michael Mantha:** My question is to the Premier. Last November, 25 hospital CEOs in northern Ontario wrote a joint letter to your government about the precarious financial situation that they are in. In the letter, they outlined the fact that hospitals in northern Ontario have been directed by your minister to avoid closures of emergency departments, support surgical recovery and avoid reductions of hospital services. At the same time, they are expected to cope with the financial pressures of private agency staffing, the impacts of Bill 124, infrastructure costs and inflation, as well as the discontinuation of the locum incentive program on March 31.

Despite these pressures being communicated to the ministry, northern hospitals have received no funding to support their work, pushing many of our northern hospitals to the brink of having to consider drastic measures to continue to operate. Premier, why has your government ignored the request of northern hospitals and allowed them to reach this crisis point?

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** The parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Health, the member for Eglinton–Lawrence.

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** For over a decade, the Liberals, supported by the NDP, underfunded the health care system, closing hospitals and hospital beds, firing nurses and cutting medical school residency spots. Our government inherited a health care system under pressure due to failed policies of the previous Liberal government.

Under the leadership of Premier Ford, our government has made record investments in health care. Since 2018, we’ve increased the health care budget by over \$18 billion, investing \$80 billion into the system in this year alone, and the total health care budget in Ontario is the same as that of almost every other province and territory combined.

Continuing their legacy of not supporting health care across the province, the Liberals and NDP constantly vote against our investments and bold innovative action by this government. We’ve seen an increase in new nurses and new physicians registering and starting to practise, and we’re going to make sure that we get it done for our hospitals across Ontario.

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

**Mr. Michael Mantha:** Again to the Premier: When the letter came to my attention, followed by the Auditor General’s scathing report on northern hospitals, I met with the leadership teams in each hospital in my riding.

Northern hospitals are approaching a crisis that will impact services and will mean emergency closures, services suspended and potentially complete hospital closures. The situation is especially dire in small communities, where they deal with more complex delivery of care, work with fewer resources and are often the end-all and be-all of health care for a very large area.

Northern hospitals are poised for catastrophe. This crisis is real. Premier, these hospitals raised this alarm months ago. What are you waiting for?

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** We continue to work with our hospital partners, including the Ontario Hospital Association, to ensure that all our hospitals have the tools they need to continue to deliver high-quality care that patients in Ontario deserve. This includes communicating to the Ontario Hospital Association and hospital corporations throughout the province that our government would provide financial support to hospitals facing financial challenges. That means that we have their backs. This includes a 4% increase to the hospital sector, an additional \$44 million to tackle emergency department wait-times as well as a historic \$330 million in annual funding for pediatric care in every corner of the province.

We’ll continue to support and work with our hospital partners who deliver convenient care to patients close to home.

#### WATER AND SEWAGE INFRASTRUCTURE

**M<sup>me</sup> Dawn Gallagher Murphy:** My question is for the Minister of Infrastructure. The previous Liberal government left many water infrastructure programs in Ontario underfunded and poorly managed. Under their watch, much of the infrastructure was in need of critical repairs and upgrades. As our government continues to build Ontario, it is essential for our municipal partners to have the tools they need to build stronger, more prosperous communities. That’s why we must invest in critical infrastructure to support our rapidly growing population, unlock more housing opportunities and spur economic growth.

Speaker, can the minister please share what our government is doing to support municipal water projects to help build more housing?

**Hon. Kinga Surma:** Thank you very much to the hard-working member. And you’re right: We are building this province.

Mr. Speaker, our ministry met with over 50 different rural municipal partners at the ROMA conference. That is in addition to past ROMA meetings and AMO meetings and the consultations that occur in between. But what was very clear was the need for water infrastructure: the need for drinking water, waste water and stormwater infrastructure. You cannot build housing without connecting them to the pipes that flow clean water, discharge dirty water and treat that waste water.

In the fall economic statement, we announced the \$200-million Housing-Enabling Water Systems Fund. The

intake for applications opened at the end of January, and we encourage all municipalities in the province of Ontario to apply.

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

**M<sup>me</sup> Dawn Gallagher Murphy:** Thank you to the minister for that response. It is encouraging to see our government support municipal water projects to help build more housing and provide residents with clean, reliable drinking water.

Speaker, despite our numerous calls to the federal government, they have not yet provided Ontario its fair share of infrastructure funding. The people of this province are waiting. They are waiting for the federal government to step up and address unmet infrastructure needs. We must all continue to build a stronger Ontario together through a responsible, targeted approach.

Speaker, can the minister please explain how our government is bridging the gap in housing and water projects while holding our federal counterparts accountable?

**Hon. Kinga Surma:** Again, thank you to the member.

Two years ago, we knew that the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program, a program that was very successful and benefited many communities represented by members here in the House—we knew that all of the dollars would be allocated. For the last two years, we have been advocating and working and starting that conversation with the federal government to encourage them to give money to support Ontario infrastructure projects. Even the big city mayors as well as AMO wrote letters of support, stood behind us and lobbied the federal government. Unfortunately, we saw nothing in their fall economic statement. We have seen nothing in their budget.

But to the communities across the province: Do not feel discouraged. We just released \$200 million. There is an intake process. Please apply. The province is here to support you in growing your communities and enabling housing across the province of Ontario.

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## HEALTH CARE

**Mr. Wayne Gates:** My question is to the Premier. Speaker, when it comes to my community in Niagara, the Premier and his Ministry of Health promised over a year ago to provide a nurse practitioner to the town of Niagara-on-the-Lake. The town desperately needs a nurse practitioner, and the Premier has failed to act. Speaker, when will the Premier ensure that the people of Niagara-on-the-Lake get the public nurse practitioner service they need and deserve?

**Hon. Doug Ford:** I'm so disappointed with the member, as he voted against a brand new, over a billion-dollar hospital, right in his own region. But, Mr. Speaker, what I was happy about with him is, he handed out my cell number to everyone, so I got to actually tell them the truth about you. I actually told them the truth, that you voted against doctors, voted against nurses, voted against the

hospitals. And do you know something? After I was finished talking to endless people—not a little bit; it must have been over a hundred people I spoke to in his own riding—they agreed.

But you know what's very, very difficult—and we're doing everything we can, because we've registered over 10,000 doctors—is having doctors in that area to make sure that they're taken care of when 80% of the people see the physicians in between 10 in the morning till 8 at night. We need more doctors in the area. We're working very, very hard to attract doctors, to attract nurses—we're paying for their education. And during that time, from 10 at night till 6 or 8 in the morning, they see about eight patients. We're—

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** The Premier will please take his seat. And I'll remind the members to make comments through the Chair.

Supplementary question.

**Mr. Wayne Gates:** My question is back to the Premier, and you might be a stranger to the truth. Why won't the health minister—

*Interjections.*

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** I ask the member to withdraw the unparliamentary remark.

**Mr. Wayne Gates:** Withdrawn.

I can't hold this up, but this is a headline on the Niagara-on-the-Lake local paper, not by me, Premier, but written by Penny Coles: "Why won't the health minister keep her promise to" Niagara-on-the-Lake? So it's not me.

Speaker, back to the Premier, in Niagara, we have families in desperate need of a primary care doctor. A recent report from the Auditor General revealed the Premier is underfunding public health care by \$21 billion while increasing funding for for-profit hospitals and clinics by 300%.

We have an urgent care centre in Fort Erie—and why I gave your phone number out—closed to residents overnight, and still no nurse practitioner in Niagara-on-the-Lake. We have emergency rooms closing and urgent care closing last year in record numbers.

Speaker, when will the Premier drop the privatization scheme, invest in publicly funded, publicly delivered nurse practitioners for every resident in Ontario?

**Hon. Doug Ford:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I think he has the numbers mixed up. We've increased spending in the province by \$21 billion, not cut it by \$21 billion, and we've registered over 80,000 nurses and 10,400 doctors. We're building medical schools.

And, by the way, I'd like to ask him why he voted against a brand new hospital in his area—a billion-dollar hospital in the area? But I'd also like to ask him: Maybe he can go out and help us. Maybe you can recruit some doctors and nurses to work in that urgent care facility, because right now it's very, very difficult to find them.

It's not a money issue, Mr. Speaker. We need doctors across the province and if the nurses, like I said earlier, work in rural areas, we'll pay. We will pay for their education. That's why there were 17,500 nurses registered

last year alone. Rather than complain, why don't you get off your lazy butt and start working?

*Interjections.*

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

#### TENANT PROTECTION

**Ms. Aislinn Clancy:** My question is for the Premier. Tenants in a Kitchener apartment building are fearing the worst because they're being handed eviction notices. They're worried that their landlord is trying to evict them to raise the rents. They're seniors, newcomers, folks on ODSP, single parents, people who can't afford for their rents to go up. They have no place to go.

The Ontario Landlord and Tenant Board has been failing to prevent bad-faith evictions, so much so that the Ombudsman's report called the board "fundamentally failing." Speaker, will the Premier help these folks by saying yes to real eviction prevention for renters by implementing vacancy control to limit huge rent increases between tenancies and stop these bad-faith evictions plaguing our communities?

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** To reply, the Attorney General.

**Hon. Doug Downey:** I'm honoured to take the first question from the new member, Mr. Speaker. Just to give a bit of background for the new member, in the year 2014-15 annual report of the Landlord and Tenant Board—2015-16, 2016-17, 2017-18—they were taking in more cases than they were disposing of. They were creating a backlog. When we came into COVID, all of a sudden, the system actually failed, because they hadn't maintained the system. The "they" I'm talking about is the Liberal Party. When the NDP held the balance of power, they did nothing to identify these as issues.

Well, we're going to get it done. We've doubled the number of adjudicators. We put a new system in place. We've added more staff. We're making things work. We're going to get to balance, Mr. Speaker, despite the mess that the Liberals left us.

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

**Ms. Aislinn Clancy:** Does the Premier know how many landlords have been fined over the past four years? Thirteen. Of those, four have paid fines of an average of \$5,000. That's unacceptable.

The government's failures are only driving up the cost of housing. Right now, the average rent for a one-bedroom apartment is \$2,200. How is a person on a full-time minimum wage a month supposed to pay that much? That's all their money. How can single parents, retirees, folks on ODSP survive?

Speaker, my constituents cannot afford to wait. Again, will the Premier commit to real protections for renters, implement vacancy control now, limit the huge increases between tenancies and de-incentivize these bad-faith evictions plaguing our communities?

**Hon. Doug Downey:** Mr. Speaker, we've increased the fines for landlords who are inappropriately evicting people. The important thing is that they get a fair hearing—that they get a fair hearing, Mr. Speaker. That's why we've doubled the number of adjudicators. We put in a system that is more transparent, and it's moving faster. We're at a point now where 90% of the orders are being issued in 30 days or less—90%, 30 days or less. We're coming back to balance. We're going to make sure that those tenants have a fair chance at a fair hearing so that they can get their matters resolved. If the landlords are being inappropriate, if they're doing things they shouldn't be doing, then they will be.

Let me remind you, Mr. Speaker, that, as the Minister of Municipal Affairs indicated, we have the highest number of purpose-built rentals in the history of this province. That's what tenants need.

#### ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

**Mr. Dave Smith:** Before I ask my question, I just want to wish a happy birthday to my good friend from Mississauga Centre.

My question is for the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks. Our government must remain committed to the protection of green spaces. By expanding the amount of conserved natural spaces across the province, we're not only helping to preserve the environment but to promote physical activity and improve mental health. We need to continue our work with Ontario's conservation partners because these are our shared goals.

Last week I was honoured to join the minister and my colleague from Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock for an important announcement in Trent Lakes. Speaker, can the minister share with the House how our government is protecting ecologically important natural areas in my community and all across Ontario?

