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Clerk: Trevor Day

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### ORDERS OF THE DAY / ORDRE DU JOUR

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## LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Thursday 7 March 2024

## ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 7 mars 2024

*The House met at 0900.*

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

*Prières / Prayers.*

**Ms. Peggy Sattler:** Point of order.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Point of order: the member for London West.

**Ms. Peggy Sattler:** I seek unanimous consent of the House to allow the independents as a group to speak for five minutes in response to the minister's statement on International Women's Day today.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** The member for London West is seeking the unanimous consent of the House to allow the independents as a group to speak for five minutes in response to the minister's statement today on International Women's Day. Agreed? I heard a no.

### ORDERS OF THE DAY

#### STRENGTHENING ACCOUNTABILITY AND STUDENT SUPPORTS ACT, 2024

#### LOI DE 2024 POUR RENFORCER LA RESPONSABILISATION ET LES MESURES DE SOUTIEN AUX ÉTUDIANTS

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 6, 2024, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 166, An Act to amend the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities Act / Projet de loi 166, Loi modifiant la Loi sur le ministère de la Formation et des Collèges et Universités.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Further debate?

**Ms. Peggy Sattler:** It is a pleasure to