**Hon. Andrea Khanjin:** I want to thank the member for that great question, and I want to thank him for being a special adviser to parks. While this government is building roads, bridges and housing for people, we're also building great parks and preserving great green spaces. It's under the leadership of Premier Ford that our government is taking action to conserve Ontario's natural beauty and protect its unique biodiversity for future generations.

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Last Monday, I had the pleasure to announce the latest investment our government has made under the Greenlands Conservation Partnership: \$2.9 million to protect 1,400 acres of wetlands, fields and natural shoreline along Pigeon Lake. This was one of the largest not-for profit conservation projects in the Kawarthas ever and the largest conservation project by the Kawartha Land Trust.

By working together, Speaker, this project proves that we can not only protect our great land and conservation, but we can build the great things that we're doing in this province.

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

**Mr. Dave Smith:** Thank you to the minister for her response. Last week's announcement demonstrates our commitment to preserving our ecosystems across all of Peterborough–Kawartha. Ontarians want to see our government take meaningful action to ensure a healthy environment for everyone to enjoy, now and into the future.

We know that conserving natural areas such as wetlands, grasslands and forests helps mitigate the effects of climate change. That's why we must continue our efforts and work in partnership with conservation leaders like Kawartha Land Trust to increase our opportunities to protect nature.

Through you, Speaker, can the minister please tell the House how investments in the Greenlands Conservation Partnership have enabled the government to lead the way in our conservation efforts?

**Hon. Andrea Khanjin:** It is a great partnership we have with private donors and folks all across the province to really continue to lead the way in conservation as a province. Since 2020, our government has protected over 420,000 acres of land, an area two and a half times the footprint of the city of Toronto, through the Greenlands Conservation Partnership. This is real progress in conserving Ontario's biodiversity.

Since the launch of the program in 2020, we have had remarkable success. These successes include Hastings Wildlife Junction, Batchewana Island and, most recently, wetlands on Manitoulin Island. Thanks to our hard work, these lands are now permanently protected.

But our work is far from done. Our government, under the leadership of Premier Ford, will continue to invest in conservation projects and Ontario's rich biodiversity, and build Ontario's climate resiliency for generations to come, all while building critical infrastructure like roads and bridges and houses.

#### PUBLIC SERVICE DELIVERY

**Mr. Tom Rakocevic:** My question is for the Premier. Speaker, nobody asked for it, but this government is closing down ServiceOntario locations and putting them into Staples and Walmart. Even worse, they're paying these American mega-corporations over \$1.7 million to do so, in the form of makeover renovations.

Now, this government will pay for the renos in Walmart or Staples but not in existing ServiceOntario locations owned by small Ontario business owners. So why the double standard? Why does this government always put the interests of big US companies over small, homegrown Ontario businesses?

**Hon. Todd J. McCarthy:** To the member for Humber River–Black Creek: More for less. The customer comes first. The people of Ontario come first. And so my ministry officials reached out with the opportunity of the expiring locations in nine venues in the province of Ontario to look at further alternative delivery models. Every party that has ever formed government here at Queen's Park has

embraced the alternative service delivery model of the private sector.

The retail partnership model, which is now added to with Staples Canada, which extends hours to 9 p.m. on weeknights, all day Saturdays as well—that's what people are embracing. It was a success with Canadian Tire, IDA and Home Hardware. We're continuing that. In fact, the member opposite's party supported the Liberal government on that retail partnership initiative in 2011.

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

**Mr. Tom Rakocevic:** The minister told us he's paying Staples and Walmart to run ServiceOntario to save costs, but he can't give us a solid amount and keeps changing the answer. The minister refuses to give an answer as to why he's giving out sole-source contracts to big US companies.

So will this government come clean with the numbers? How much is it going to cost Ontario taxpayers to run ServiceOntario out of Staples and Walmart, and why the secret sole-source process?

**Hon. Todd J. McCarthy:** To the member opposite: The answer is more for less. The answer is value for money. The answer is a million dollars in savings over three years in this pilot project. That's great news for the people of Ontario, and for a million dollars in savings, the people of Ontario in these nine locations will get extended hours, more parking, online booking, interacting with government in 15 minutes or less and, of course, all day Saturdays. Every one of the employees at the expiring locations is eligible to be employed at the new Staples Canada locations. That's great news for Ontarians. That's great news for service delivery. That's the name of my ministry: public and business service delivery.

#### PUBLIC SAFETY

**Mr. Amarjot Sandhu:** My question is for the Solicitor General. People in my riding of Brampton West are concerned about ongoing car thefts in their communities. They, like many Ontarians, rely on their cars for their commute to work and to drive their family members to school and extracurriculars.

With reports of violent carjackings becoming more prevalent across the country, people in our province are justifiably concerned. They want to see our government combat the rise in auto theft in Ontario so they can feel safe in their own communities.

Speaker, can the Solicitor General share with the House what our government's strategy is to deal with this new wave of auto theft?

**Hon. Michael S. Kerzner:** I want to thank my friend for the question. Auto theft in Ontario is a serious issue. Car thieves have no morals and no decency, and they don't share the values of who we are as Ontarians. This government will not tolerate this crime. We are of a firm belief that these criminals belong in one place: They belong in jail. We will lock them up and we will throw away the key.

But, Mr. Speaker, our government is taking this very seriously, by investing over \$160 million. We're investing

\$51 million in the auto theft grant, monies that are flowing to the First Nations, municipal and OPP police service. We're investing over \$100 million in bail compliance to keep these violent and repeat offenders off our streets, and we're putting over 800 new police officers on the ground by making it easier to get into the Ontario Police College.

For our government, public safety is a priority, morning, noon and night.

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

**Mr. Amarjot Sandhu:** It's encouraging to hear the Solicitor General talk about the actions our government has taken to combat auto theft and ensure violent offenders remain behind bars.

We have seen media reports of Ontario vehicles being smuggled overseas. This has left many people in our province troubled about the safety and security for themselves and their loved ones. But this issue extends across Canada. Our government must collaborate with other provinces and the federal government to put a stop to this criminal activity.

Speaker, can the Solicitor General tell the House what our government is doing to advocate for the people of Ontario and to make sure that our borders are protected?

**Hon. Michael S. Kerzner:** The member is absolutely correct. Just a couple of weeks ago, together with the member from Simcoe–Grey, we attended the auto theft summit in Ottawa, and we had excellent discussions with our federal counterparts. I appreciate, as a result of sending a very strong letter to the federal government—we need them to step up at the port of Montreal, and we need them to instruct CBSA to take the same protocols as they are for incoming sea containers. The same should be done for outgoing sea containers, because that's where our autos are going. I had very detailed and excellent meetings with my provincial counterpart in the province of Quebec, and they agree that more has to be done.

Mr. Speaker, at the end of the day, we have one message for those who think it's okay to steal cars in our province or anywhere in Canada: We're putting you on notice. We're putting you out of business.

#### BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** A number of members have points of order they wish to raise.

I'll start with the government House leader, under standing order 59.

**Hon. Paul Calandra:** I am pleased to rise on standing order 59, as I do every week when the House is sitting, to outline the order of business. I will speak slower for the Liberal caucus, who have raised the concern that they are unable to keep up with my recitation of the weekly business.

On Monday, February 26, we will be introducing a bill—later today—and we will be debating that on Monday, February 26, in the afternoon.

February 27, in the morning and in the afternoon, we will continue debate on that bill. That evening, on

February 27, there will be no private member's public business. So colleagues can organize themselves accordingly.

On Wednesday, February 28, we will be debating a bill which will be introduced later today. In the afternoon, we will be debating Bill 162, the Get It Done Act. Private members' business: We will move to debate on the member for Guelph's Bill 156.

On Thursday morning, Bill 162, again, will be featured for debate, which is the Get It Done Act. There will be, in the afternoon routine, a ministerial statement on Black History Month. Proceedings for the afternoon on February 29 are yet to be determined. At 6 p.m., the member for Toronto Centre will have Bill 42.

That's the order of business. I thank colleagues for a very good week.

#### BIRTHDAY OF MEMBER'S HUSBAND

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** I'll recognize the member for St. Catharines on a point of order.

**Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens:** This is not really a parliamentary point of order, but I think it's worth pointing out that today is my husband's, my best friend's, the first lady of St. Catharines's 61st birthday.

So I'd like to wish you, Jimmy, a very happy birthday. May all your wishes come true.

#### LEGISLATIVE INTERNS

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Point of order, the member for Ottawa South.

**Mr. John Fraser:** I would like to thank my OLIP intern, Milena Basciano. It's her last day today. I hope she's up there somewhere. I can't see her. She's probably hard at work for the last few hours. She was calm in an office that's sometimes a little bumpy—as you can imagine, Premier. I know that some lucky member on the other side is going to get her. So thank you very much, Milena. Oh, are you're up there? You're supposed to be over here.

Speaker, I would also like to take a moment to let the government House leader know that I'm always able to hear him.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Member for Guelph.

**Mr. Mike Schreiner:** I also want to take a moment to thank my OLIP intern, Evan Cameron, who's watching on video, and say that, whoever's office he will be in next—you're going to have a fantastic OLIP intern. Thank you for your great work, Evan. I got him well trained.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Member for Thornhill.

**Ms. Laura Smith:** I would also like to take this opportunity to thank my amazing OLIP intern, Kaitlin Gallant. She has been remarkable, and some lucky individual will get her. I'm so grateful. Thank you.

## NOTICES OF DISSATISFACTION

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Pursuant to standing order 36(a), the member for London North Centre has given notice of their dissatisfaction with the answer to their question given by the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing regarding “attainable housing” definition. This matter will be debated on Tuesday, following private members’ public business.

Pursuant to standing order 36(a), the member for Waterloo has given notice of their dissatisfaction with the answer to their question given by the Premier regarding Super Bowl commercials. This matter will be debated on Tuesday, following private members’ public business.

## DEFERRED VOTES

## TAXATION

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** We have a deferred vote on private member’s notice of motion number 75.

Call in the members. This is a five-minute bell.

*The division bells rang from 1144 to 1149.*

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

Mr. Saunderson has moved private member’s notice of motion number 75. All those in favour will please rise and remain standing until recognized by the Clerk.

## Ayes

Anand, Deepak	Gretzky, Lisa	Rickford, Greg
Armstrong, Teresa J.	Grewal, Hardeep Singh	Riddell, Brian
Babikian, Aris	Hardeman, Ernie	Romano, Ross
Bailey, Robert	Harris, Mike	Sabawy, Sheref
Barnes, Patrice	Hogarth, Christine	Sandhu, Amarjot
Bethlenfalvy, Peter	Holland, Kevin	Sarrazin, Stéphane
Bouma, Will	Jones, Trevor	Sattler, Peggy
Bourgouin, Guy	Jordan, John	Saunderson, Brian
Brady, Bobbi Ann	Kanapathi, Logan	Scott, Laurie
Bresee, Ric	Ke, Vincent	Shaw, Sandy
Byers, Rick	Kernaghan, Terence	Skelly, Donna
Calandra, Paul	Kerzner, Michael S.	Smith, Dave
Cho, Raymond Sung Joon	Khanjin, Andrea	Smith, David
Cho, Stan	Kusendova-Bashta, Natalia	Smith, Graydon
Clark, Steve	Leardi, Anthony	Smith, Laura
Coe, Lorne	Lumsden, Neil	Smith, Todd
Crawford, Stephen	MacLeod, Lisa	Stevens, Jennifer (Jennie)
Dixon, Jess	Mamakwa, Sol	Stiles, Marit
Dowie, Andrew	Mantha, Michael	Surma, Kinga
Downey, Doug	Martin, Robin	Tangri, Nina
Dunlop, Jill	McCarthy, Todd J.	Taylor, Monique
Fife, Catherine	Oosterhoff, Sam	Thanigasalam, Vijay
Flack, Rob	Pang, Billy	Thompson, Lisa M.
Ford, Doug	Parsa, Michael	Tibollo, Michael A.
Ford, Michael D.	Pasma, Chandra	Vaugeois, Lise
French, Jennifer K.	Piccini, David	Wai, Daisy
Gallagher Murphy, Dawn	Pirie, George	West, Jamie
Gates, Wayne	Quinn, Nolan	Williams, Charmaine A.
Gélinas, France	Rae, Matthew	Wong-Tam, Kristyn
Ghamari, Goldie	Rakocevic, Tom	Yakabuski, John

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** All those opposed will please rise one at a time.

## Nays

Clancy, Aislinn

Schreiner, Mike

**The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Trevor Day):** The ayes are 90; the nays are 2.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** I declare the motion carried.

*Motion agreed to.*

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** There being no further business this morning, this House stands in recess until 1 p.m.

*The House recessed from 1153 to 1300.*

## INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

**Hon. Michael D. Ford:** Good afternoon, everyone. It is my honour to welcome community members and the staff and students from St. Demetrius Catholic School in Etobicoke, as well as members of Ontario’s Ukrainian community, to the House.

## REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

## STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** I beg to inform the House that today the Clerk received the report on intended appointments dated February 22, 2024, of the Standing Committee on Government Agencies. Pursuant to standing order 110(f)(9), the report is deemed to be adopted by the House.

*Report deemed adopted.*

## 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. Christopher Tyrell):** Your committee begs to report the following bill without amendment:

Bill 151, An Act to amend various statutes regarding infrastructure / Projet de loi 151, Loi modifiant diverses lois relatives aux infrastructures.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** Shall the report be received and adopted? Agreed? Agreed.

*Report adopted.*

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** The bill is therefore ordered for third reading.

## INTRODUCTION OF GOVERNMENT BILLS

### KEEPING ENERGY COSTS DOWN ACT, 2024

### LOI DE 2024 VISANT À MAINTENIR LA FACTURE ÉNERGÉTIQUE À UN NIVEAU ABORDABLE

Mr. Todd Smith moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 165, An Act to amend the Ontario Energy Board Act, 1998 respecting certain Board proceedings and related matters / Projet de loi 165, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1998 sur la Commission de l'énergie de l'Ontario en ce qui concerne certaines instances dont la Commission est saisie et des questions connexes.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

*First reading agreed to.*

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** Would you like to give a brief statement?

**Hon. Todd Smith:** I absolutely would.

The Keeping Energy Costs Down Act would, if passed, give the province authority to reverse an Ontario Energy Board decision that would have increased the costs of new homes across the province.

The act would also require the Ontario Energy Board to conduct more public engagements so future decisions support the priorities of the people of Ontario, including keeping energy prices down.

I'll have more to say at second reading of the bill.

## STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

### ANNIVERSARY OF INVASION OF UKRAINE

**Hon. Michael D. Ford:** Good afternoon, colleagues. Before I begin my formal remarks this afternoon, I want to acknowledge that this morning the terrorist responsible for the murder of London's Afzaal family in the summer of 2021 was convicted on his terrorism charge. While no verdict will ever heal the pain that continues to be felt, this decision is the right one, and it signals that acts of hate, Islamophobia, will never be tolerated here in the province of Ontario.

Colleagues, I rise this afternoon because in two days' time, on the 24 of February, the world will mark a tragic anniversary. Two years ago, Russia began its latest phase in its illegal, unprovoked and brutal war of aggression on Ukraine and its citizens. As we look back and reflect on these last two years, it has been challenging to put into words the profound impact this conflict has had: the countless lives lost, the families torn apart and the images of once vibrant communities reduced to rubble by Russia's

indiscriminate bombings of civilian centres. These undeniable realities weigh even heavier on our hearts as we approach this difficult anniversary. Today and every day, Ontario stands with the rest of the world in condemning Russia's actions.

The actions of Russia over the last two years, while highly shocking and deeply saddening, are part of a long history of aggression by Vladimir Putin's Russia in an effort to exercise control over Ukraine's sovereign territory and nation. Nearly 10 years ago today, he began his illegal operation with the annexation of Crimea. This action, as we now know, was only part of this destructive campaign and drive for power. Now, two years into total war, one thing has become increasingly clear: Putin will not stop, no matter the cost, destruction and untold misery his actions have unleashed.

While an ocean and a continent separates us from those on the front lines, we, as Ontarians and Canadians, do not have to look far to find living reminders of the impact this conflict is having right here at home. Speaker, in the gallery joining us here today, as introduced earlier, are members and leaders of Ontario's Ukrainian communities and the students of St. Demetrius Catholic School in Etobicoke, some of whom are new to Canada, having fled their homes in search of safety, and many of whom have family and loved ones who remain in harm's way. No words delivered here today could ever begin to encapsulate the feelings and hardship they—along with thousands of others who have sought refuge here in Ontario. We welcome you to the Legislature today—your seat of government—and thank you for joining us.

**1310**

In my capacity as Ontario's Minister of Citizenship and Multiculturalism, I have had the honour and privilege of meeting with many from Ontario's Ukrainian communities. I have seen first-hand how the loss and anguish brought on by a conflict of this scale has the power to test the resolve of even the strongest of communities. And yet, even during the darkest moments of this conflict, the resilience, courage and unwavering spirit of the Ukrainian people continues to shine ever so bright. In the face of unimaginable hardship, they have remained steadfast and shown that no invasion, war or conflict will ever extinguish their love of country and determination for a brighter day to come once again—a day when the sun rises over the eastern Ukrainian sky, when war is no more, communities are restored and peace is the everlasting normal.

I have seen this resilience shared first-hand on more than one occasion. Last May, I was fortunate enough to join the Ukrainian Canadian Congress for their Vyshyvanka Day celebrations at Toronto's High Park. The vibrant garments of white, blue and yellow—which have long been a symbol of Ukrainian heritage, dignity and good luck and good fortune to those who wear it. That evening, however, it became clear that now more than ever, the Vyshyvanka has taken on a new meaning, as a symbol of Ukraine's continued strength, independence and resistance to Russia's genocidal campaign.



In September, I saw this spirit on full display once again when I joined the Premier and over 1,000 community members in welcoming President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to Toronto. I still remember the deafening roar as the crowd cheered, and the pride as those in attendance proudly proclaimed, “Slava Ukraini.” As President Zelenskyy said in his remarks that night, “The day will come when we gather at a similar place in Ukraine, many people, millions, cheering crowds, blue and yellow flags and Maple Leaf flags.” I, too, have no doubt that that day will come. We have seen the undying spirit of the Ukrainian people in our communities, across Canada and around the world. And that spirit is simply too strong, too unwavering for even Vladimir Putin to suppress, try as he might.

As Canadians and as Ontarians, we have a moral obligation to stand up and to speak up when we see evil take place. From the very beginning, Ontario has been there to lend a hand of support to the Ukrainian people. Our government, under the leadership of the Premier, has taken and continues to take action to step up and help those arriving in Ontario. Since the start of the war, we have proudly welcomed over 75,000 displaced Ukrainians find safety here in our great province. As part of these efforts, our government launched a suite of supports for these newcomers to restore a sense of normality back to their lives—from a dedicated job-search hotline to connect new arrivals to local employers in their communities, to OHIP coverage and drug benefits, access to emergency housing, employment services, mental health and wellness support through investments in settlement agencies and local organizations, as well as the new provincial Ontario-Ukraine Solidarity Scholarship to provide eligible students with the ability to pursue post-secondary education.

These investments are helping ensure that all who have come to Ontario, whether as a temporary home or as a permanent one, have the tools and opportunities to build a life here in our great province for as long as they choose to stay.

In addition, under the leadership of the Minister of Education, Ontario became the first province to mandate learning of the Holodomor, a famine genocide which led to the deaths of over three million Ukrainian men, women and children. This curriculum will ensure grade 10 students from all corners of Ontario can learn about the impacts of this genocide and how it was caused by a radical communist ideology like the Soviet Union. More importantly, however, this curriculum will stress the importance of standing up for the values that unite us and not being a bystander in the face of evil and those who look to sow division and hatred within our communities or elsewhere.

We have done all these things not only because they were the right things to do, but because we as Ontarians and Canadians know that it is our duty and responsibility to stand with our allies and with those who share our values of freedom, democracy, the rule of law and the fundamental belief that all have the right to live life with dignity.

Madam Speaker, Ontario has long been a beacon of light and hope for people from all around the world. We as Ontarians take great pride in being from a place where all are welcomed and where our diversity is viewed as a source of strength. As home to one of the largest Ukrainian communities in the world, we share a unique bond with Ukraine, one that is bolstered by our common values and the strong ties of friendship that connect our two jurisdictions. We are so incredibly proud to be home to such a strong and vibrant Ukrainian community here in Ontario, one whose contributions have helped build our province into everything it is today. Our government will never waver in its support for the people of Ukraine and the Ukrainian community here at home in its ongoing fight for freedom, not just today but every day.

Madam Speaker, as the world marks this tragic anniversary, there is no denying how long and difficult the road to this point has been. And while we do not know yet when it may end, know that we walk alongside you, now and always, in your struggle for peace and a brighter future for the Ukrainian people. Thank you. Slava Ukraini.

*Applause.*

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** Responses?

**Ms. Peggy Sattler:** I want to begin by thanking the minister for acknowledging the finding of terrorism in the justice’s ruling on the murder of four members of our London family. It has been an emotional and painful time for Muslims across this province and in my own community. While this verdict cannot begin to fill the void left by such a senseless act of violence, it is an important step toward justice and closure.

I rise on behalf of the official opposition to commemorate a sombre anniversary. February 24 marks two years since Russia’s unprovoked assault on Ukrainian sovereignty and peace, a brutal escalation of a 10-year conflict that has tested the spirit and resilience of the Ukrainian people. The horror and disbelief experienced around the world that day has been followed by awe and admiration for the bravery, determination and commitment to freedom of Ukrainian women and men.

**1320**

The two years have taken a devastating toll. The United Nations reports that more than 10,000 civilians have been killed and 18,500 injured since Russia launched its full-scale attack. Almost 15 million Ukrainians, about 40% of the population, require some form of humanitarian assistance and are struggling with PTSD, depression, anxiety, stress and sadness. Four million people are displaced internally, and more than six million are living as refugees globally.

As we sit in the quiet of this chamber today, sirens are sounding in Ukraine. Every day, people are injured and killed. Every day, people are losing their homes and their jobs, and forced to go without access to heat, electricity, water or sanitation. The devastation of war is visible across Ukraine’s beautiful countryside, and immense damage has been done to Ukraine’s infrastructure and

wonderful cultural assets: its heritage buildings, its works of art, its creative and cultural spaces.

But despite the overwhelming challenges, despite the fear and uncertainty and the fatigue of war, the Ukrainian identity is strong and the Ukrainian spirit is not broken. Families are carrying on, schools have adapted, businesses have found ways to operate and cultural expressions of resistance have flourished. These inspiring stories of courage, resilience and solidarity have resonated around the globe, reminding us that Ukraine's fight is not just for the land, but for its right to self-determination as a free and sovereign state, which is why we must condemn Russia's actions and continue to stand with Ukraine.

In my community, Londoners will gather at a rally on Saturday to show support for our Ukrainian friends, neighbours and co-workers. London has long been home to a thriving Ukrainian community. This past October, the Ukrainian Canadian Congress's London branch celebrated their 70th anniversary in combination with the 65th anniversary of the Western University Ukrainian Students' Association.

It is important that we take time in our ridings and in this Legislature to show Ukrainians that the world is still watching; we have not forgotten. Since the Russian invasion in 2022, London's Ukrainian community has worked tirelessly to raise support for relief efforts for the people still on the ground in Ukraine. They are running events to educate and inform Londoners about the invasion and helping approximately 6,000 refugees of the conflict make a new home in London and across southwestern Ontario, all while hosting the cultural celebrations, family and youth programs, holiday events, markets and food sales that bring so much richness to our city.

London has been privileged to host thousands of Ukrainian refugees, and they have already made a lasting impact in our community, but most of those seeking safety here did not imagine that they would still be in Canada in 2024, watching their phones for updates from family and friends at home or displaced around the world.

On this solemn anniversary, let us commit to working toward a future where conflicts are resolved not through acts of terror or the barrel of a gun, but through dialogue, diplomacy and respect for international law; a future where every nation's sovereignty is respected, where people can live in peace, without fear of terrorist acts or aggression, and where the ideals of freedom and democracy are upheld and cherished.

## MOTIONS

### CONSIDERATION OF BILL 156

**Mr. Trevor Jones:** I move that, pursuant to standing order 77(a), the order for second reading of Bill 156, An Act to amend the Planning Act with respect to housing policies in official plans and other related amendments, be

discharged and the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Heritage, Infrastructure and Cultural Policy.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** Mr. Jones has moved that, pursuant to standing order 77(a), the order for second reading of Bill 156, An Act to amend the Planning Act with respect to housing policies in official plans and other related amendments, be discharged and the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Heritage, Infrastructure and Cultural Policy.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

All those in favour, please say "aye."

All those opposed, please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This is a 30-minute bell.

*The division bells rang from 1325 to 1355.*

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** Would the members please take their seats.

Mr. Jones, Chatham-Kent-Leamington, has moved that, pursuant to standing order 77(a), the order for second reading of Bill 156, An Act to amend the Planning Act with respect to housing policies in official plans and other related amendments, be discharged and the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Heritage, Infrastructure and Cultural Policy.

All those in favour, please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

#### Ayes

Anand, Deepak	Grewal, Hardeep Singh	Rickford, Greg
Babikian, Aris	Hardeman, Ernie	Riddell, Brian
Bailey, Robert	Harris, Mike	Romano, Ross
Barnes, Patrice	Hogarth, Christine	Sabawy, Sheref
Bethlenfalvy, Peter	Jones, Trevor	Sandhu, Amarjot
Bouma, Will	Jordan, John	Sarrazin, Stéphane
Bresee, Ric	Kanapathi, Logan	Saunderson, Brian
Byers, Rick	Ke, Vincent	Scott, Laurie
Cho, Raymond Sung Joon	Kerzner, Michael S.	Smith, Dave
Cho, Stan	Khanjin, Andrea	Smith, David
Clark, Steve	Leardi, Anthony	Smith, Graydon
Coe, Lorne	Lumsden, Neil	Smith, Laura
Crawford, Stephen	MacLeod, Lisa	Smith, Todd
Dixon, Jess	Martin, Robin	Surma, Kinga
Dowie, Andrew	Oosterhoff, Sam	Tangri, Nina
Downey, Doug	Pang, Billy	Thanigasalam, Vijay
Dunlop, Jill	Parsa, Michael	Thompson, Lisa M.
Flack, Rob	Piccini, David	Tibollo, Michael A.
Ford, Michael D.	Pirie, George	Wai, Daisy
Gallagher Murphy, Dawn	Quinn, Nolan	Williams, Charmaine A.
Ghamari, Goldie	Rae, Matthew	

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** All those opposed, please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

#### Nays

Bowman, Stephanie	Glover, Chris	Sattler, Peggy
Clancy, Aislinn	Hsu, Ted	Schreiner, Mike
Collard, Lucille	Kernaghan, Terence	Shamji, Adil
Fife, Catherine	McCrimmon, Karen	Stevens, Jennifer (Jennie)
Fraser, John	McMahon, Mary-Margaret	Vaugeois, Lise
French, Jennifer K.	Rakocevic, Tom	Wong-Tam, Kristyn

**The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Trevor Day):** The ayes are 62; the nays are 18.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** I declare the motion carried.

*Motion agreed to.*

## PETITIONS

### SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

**Mr. Chris Glover:** I'd like to thank Sally Palmer for getting these petitions.

This is a petition "To Raise Social Assistance Rates.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

**1400**

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

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

I fully support this petition and will pass it to page Skye to take to the table.

### AIDE SOCIALE

**MPP Lise Vaugeois:** « Pétition pour augmenter les montants de l'aide sociale.

« À l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario :

« Attendu que les montants de l'aide sociale de l'Ontario sont bien en dessous du seuil de pauvreté officiel du Canada établi selon les Mesures de la pauvreté fondées sur un panier de consommation et loin d'être suffisants pour couvrir l'augmentation des coûts de la nourriture et du loyer : soit 733 \$ pour les personnes bénéficiant du programme Ontario au travail (OAT) et 1 227 \$ pour les personnes bénéficiant du Programme ontarien de soutien aux personnes handicapées (POSPH);

« Attendu qu'une lettre ouverte adressée au premier ministre et deux ministres du cabinet, signée par plus de 230 organisations, recommande que les montants de l'aide sociale soient doublés pour le programme OAT comme pour le POSPH;

« Attendu que la petite augmentation récente de 5 % appliquée au POSPH maintient ces citoyens en dessous du seuil de pauvreté et que les bénéficiaires de ce programme comme des personnes qui perçoivent les montants gelés du programme OAT ont de la difficulté à survivre en cette période d'inflation alarmante;

« Attendu que le gouvernement du Canada a reconnu, dans son programme de Prestation canadienne d'urgence (PCU), qu'un revenu de base de 2 000 \$ par mois est le montant d'aide standard requis pour les personnes qui ont perdu leur emploi pendant la pandémie;

« Nous, soussignés, citoyens de l'Ontario, demandons à l'Assemblée législative de doubler les montants de l'aide sociale alloués aux personnes bénéficiant du programme OAT et du POSPH. »

Je veux remercier Sally Palmer pour cette pétition.

I agree wholeheartedly and will pass it on to page Isaac.

### HEALTH CARE

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** It's my honour to read the following petition into the record. It's entitled "Health Care: Not for Sale." It reads, "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Ontarians should get health care based on need—not the size of your wallet;

"Whereas Premier Doug Ford and Health Minister Sylvia Jones say they're planning to privatize parts of health care;

"Whereas privatization will bleed nurses, doctors and PSWs out of our public hospitals, making the health care crisis worse;

"Whereas privatization always ends with patients getting a bill;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to immediately stop all plans to privatize Ontario's health care system, and fix the crisis in health care by:

—"repealing Bill 124 and recruiting, retaining, and respecting doctors, nurses and PSWs with better working conditions;

—"licensing tens of thousands of internationally educated nurses and other health care professionals already in Ontario, who wait years and pay thousands to have their credentials certified;

—"10 employer-paid sick days;

—"making education and training free or low-cost for nurses, doctors, and other health care professionals;

—"incentivizing doctors and nurses to choose to live and work in northern Ontario;

—"funding hospitals to have enough nurses on every shift, on every ward."

I fully support this petition, will affix my signature and deliver it with page Abigail to the Clerks.

### LONG-TERM CARE

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** I want to say a special thank you to the good seniors in Willowdale for collecting signatures for this petition, which reads as follows:

“Support Bill 21, the Till Death Do Us Part Act.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

“Whereas the median wait time for a long-term-care bed has risen from 99 days in 2011-12 to 171 days in 2020-21; and

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

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

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

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

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to direct the Minister of Long-Term Care to call Bill 21 to the Standing Committee on Social Policy to find a compassionate solution to provide seniors with the right to live together as they age.”

It’s my pleasure to affix my signature to the petition and give this to Sarah.

#### TENANT PROTECTION

**Ms. Peggy Sattler:** I want to thank all of the Londoners who signed this petition to bring back real rent control. It reads:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the government cancelled rent control on units built after November 2018; and

“Whereas the cost to rent a home has never been higher; and

“Whereas people are being forced to leave their communities because decent, affordable homes are increasingly out of reach; and

“Whereas the Rent Control for All Tenants Act, 2022, will ensure tenants are not gouged on rent each year;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to protect tenants from predatory rent increases and pass the Rent Control for All Tenants Act to ensure renters can live in safe and affordable homes.”

I fully support this petition, affix my signature, and will send it to the table with page Matias.

#### SCHOOL SAFETY

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** It’s my honour to present the following petitions on behalf of the hard-working educators in London. It is entitled, “Keep Classrooms Safe for Students and Staff.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas students and education workers deserve stronger, safer schools in which to learn and work;

“Whereas the pressure placed on our education system has contributed to an increase in reports of violence in our schools;

“Whereas crowded classrooms, a lack of support for staff, and underfunding of mental health supports are all contributing to this crisis;

“Whereas the government of Ontario has the responsibility and tools to address this crisis, but has refused to act;

“Therefore, we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to:

“Take immediate action to address violence in our schools;

“Invest in more mental health resources;

“End violence against education workers and improve workplace violence reporting.”

I fully support this petition, will affix my signature and will deliver it with page Isaac to the Clerks.

### ORDERS OF THE DAY

#### NEW MEMBERS OF PROVINCIAL PARLIAMENT

Resuming the debate adjourned on September 26, 2023, on the motion to recognize newly elected members of provincial Parliament.

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

**Ms. Aislinn Clancy:** I’m humbled by the honour and privilege to be here before you today on the treaty lands of the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation, Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee people. These lands are governed by the Dish With One Spoon treaty, a treaty of peace, friendship and respect. May we heed the wisdom and all eat out of the dish, share the responsibility that the bowl is never empty, taking only what we need, and keep the peace so no knives are needed.

I’m grateful to work on this land, to support the land defenders and preserve it for the next seven generations. May we continue to pursue truth and reconciliation in all aspects of community. Thank you to my predecessor Laura Mae Lindo. She is an inspiration to many in our community. She left big shoes to fill. She pushed for system change, and I hope to do the same. Like Laura Mae, I’m an eternal optimist, and I still carry some hope.

**1410**

I’m proud to rise in the Legislature as the second-ever MPP for the Green Party of Ontario. While it’s me standing here today, I’m just one part of a bigger movement shaped by so many amazing people. I’m joined today by the GPO team, friends, family and staff. Many more in Kitchener Centre and across Ontario are with me in spirit, part of a growing group of people committed to combatting the many connected crises our communities are facing.

Thank you to Mike Schreiner for being so kind, generous and thoughtful. You're an amazing mentor and MPP, and I'm learning from the best.

Thank you to MP Mike Morrice for teaching me how to love knocking on doors, for blazing a trail in Kitchener Centre, and for showing folks what good service, integrity and leadership looks like.

Thank you to my mom and dad and sister. Brendan Clancy has joined me today. My mom is watching. She was an amazing nurse. She was an advocate for her profession and patients. Unfortunately, she left the profession, pushed out by the mounting workload and a move to 12-hour shifts. My dad was a small business owner and a 30-year-plus volunteer with KW Accessibility in Kitchener Centre, a group working to ensure that all have equal opportunities to thrive. My sister is a teacher and a union leader, and she works hard to ensure that workers' rights are respected.

Of course, I wouldn't be here in front of you today without the residents of Kitchener Centre. I'm very grateful for your trust and confidence in me. My job is to be your voice at Queen's Park. I promise that I will always put people before politics by working across party lines to bring home better for you.

In our campaign office, we had a big, beautiful mural; it was about 20 by 15. It was an old tree, with many, many branches. On the twigs and branches, we put photos of community members who contributed to the campaign. Underneath the mural was a quote: "If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together." This became a compass for our office. When we go fast and when we go alone, we risk doing harm.

In social work, the field that I practised in for 16 years, our motto is, "First, Do No Harm."

In Kitchener, in Ontario, and around the world, the systems we rely on every day are collapsing, and the harmful impacts are everywhere we look. In my riding, and I would say all ridings, people are finding it hard to get by.

Just the other day, a woman with a developmental disability came to the office. She was crying, she was screaming and she was angry, because for the first time in her life, although having deeply affordable housing, she didn't have enough to buy groceries. She's a survivor, but she can't take it anymore. The system is failing her.

This year alone, in the Waterloo region, the number of families using the food bank more than doubled—that's right; in one year, more than doubled. Why? Because food prices keep rising while grocery giants are raking in record profits. Last year, grocery giants made over \$6 billion—yet another record high, and an 8% increase from the year before. That's money out of your pocket that you don't get back.

While prices of necessities have gone up, Ontario Works has been frozen since 2018, at \$733 a month—ODSP rates are at just over \$1,300 a month. Let's take a moment to consider what it would be like to live off of \$733 a month.

We live in a world of monopolies. The lack of competition in almost every sector means people are paying more than ever to survive—more on cellphone bills, more on rent, more on groceries, more on transportation. Not only that, but they're galvanizing the attention and motivation of our children—these tech companies that steal the attention and motivation of our kids. The gouging has to stop.

Just the other day, I was walking through Victoria Park, and I struck up a conversation with a group of students who had moved to Kitchener from Brazil. They shared that they were barely surviving right now, despite having great degrees, credentials and jobs, because they can't find an affordable place to rent. And I talk to a lot of young people who have lost hope of ever owning a home. Meanwhile, investors and pension plans continue to increase their investments.

In Kitchener-Waterloo, the average home price has increased over 159% in the past 10 years. Last year alone, Kitchener rents were up 6.5%. All across Ontario, homeless encampments are a new reality, and our communities can't keep up with the needs of those who have been displaced from their homes. There's an encampment in Kitchener that's two blocks from my home.

Recently, our region invested millions to create a managed encampment with tiny homes and supports. Fifty residents moved to this encampment from the encampment near my home into these tiny homes. But because of our current drug crisis where needs aren't being addressed and the housing affordability crisis, the encampment is full again today.

The number of people experiencing chronic homelessness in the Waterloo region has grown by 129% since the beginning of 2020. I talk to folks who have lived in Kitchener their whole lives. They say they've never seen this before. It's never been so bad. And we're on track to triple by 2028 unless urgent action is taken. Meanwhile, our affordable housing stock is being bought en masse and turned into luxury condos by real estate investment trusts.

This is not just a problem in Kitchener. In Canada, for every new affordable home that we build, we lose 15 in the private sector. We are hemorrhaging affordable housing every year. Housing has become a commodity when it should be a human right.

These factors that are causing the cost-of-living and housing crises—corporate greed and lack of regulation—are also the biggest causes of climate change. I became involved in the climate movement as a mom who wanted to do what I could to take action against the escalating crisis. I started volunteering with Citizens' Climate Lobby and also answering phones for Mike Morrice's 2019 campaign. I got involved because I'm grieving for my kids, for my grandkids or the babies being born today. They won't know what it's like to skate on an outdoor rink or pond, or ski through a bush, or even slide down a hill at a local park. I think we've all experienced this winter. It's unprecedented. They're also spending time inside in the summertime. Why? Because of wildfire smoke and extreme heat that makes it dangerous to be outside. Imagine children spending their summers indoors.

Recently, Ontario's climate change impact assessment concluded that if we don't take action to curb carbon emissions, Ontario will face 55 to 60 days of extreme heat by 2080. I talked to an elderly man who goes without food and shops at our local Tiny Home Takeout for free so that he can pay for an air conditioner to survive. Others on OW in his building don't have that luxury.

Yet, oil and gas companies who have known for decades that their products are killing our planet continue to ramp up pollution and rake in record profits. That's 18 cents a litre that you don't get back. It lands in their pockets. Canada's five biggest oil and gas companies saw profits of \$38.3 billion in 2022. That's more than double the year before—another double, the wrong kind of double.

Meanwhile, the cost of climate change—wetter, warmer and wilder weather—has been rising for decades. The Ontario Financial Accountability Office has estimated that climate change will add \$4.1 billion a year over the rest of the century to the cost of maintaining our public infrastructure. It's time to adapt.

Who will pay for this in the end? Who inherits the debt left by corporate greed? My children, our children, future generations will pay. Our home will pay, and all those who live on it will pay. We live on the only planet that's suited to us, and there is no planet B.

So yes, there are many challenges, but in Kitchener Centre, so many of us are going farther by going together. As our mayor, Berry Urbanovic, says, "We're barn-raisers. We come together when someone is in need."

There are so many people in my community who inspire me every day to push for more and for better—people like my friend Nadine Green, one of the founders of A Better Tent City, a place with tiny homes and great community. One night, she was sitting in her car when there was extreme cold. She decided to welcome unhoused folks into her variety store overnight. She didn't want them to die. She didn't want them to be left out in the cold. This became a habit, and she was evicted from her store. But she partnered with Ron Doyle and other community leaders to create A Better Tent City. They built 50 tiny homes and have a place to live for 65. They live in a warm community filled with dignity.

**1420**

She's joined by many others who work to provide homes for those who need them, including the Working Centre, Indwell, SHIFT, House of Friendship, YWCA, women's crisis services, Lutherwood, the Union co-op, OneROOF and many more.

My riding is also home to Peter Jola, an ethnocultural community leader working hard to ensure that no community member is left behind. He came to Kitchener 30 years ago, fleeing violence in South Sudan, after he and his daughter were offered a flight from Irish dignitaries. Since then, he has helped his community members settle here and find a new home. We have a lot to learn from Peter and others who see the world like he does. They empathize with others struggling with mental health,

addictions, poverty, disability, and religious and racial oppression.

I'm grateful to CCORIC, a committee I was on for many years; Compass; YMCA; Reception House; the multicultural centre; Sanctuary; Immigration Partnership; and so many other organizations serving newcomers in Kitchener for decades.

I'm inspired also by our tenant groups, housing advocates who are coming together to ensure no one is left behind when community members are facing renovations by bad-acting landlords. They've been organizing services from the Social Development Centre and ACORN to make sure no one is left behind, including our lived experience working group—hello, Char. They want to be sure that no one is kicked out of their home. They serve as a reminder that the best way to eradicate homelessness is to prevent someone from becoming homeless. It's leaders like this who shape the legacy that I hope to leave behind in this House.

Over the next few years, I will lead with an open heart and an open mind. As a business grad, I hope to ensure that we make good fiscal decisions, not two-year gains with long-term pains. As a former school social worker, my greatest tool is my empathy. I will hold people's experiences with reverence, whether they're a parent whose child dropped out of school, or they're caring for an aging loved one, or they are someone with a disability; whether they're facing toxic hate in our community or online; whether they're a small business owner trying to stay afloat.

I hope to enter this chamber and every interaction with humility and compassion—and sometimes a joke; I'm Irish.

As a former city councillor, I call on us to govern with good process. Our Waterloo regional chair, Karen Redman, once said, "You measure what you value, and you change what you measure." I hope to push for all of us to make decisions backed by data, not fear, and step into those required changes when we encounter them.

As a mother, I'm determined. I'm not just thinking of the next election cycle; I'm here for the next seven generations to come. I'm anxious and worried about my children's future. I can tuck them in, I can buy them groceries, but I can't look them in the eye right now and say they will have a better future than I did. That's not okay. So I will hustle to protect water, food, air and climate for all of the generations to come after us.

I pledge to Kitchener Centre not to talk at you, but to listen. I'm not your leader. I'm your neighbour who will sit with you in a circle and carry the responsibilities you've entrusted me with with honour. I'll defend our residents from harm, and I'll make sure that no one is left behind.

To my partner, Ryan: I know we're all making sacrifices for me to be away from you and the kids. I hope I make you proud by sharing all your nerdy optimism, taking the solutions you share with me that are in full swing across the globe, and to push for a green economy that you believe in.

To my kids: Thank you for breaking my heart in ways I never knew possible. I will work as hard as I can to

ensure that you and all the children of Ontario will have a chance for a healthy future, with a roof over your head and all the tools you need to thrive.

To my fellow MPPs: I hope that together we will do no harm and that we will do everything in our power to go further together. Thank you.

Speaker, I move adjournment of the debate.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** The member for Kitchener Centre has moved the adjournment of the debate. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

*Debate adjourned.*

#### BUILDING INFRASTRUCTURE SAFELY ACT, 2024

#### LOI DE 2024 SUR LA CONSTRUCTION SÉCURITAIRE DES INFRASTRUCTURES

Resuming the debate adjourned on February 21, 2024, on the motion for third reading of the following bill:

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

**Mr. Michael Mantha:** It's always a joy to stand in my place and speak on behalf of the good people of Algoma-Manitoulin, particularly when I have to—not have to—but I've always been one to stand in my place in this House and give credit where credit is due, whether it's from the opposition, whether it's from government individuals, whether it's from independent members, community leaders, municipalities. I think that's a task that we have as representatives of our constituents.

And I want to give a really good, big shout-out to the community of Hornepayne, particularly, the public works manager there, Duane Gaudreau, along with Her Worship Cheryl Fort, Gail Jeremy and Jennifer Hill, who work extremely hard. And what came out of this is their community was challenged with some infrastructure challenges, particularly a very large water leak. And it took them a very long time in order to get someone to actually address and recognize the permits that were required in order to permit them to move ahead with the work. It was well over 30 days that we waited for it. And it's through their work we managed to get it resolved.

There were some people in the community that had to be relocated. Some of them ended up in hotel rooms. Unfortunately, some of them suffer from big hardships. However, the leadership of this community came to the table and reached out to the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, the Federation of Northern Ontario Municipalities, Rural Ontario Municipal Association, Northwestern Ontario Municipal Association, the Algoma District Municipal Association—all of them, along with FONOM—worked together in order to bring some suggestions to this government and this government acted on it. And I want

give credit where credit is due, and again, for their leadership and tenacity for bringing these issues forward and the community of Hornepayne for really taking the lead on this issue and being a champion to getting this legislation brought forward.

And I know, initially, the member—his riding escapes me; the member was a PA at that point in time—from Sarnia-Lambton. I want to give him a shout-out as well for having listened to the community and those individuals who brought that issue forward and bringing it as a PA in order to have the legislation that we have in front of us here today and being an instrument of change as well. So I always give credit where credit is due. Shout-out to you, Hornepayne.

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

**MPP Lise Vaugeois:** I'd like to ask a question to the member from Algoma-Manitoulin. I'm just wondering if you have any concerns about access to service. We know the objective of the bill, but in practice, in northern communities, it doesn't always look that way. I wonder if you could speak to that.

1430

**Mr. Michael Mantha:** You know what? I want to thank the member for asking that question, because part of the consultation that did happen within the government—there were some strong suggestions that were provided by many of those municipal leaders, and particularly the community of Hornepayne. One of those is to actually “set up a system where local contractors can respond to locate requests”—that was one—“Hydro One to consider completing the locates in house”—instead of contracting it out to other firms.

The other two were, “Ontario One Call to employ a better complaint process, one which elicits results and has a mandatory response time”—because that was one of the issues that we're having: these extensive waiting periods in order to get the locates done. And the other one, which I thought was really important, is, “Open up a second call centre in the north” to remove the barriers that divide all the requests that are being done.

These were constructive suggestions that were given to the government. It's nice to see that some of them were implemented and some of them were moved upon. But again, there are very big challenges in northern Ontario. The stress that was being put by the many associations in northern Ontario is, recognize the geographical challenges that we have in northern Ontario by providing us with a second locate office.

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

**Mr. Ric Bresee:** My question to the member, then, would be—as a former municipal member, I certainly saw a lot of challenges with this process, with a number of processes around construction. When we look at all of these, when we see a bill like this that is looking to improve a structure, to improve a system that provides for safety for all types of development, whether that be big construction companies or a guy working in his backyard, do you think that this bill will achieve that goal?

**Mr. Michael Mantha:** You know what? I think time will tell. What I will share with the member is that since the discussions were initiated, there has been a significant improvement. There are many municipalities that have indicated throughout northern Ontario that their wait times have been significantly improved. There were some immediate improvements as far as timelines. But like everything else, some improvements went for a little bit of time, then they fell back, and some went forward again. So time will tell if this legislation is actually going to be addressing those issues. I think we need to have a receptive ear. We need to be listening to a lot of our community leaders, that if it's not working, it doesn't take us two years to implement legislation or bring the changes to improve the system.

Again, I give credit where credit is due. We needed something to change. This is a step. Let's see if the work that needs to be done now is actually going to materialize positively so that the economies of communities aren't affected, the complaints of individuals are addressed, people are not put in undue hardship, are not moved out of their homes—

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

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** To the member from Algoma–Manitoulin: Northern members for years have been talking about the disconnect around timing around receiving information about locates. We heard from the member from Nickel Belt that often, northern constituents make the call to dig responsibly to make sure that it's safe to do so. But in turn, it takes so long to get that information back. Would you like to comment on that?

**Mr. Michael Mantha:** Well, that's a huge problem. I'll go as far as saying there were some municipalities that were waiting up to three months for major infrastructure road projects to go forward because the locate wasn't being responded to. Again, I believe in the suggestions that were made. A second office in northern Ontario would be able to address some of those timelines. Increased staffing would also be of great assistance. We'll have to see what this piece of legislation—

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

Mr. McCarthy has moved third reading of Bill 153, An Act to amend the Ontario Underground Infrastructure Notification System Act, 2012. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Be it resolved that the bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

*Third reading agreed to.*

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

**Mr. Trevor Jones:** On a point of order: Speaker, if you seek it, you will find unanimous consent to see the clock at 6.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** Mr. Jones is seeking unanimous consent to see the clock at 6. Agreed? Agreed.

## PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

### NORTHERN HEALTH TRAVEL GRANT ADVISORY COMMITTEE ACT, 2024

#### LOI DE 2024 SUR LE COMITÉ CONSULTATIF DES SUBVENTIONS AUX RÉSIDENTS DU NORD DE L'ONTARIO POUR FRAIS DE TRANSPORT À DES FINS MÉDICALES

Mr. Mantha moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 13, An Act to enact the Northern Health Travel Grant Advisory Committee Act, 2024 / Projet de loi 13, Loi édictant la Loi de 2024 sur le Comité consultatif des subventions aux résidents du Nord de l'Ontario pour frais de transport à des fins médicales.

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

**Mr. Michael Mantha:** It's always an honour to stand in my place and bring the issues that matter most to the people of Algoma–Manitoulin, but particularly in this case, throughout northern Ontario. I am honoured to be bringing forward Bill 13—lucky number 13; let's see if that works in my favour or in northern Ontarians' favour—the Northern Health Travel Grant Advisory Committee Act, 2022, for second reading. This bill is an opportunity to have an important conversation in this place about the state of health care in northern Ontario.

I will be speaking about the Northern Health Travel Grant and its importance to residents, but first, I would like to paint a picture of the realities that hospitals, individuals, organizations and service providers are facing in northern Ontario.

Just recently—actually, this morning, during question period—I put a question to the government in regard to the need for action from this government for funding for northern hospitals. The Ministry of Health has directed northern hospitals to keep services open at any cost and to implement millions of dollars in initiatives without upfront funding. This includes millions of capital and staffing dollars spent on Meditech Expanse that hospitals paid out of their own budgets. Twenty-four hospitals are expecting year-end deficits totalling more than \$74 million, which includes \$43 million in agency staffing costs. Twelve hospitals are projecting deficits greater than 10%.

Emergency department closures are becoming the norm. Lines of credit are being used in order to meet payroll and responsibilities by hospitals. Hospitals are looking at their providers' bills and invoices at the end of the month, making a determination as to which ones they're going to be paying. Cash advances are becoming more increasingly difficult to obtain, because financial institutions are losing trust that the government will get money to hospitals in time.



Speaker, there's more. I also spoke this morning in regard to the Auditor General's annual report. The report found that ER wait times remain too long, lack of nursing staff to quickly triage patients leads to longer delays, lack of primary care has created backlogs in ERs. Two hundred unplanned ER closures at 23 hospitals were recorded between 2022 and 2023, largely due to staffing issues. Without locum coverage, this would have expanded to 600 closures. Northern hospitals are increasingly reliant on agency nursing, costing up to three times more for hospitals to deliver services. Numerous patients are waiting for long-term care and home care services, taking up hospital beds. The ministry does not have a strategy for ER closures or for northern Ontario health care issues. The locum incentive program ends on March 31, with nothing coming from this government in regard to the challenges that will present to the hospitals.

**1440**

There are approximately 10,000 de-rostered patients in Algoma as of last July, in 2023. Recently, another 10,000 are without a family doctor in Sault Ste. Marie. In the Sudbury/Espanola/Manitoulin/Elliot Lake area, 13,000 are without a family doctor. That's the reality of what we're facing in many communities across northern Ontario.

Now I want to get back to the importance of what the travel grant does and how it helps people in northern Ontario. Briefly, for background for any of the members—because I was surprised; I'm a little bit lonely in my corner here today, but many of the members were actually not aware of what the Northern Health Travel Grant Program does for northerners. The Northern Health Travel Grant was established in 1980 to aid patients who live in northern Ontario and who must travel for specialized medical treatment or diagnostics. It reimburses patients based on the distance they travel to their appointment and for overnight accommodation.

Doing this is necessary to ensure that people living in northern Ontario can get the care they need without financial barriers in access to health care. It's necessary because we face different realities in northern Ontario when it comes to health care. Most of our specialized treatment and diagnostic services are in large urban centres. For ridings like mine, where it is almost entirely small, rural communities, patients must travel large distances to get to their appointments. Depending on the time of year, you might have to get to the city your appointment is in the day before to make sure you can get there on time. You travel on northern roads, and our roads close very often due to poor winter road maintenance, or you may have to stay there overnight afterwards.

All these costs add up, so on top of the stress and hardship of your treatment, you must also add the burden of travel and all the associated costs. That makes the Northern Health Travel Grant essential to people in my riding and across northern Ontario. It takes away the added stress of, "How am I going to get to or from my appointments that are hundreds of kilometres away from my home?"

However, my office has been hearing for years that the grant is not keeping up with the cost of travel in northern Ontario. Not only that, the policies and requirements to get the reimbursement are painfully complicated and slow. I want to take a couple of minutes to read into the record some of the words that constituents have shared with me in regard to how the travel grant challenges have affected them.

Roxanne Goulet, who is a nurse on Manitoulin Island, wrote to my office saying, "Living in rural northern Ontario has presented many challenges for our family members across specialized health care and diagnostics. We are required to travel the minimum of three and a half hours, round trip, weather depending, to access necessary medical treatment only available at the larger Sudbury city hospital site.

"In addition to the distance travelled, there are also extensive wait times, parking fees and sometimes overnight accommodation requirements. The increased fuel prices have surpassed any cost benefit the Northern Health Travel Grant Program allows for, leaving me out of pocket. The onerous wait times of three-plus months for the processing of a grant adds to the impact of one's monthly budget and all other living expenses."

Here's another one from Richard and Jane Gulka from Manitowadge: "Richard required medical treatment at a facility in Mississauga, five days a week for approximately two hours daily, which left him extremely tired and weak for several hours. We submitted a claim for one round trip by automobile, accommodation for the duration of the six weeks and two trips by Uber to Sunnybrook Hospital in Toronto.

"My husband has been dealing with an illness for three years, necessitating diagnosis, treatment and follow-up care out of our community. Richard is physically tired, emotionally drained, and we are both extremely stressed. Our initial submission for a round trip was \$863.46 and accommodation of \$3,995, and the total reimbursement was \$1,413.46. He was denied the outstanding balance because we didn't fit the program protocol of returning home, 12 hours away, on days of non-treatment."

Florie Maeck from North Bay: "I live in North Bay, Ontario, and I have to travel to Sudbury every few months to see an ophthalmologist and every three months to see a physiatrist who holds Botox injection clinics for movement disorders. I receive \$60 from the Northern Health Travel Grant service for these visits. There have been a couple of visits where I have received nothing, and there is no response from the travel grant agency when you try to address the issue. I must rely on a family member to take me. This grant money does not cover a tank of gas to and from these appointments. We seldom eat. I cannot afford a meal for two of us. Forty-one cents per kilometre does not cut it anymore."

Marina Verdonk from Sault Ste. Marie: "I had to stay at a hotel for three nights in Toronto, and even at the hotel's medical rate, the cost was \$500. The Northern Health Travel Grant only covers \$250. I had to fly last minute to Toronto at a cost of \$851.17 and was reimbursed

\$533 to cover my flight. Meals are not covered in any way, and with the cost of eating out or even ordering in, even one meal can cost you \$20 to \$30. I've even resorted to taking coupons with me to eat at McDonald's in Toronto. Any taxi, from and to the airport, to the hospital or from the hotel, is not taken into consideration. Since I have to travel every three weeks and it takes about eight weeks to obtain a reimbursement, I'm having difficulties making ends meet."

The last one that I have here is from Marguerite Collin, from Sudbury: "I appreciate you answering me. I am currently travelling to Barrie for nerve block injections for chronic migraines, upper back pain and neck. I am going to the Simcoe pain clinic because the Sudbury chronic pain clinic is a three-year wait for the same treatment. Originally, my rheumatologist in Barrie referred me there because of the wait times in Sudbury. Because she is not a northern doctor, they denied the travel grant. I got my GP in Sudbury to refer me to the Simcoe plain clinic, so now they are denying me only because the doctor is a GP. I work with the city of Greater Sudbury and most recently had to take a leave of absence due to my stress and migraines of this. I am unsure if I will be able to even travel next week because of the money it's costing me. My family of five is really suffering financially."

Speaker, there are endless stories that I could bring to the floor of the Legislature. What I'm asking this government to consider is establishing a table where we can bring individuals and have a discussion and make recommendations in order to improve the Northern Health Travel Grant.

In my supplementary, I will be touching on a group that I just met this afternoon, which I hadn't heard of. Only just recently, through a CBC article, I've heard of Hope Air. I will be talking about them in the additional time that I'm provided.

This is long overdue—long overdue. The last substantive change that has happened to the Northern Health Travel Grant was back in 2017. I think this is something that we can all agree upon: that care, regardless of where you are in this province, should be something that is provided. There should be no barriers to getting individuals to the care that they need. We pride ourselves on the health care system that we have, and we need to share that pride with those that are being affected and those that absolutely need the care that is needed.

So again, I am proud to present this bill here to the floor, and I look forward to the many discussions and points that I look to hear from the government, the opposition and some of my independent colleagues.

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

**MPP Lise Vaugeois:** I would like to thank the member from Algoma-Manitoulin for this bill. It's a very important bill, and it certainly matters to people in Thunder Bay-Superior North, where I am. I think the problems with the inadequacy of the Northern Health Travel Grant keep the people in my office very, very busy.

The amount for kilometres is 41 cents a kilometre. It hasn't been adjusted since 2007. I think the hotel amount

was adjusted in 2017, but there are very few places—I believe the hotel amount is a \$100 a night but only to a maximum of \$500. We know it costs an awful lot more than that to stay in a hotel these days.

I've got a few specific examples. For seniors in Greenstone—Greenstone is 250 kilometres, I think, from Thunder Bay, and the cost of travelling to Thunder Bay for seniors is something that they worry about quite a bit.

**1450**

I was actually just up in Greenstone and met with a group of seniors, and the Northern Health Travel Grant was the top of the list for their concerns. People can take a van from Greenstone or from Geraldton to Thunder Bay for \$350, but the Northern Health Travel Grant only covers \$184, not including hotel accommodation. Imagine if you have to travel regularly to Thunder Bay for dialysis; the cost is going to be in the thousands of dollars. In fact, a couple from Kenora—this was an issue a few months ago—had to stay in Thunder Bay over an extended period of time. Well, it was cheaper to actually rent an apartment than stay in a hotel, but it still cost them \$9,000 to cover their dialysis treatments.

I recently heard from a constituent in my riding who is now out \$20,000 because they had to travel from Thunder Bay to Toronto for a kidney transplant at the Toronto General Hospital. This required staying in a hotel from November 21 until checkout on January 6. They're actually only eligible for \$555 for accommodations. Then, there was of course the travel and so on, which was very high, partly because of the medical condition and having to sit in first class and so on to accommodate that condition.

The thing is that we are supposed to have equal access to the health care that we need where we live, and if we have to travel to get it, then the support needs to be there so that we can have equitable access to health care. The set-up of the Northern Health Travel Grant doesn't meet those needs at this time, so I think the recommendation to have a table to actually really work out what's going on and how people can be supported is important. I support the motion, and I would like to pass things over to my colleague from Sudbury to add.

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

**MPP Jamie West:** I want to thank the member from Algoma-Manitoulin for bringing forward this bill. I had asked a question about the Northern Health Travel Grant last spring, and I had more phone calls and emails to my office through the spring and the summer about this than any other issue that I brought up that I can think of.

The core issue, really, here is that when you are travelling from northern Ontario—my riding, often—to Toronto, you're compensated 41 cents a kilometre, but you're not paid for the first 100 kilometres that you travel. We know the cost of gas and maintenance on vehicles as well. It really doesn't add up for people. As well, the hotel costs are capped at \$100 a night; we can't find a hotel for \$100 a night. Those of us who travel long distances and have residence here know how expensive it is to live in Toronto, and anyone who is coming to Toronto for all the

amazing tourist attractions they have or for work knows how expensive lodging is.

I want to share a couple of validators for this. I think it's important to talk about why this is important, so I'll tell you about a woman from my riding who had to travel to Toronto for knee surgery. What's interesting, Speaker, is depending how many of the validators you talk to, you'll see many of them didn't want me to use their name, because they feel like—they're embarrassed. They feel like it's a poverty issue and they feel stigmatized because they don't have access to health care. So, I'm going to call this woman "Betty." She had come down to Toronto for knee surgery. Betty made the trip down to Toronto. She had the surgery, then she applied for the grant and was denied.

Here's what happened: Betty doesn't have a credit card. Her husband has a credit card, so her husband paid for everything on credit card. Her husband came with her to take care of her on this trip for the knee surgery. When she filled out the form, she was told to put her name on the forms because she had the surgery. Betty can prove that they're married and Betty can prove that her husband came with her, but she was still denied.

And here's the kicker for them: They're out-of-pocket for all of those expenses—expenses that people who are in the area and can travel to a Toronto hospital, because of where they were born or where they moved and lived, wouldn't be out of. But the kicker for her is that she asked why she was denied and what was happening, and it took 12 weeks to get a response—12 weeks of trying to figure out what happened to the money and why it wasn't reimbursed.

I want to talk about Stephan and Denise. Now, Stephan and Denise—I actually asked a question about them last spring. I want to read what Denise wrote to me, outside of the question, because I had to really shorten it for the question. Denise wrote and she said that her husband is required to see a specialized neurologist in Toronto. The current reimbursement for two nights' accommodation is \$100 per night. When you look at hotel rooms in Toronto, on average, the cost of the rooms starts at about \$500 a night. Even the hospital rates have doubled. Two years ago, the hospital rate at the DoubleTree hotel was \$129. So even two years ago, you paid 30 bucks out of your own pocket. Now, it's up to \$250. Mileage is also an issue. Compensation is limited at 41 cents per kilometre, and the first 100 kilometres is deducted from being compensated.

"We're both seniors. We both live on a fixed income." This is the issue that we're seeing. The system is designed so that you pay up front, but if you're on a fixed income, like many seniors are—and many seniors have those comorbidities, need more care. When you're on a fixed income and you can't afford to pay up front, if you don't have a credit card, you're very limited. You don't have that equity of access when it comes to health care.

The next person I'm going to talk about I'm going to call Bev. She asked me as well not to use her name. Bev had to travel to Toronto for cancer treatments. It was complex, and she had to do various diagnoses. Bev has

cancer, and her husband has taken a leave from work to care for her, so there's no income coming in from her husband. There's just Bev's income, and she has CPP. Between her and her husband, their income is \$1,100 per month to make ends meet.

Bev's oncologist is in Toronto. He's one of only two in the province that specializes in this type of surgery. Absolutely, congratulations to our province for having specialized health care available. What we're talking about is having people able to access it in the north. So Bev had to come down, see her oncologist in-person. She couldn't travel alone. She would have to be in Toronto for three days for tests and the appointment. Bev and her husband had no funds to pay for the hotels. They had no funds to buy food. They had no funds to put gas in their car. They had \$1,100 a month at the time.

Bev told me—and this is one of the reasons that she asked me not to use her name—they didn't even have food in their house at this time. Bev's doctor offered discount options for accommodations, but because Bev didn't have the money up front to pay for it, she was out of luck. Because the Northern Health Travel Grant is a system where you pay up front and then you're reimbursed, Bev and her husband are out of luck.

The question is, if you can't pay up front, if you can't afford the wait to reimburse—we know there are a lot of people living hand to mouth. We know that every year since 2018, the number of full-time working people accessing food banks—that number continues to grow. We know there are the working poor out there. The working poor also get sick. The working poor also need specialized treatment in health care, and they deserve to have that access to health care.

It's about equity of care. People shouldn't have to go without care because they don't have the funds up front to travel where health care is. The member for Algoma-Manitoulin is talking about a simple solution of putting our heads together and figuring out where this is broken and fixing it. I believe the Conservative side—I'm a critic; it's in my title. But I believe the Conservative side wants to address this. I believe they want people in the north to have access to health care. They have members in the north. They wouldn't want to vote against those members and the access that they have.

With the limited time I have left, I'm going to talk about a gentleman who also asked me not to share his name because he was embarrassed at the situation he was in. I'm going to call him Gary. So Gary had to receive hyperbaric oxygen therapy, and this is a treatment that has to get done daily over the course of several weeks. This is covered by OHIP, but the facilities don't exist in Sudbury. So Gary's specialist, who was in Sudbury, referred the treatment to Toronto, and Gary travelled and stayed in Toronto for several weeks. But his Northern Health Travel Grant was denied.

We helped Gary with his appeal. We started helping him in March 2021. The good news is that it was eventually resolved in his favour, but I want to remind you of the people who don't have the money up front or how

tight finances are. And each and every one of us can relate to this, either personally or members of our family or close friends of ours who feel that squeeze, the affordability squeeze that so many people are feeling.

The bad news is, even though it was resolved in his favour, it took more than a year. We started in March 2021, and it ended in March 2022 for him to be reimbursed—more than a year of paying out of pocket for several weeks of accommodations, food and travel. I don't know who could weather that storm. You're trying to recover from an injury. You're trying to recover from illness. You're getting treatment. The mental stress of not knowing how you're going to pay your bills or if you'll be reimbursed is unbelievable, unfathomable.

I know that this is a good bill. I want to congratulate again the member from Algoma–Manitoulin for bringing this forward. This is a common-sense solution to something. I'm sure there was a time when this worked. Nothing is ever perfect, but I'm sure there was a time where this was more effective. Time has moved on. Costs have moved on. We haven't kept pace with it. This is a good opportunity to recognize how important the people of Ontario are and how we can really help them.

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The final example—I have about a minute—is Stephen. Stephen is actually his real name. He's on a fixed income. He applied for the Northern Health Travel Grant. Typically, you're reimbursed in about four to six weeks; it's been more than three months. He hasn't received anything. He called the Northern Health Travel Grant office to find out what was going on. They said they have a backlog and that processing his claim will take longer than the six weeks it normally takes, but they couldn't give him a date when.

This is a broken system, Speaker. We need to address it. The member for Algoma–Manitoulin has a very simple solution, about putting our heads together, working together, which I think the people of Ontario want us to do, where we can address this, fix this and make health care better for people across northern Ontario.

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

**Mr. Adil Shamji:** It's a pleasure to rise in the chamber today to speak on an issue of paramount importance to people in Ontario, to patients in Ontario and especially the northern and rural communities in our province.

I speak today, of course, as the member of provincial Parliament for Don Valley East, but also has an emergency and family physician that has worked throughout the province, and in particular, for a large part of my career, in northern, rural and remote Ontario. I can say first-hand, from having helped my patients, helped to navigate them through this process, I can speak to the urgent and pressing need for us to look at how we can improve it, because if we don't, it will, unfortunately, impact clinical care and patient outcomes.

I want to start by outlining the five principles of medicare: comprehensiveness, universal, portable, publicly administered and accessible. It doesn't matter if we

have the best health care in the world in Toronto or in Ottawa; if you live in Moose Factory and can't access it, we are not honouring the spirit of the Canada Health Act—frankly, the letter of the law, of the Canada Health Act—until we make sure that health care in our province is accessible.

What we know right now, based upon the Auditor General's report on northern hospitals just released about two and a half months ago, on December 6, 2023: There is a significant imbalance in health care access between the north and the south. Not only that, the Auditor General identified that that significant imbalance is only expected to accelerate because of worsening staffing shortages. And yet, even going beyond that, the pressing need to address the Northern Health Travel Grant is only more relevant as we face in our province an affordability crisis, as we face a government that has introduced repeated waves of legislation that will centralize a variety of government services, including, under Bill 60, health care services that will drain surgeries and health care access from rural communities into urban communities.

And then, of course—and very relevant to something that just happened—as we see the growing spectre of climate change, that will make it more difficult for people to travel. We just learned a week or two ago that a number of northern communities declared a state of emergency because their ice roads are melting. When I worked in Moose Factory, those ice roads were a vital pipeline for patients to be able to come down to Moose Factory and continue their travel onto other places. For all of these reasons, we can expect that the travel, which is already expensive, will only become more expensive.

The people of our great north are not an afterthought. They have value. They contribute immensely to our history, our culture, our heritage and our province's prosperity, and they need to be treated as such. When they can't get access to the health care that they need, this is what happens: They don't apply for the grants, because they don't believe that they're going to get it, and their health suffers. They apply and they're denied, so their health suffers. Or they apply, they're denied, and they appeal, and eventually, they're approved, but in the process, their health suffers. Their health outcomes go down, and it ultimately becomes more expensive for all of us.

What the member from Algoma–Manitoulin has proposed is very fair. There is no reason that anyone could possibly disagree with this. He's not saying, by some edict, let's give everyone \$10,000 or \$100,000—no. He's saying, let's strike a committee that will look at the challenges that northern communities and northern patients face right now and look at ways, through those consultations, to improve the Northern Health Travel Grant. For a government that says that it is for the people, there could be no better suggestion for how to improve that health travel grant than by speaking to the people.

We have a grant that is well-intentioned. I can tell you from my own clinical experience working with a large number of patients throughout northern Ontario that the

grant isn't meeting their needs. We have a very reasonable proposal to show the patients of northern Ontario and rural Ontario that they are not an afterthought. I hope everyone can support this.

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

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** It's a pleasure to stand in the House today and take part in the debate about Bill 13, the Northern Health Travel Grant Advisory Committee Act. Frankly, it's nice to hear that there's a Liberal member who has accepted that the north is not just a no man's land that people shouldn't pay attention to, that it's important, so it was nice to hear that from the member opposite.

This proposed legislation seeks to establish yet another advisory committee to have further discussions, while our government is taking decisive action to improve the health care system for northern families. That's what we're focused on for families in the north and for families across Ontario. We know that patients can't afford delays or more talk or endless committees and that it's time to get it done for families in northern Ontario and across Ontario, and that's exactly what we're doing, while ensuring that all of our health care initiatives are actually delivering care to patients. That's what we're here for. While the opposition and independent members continue to be all talk or all about talk, our government is busy getting it done.

Speaker, many residents of northern Ontario live in communities that have less than 2,500 people, are dispersed across a vast geographical area in our province and may need to travel longer distances to access specific types of health care services. The province currently provides eligible patients with financial assistance, helping defray medical-related travel costs that residents of northern Ontario incur to access certain health care services. This financial assistance is based on travel that is required to access a medical specialist or ministry-funded health-care-facility-based procedures when they are not available in their local communities within a radius of 100 kilometres.

Speaker, the Northern Health Travel Grant is an important element in the delivery of equitable health care services to northern Ontario residents. In 2022-23, the Ministry of Health reviewed more than 178,000 applications for financial assistance, with the ministry providing almost \$45 million in financial travel assistance to more than 66,000 residents of northern Ontario. In 2023-24, the ministry's funding allocation for the Northern Health Travel Grant Program is more than \$48 million, and the ministry regularly reviews its programs, processes and procedures to support ongoing quality improvement and support a sustainable system for the future.

The ministry has enhanced the accommodation allowance and has established payment delivery through electronic bank deposits, providing more convenience for residents, and the program's call desk works with applicants who submit incomplete applications to help them with missing information. We have streamlined the administrative process for ODSP clients, and work continues to improve the program, including developing an online

application program for applicants. Additionally, the program has a medical appeals committee through which external and independent medical advisers review appeals and claims with exceptional medical circumstances.

Speaker, our government is making health care more connected and more convenient, and providing Ontarians with a better health care experience at every stage of life, no matter where they live in the province. We continue working hard to implement our plan to improve access to health care in northern communities by supporting medical education in the north and training more physicians to work in northern communities.

The Northern Ontario School of Medicine is being provided with additional medical resident training positions to ensure an ongoing supply of physicians in the north. The Northern and Rural Recruitment and Retention Initiative helps patients receive primary and specialist care closer to home, offering assistance to close to 130 communities, providing financial recruitment incentives to an eligible family physician or medical specialist who establishes a full-time practice in an eligible community.

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Through the Community Commitment Program for Nurses, between 2022 and 2024, over 650 of the nurses placed with employers in need have been hired in northern Ontario, and in northern communities, the Emergency Department Locum Program has provided supports to eligible hospitals to assist with 24/7 emergency department services. The Emergency Department Peer-to-Peer Program is also supporting emergency department physicians in northern, rural and remote communities through access to immediate, on-demand and real-time coaching and support via virtual channels from experienced physician peers.

The government is also reviewing and expanding Ornge air ambulance's fixed-wing fleet from eight to 12, with a new state-of-the-art aircraft, as well as a new larger Sudbury air base to house the additional four aircraft, ensuring it can continue to provide safe, consistent air ambulance services, which are especially important for northern communities.

We've invested in annual operational funding for new MRI machines in northern, rural and smaller communities, and our government made changes to allow pharmacists to treat and prescribe medications for 19 common medical ailments, including UTIs, pink eye, cold sores and acne, for example. More than 700,000 assessments have taken place over the last year, with 94% of Ontario pharmacies participating in this initiative, including many across northern Ontario.

These are just a few examples of how our government is actually taking action to provide more connected and convenient care and supporting the health care needs of people in northern Ontario.

We know that there are different health care challenges in various parts of the province and understand how important it is to have a regional voice on these matters. Ontario Health regions will continue to work and consult with local communities, and our government will continue

to listen—and I must say, we have listened here today to what our colleagues have shared with us today. We want to work closely with those on the front lines of our health care system, as well: our doctors, nurses and other care providers. This is an essential part in determining how best to provide care and meet the local health care needs of northern families where and when they need it.

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

**M<sup>me</sup> Dawn Gallagher Murphy:** I appreciate the opportunity to participate in this debate. To my colleague the member for Eglinton–Lawrence: I’d like to thank her for her remarks, as she has discussed how our government is prioritizing health care in northern Ontario by continuing to take bold action.

Our government does recognize the residents of northern Ontario and what they face with some unique health care realities. That is why we continue to provide financial assistance that is dedicated to northern Ontario residents. We are taking action for northern families instead of just talking or outright ignoring the needs of the north, as previous governments have done.

I would like to further speak about how our government is strengthening health care for northern Ontario residents and helping address their health needs. Effective, integrated models of care, as exemplified by the Ontario health teams, are critical to providing more convenient and connected health services in northern communities.

In July of last year, our government approved three more Ontario health teams in northern Ontario: the Équipe Santé Ontario Cochrane District Ontario Health Team, as well as the Elliot Lake Ontario health team, both serving Greater Sudbury, Sudbury East, Espanola, Manitoulin, Elliot Lake and surrounding areas, and the Timiskaming area Ontario health team, serving the Timiskaming district and surrounding region.

Last month, our government took another important step forward to strengthen local services in the north with the approval of the West Parry Sound Ontario Health Team, which marked a significant milestone of achieving full provincial Ontario health team coverage, with a total of 58 Ontario health teams operating in every corner of this great province.

These Ontario health teams bring together a wide variety of health care providers from across health and community sectors, including primary care, hospitals, home and community care, and mental health and addiction services, to better serve patients. Working together, these teams break down barriers, connecting people to care by ensuring a seamless transition from one provider to another, with one patient record and one care plan being shared between the providers.

We’re supporting Ontario health teams to take the next step to ensuring better coordinated care by moving the responsibility of connecting people to home care services to Ontario health teams. This is starting in 2025.

Mental health and addiction challenges are also an additional key issue facing our communities. Our government continues to make important investments, making it

easier and faster for Ontarians, including in the north, to connect to high-quality and evidence-based mental health and addictions services and supports. This includes establishing eight new youth wellness hubs over this past year, with 22 hubs launched since 2020, with several of these hubs supporting young people in northern communities like Sault Ste. Marie, Kenora, Sudbury and Timmins.

We’ve significantly expanded the Ontario Structured Psychotherapy Program, including through providers in Sudbury and Thunder Bay, to provide more convenient mental health care. Through the Addictions Recovery Fund, 53% of the new addictions beds will be located in northern communities, supporting the creation of 204 addictions beds in northern Ontario.

Speaker, I’d also like to talk to the latest announcement, with the \$110-million investment for inter-professional primary care teams that we announced earlier this month. Northern Ontario residents will further benefit from expanded timely access to primary care. Specifically, in northern Ontario, nearly \$6 million of this investment will serve more than 37,000 net new patients.

I just want to talk to some of the applicants and the locations, given the members from the north here described these areas: in Moosonee and James Bay coast, Weeneebayko Area Health Authority; in Sudbury District, French River, the Centre de santé Univi Health Centre; in Manitoulin Island, Northeastern Manitoulin FHT, Manitoulin Central FHT, Municipality of Assiginack FHT; as well as in Wawa, the Wawa Family Health Team; in Timmins as well as Chapleau—many of these areas.

Speaker, we know that people stay healthier for longer with this primary care service and with faster diagnosis and treatment as well as more consistent support managing their day-to-day health, while relieving pressures on emergency departments and walk-in clinics. We will continue to work—

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** Unfortunately, that’s your time.

Back to the member for a two-minute response.

**Mr. Michael Mantha:** I want to thank the members from Eglinton–Lawrence and Newmarket–Aurora. I wasn’t surprised with the responses that I got from the government. Unfortunately, you didn’t listen to the picture that I painted of the realities of what’s happening with our health care system in northern Ontario, and that’s too bad.

The member for Don Valley and the member for Thunder Bay, thank you for your comments. To the member from Sudbury, you’re absolutely right; it is about equity of care.

I want to read the mandate here in the short amount of time that I have. The mandate is “to make recommendations for improving the facilitation of reasonable access to health” care “services for people in northern Ontario by means of reasonable, realistic and efficient reimbursement for travel costs.” It’s not just the reimbursement; it’s also the delivery of these services.

What the member from Newmarket–Aurora just spoke about with the enhancement to the family health teams—we welcome that, but it doesn’t require a travel grant. This is the problem. If we look at the reimbursement in the

delivery of the Northern Health Travel Grant, there are things that we want to change.

I'll give you a perfect example: On the delivery, if you look at a community like Espanola or White River, they're just on the outside of that 100-kilometre diameter. If you live in White River, God forbid if you look at the price of gas. If you have to drive to Wawa to meet up with a specialist there, you need that travel grant, but guess what? You're not going to get it. Because if you're in White River or in Espanola, and you have to travel to Sudbury or Sault Ste. Marie, you won't get it; you don't qualify.

These are the types of discussions that we need to have, where we can bring the health care professionals, bring the service providers to start talking about what we need to do as far as improving the delivery and the equity of care. I touched a little bit on let's bring Hope Air as well, as far as how we can make them a partner in providing the care that we need and getting people to timely specialist appointments. This is something simple—

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** Unfortunately, you're out of time.

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

Mr. Mantha has moved second reading of Bill 13, An Act to enact the Northern Health Travel Grant Advisory Committee Act, 2022. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

All those in favour of the motion will please say "aye."

All those opposed to the motion will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

A recorded vote being required, it will be deferred until the next instance of deferred votes.

*Second reading vote deferred.*

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** All matters relating to private members' public business having been completed, this House stands adjourned until Monday, February 26, 2024, at 10:15 a.m.

*The House adjourned at 1521.*





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Kernaghan, Terence (NDP)	London North Centre / London-Centre-Nord	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de l'opposition officielle
<b>Kerzner, Hon. / L'hon. Michael S. (PC)</b>	York Centre / York-Centre	Solicitor General / Solliciteur général
<b>Khanjin, Hon. / L'hon. Andrea (PC)</b>	Barrie—Innisfil	Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks / Ministre de l'Environnement, de la Protection de la nature et des Parcs
		Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjointe du gouvernement
Kusendova-Bashta, Natalia (PC)	Mississauga Centre / Mississauga-Centre	
Leardi, Anthony (PC)	Essex	
<b>Lecce, Hon. / L'hon. Stephen (PC)</b>	King—Vaughan	Minister of Education / Ministre de l'Éducation
<b>Lumsden, Hon. / L'hon. Neil (PC)</b>	Hamilton East—Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est—Stoney Creek	Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport / Ministre du Tourisme, de la Culture et du Sport
MacLeod, Lisa (PC)	Nepean	
Mamakwa, Sol (NDP)	Kiiwetinoong	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Mantha, Michael (IND)	Algoma—Manitoulin	
Martin, Robin (PC)	Eglinton—Lawrence	
<b>McCarthy, Hon. / L'hon. Todd J. (PC)</b>	Durham	Minister of Public and Business Service Delivery / Ministre des Services au public et aux entreprises
McCrimmon, Karen (LIB)	Kanata—Carleton	
McGregor, Graham (PC)	Brampton North / Brampton-Nord	
McMahon, Mary-Margaret (LIB)	Beaches—East York	
<b>Mulroney, Hon. / L'hon. Caroline (PC)</b>	York—Simcoe	President of the Treasury Board / Présidente du Conseil du Trésor
		Minister of Francophone Affairs / Ministre des Affaires francophones
Oosterhoff, Sam (PC)	Niagara West / Niagara-Ouest	
Pang, Billy (PC)	Markham—Unionville	

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

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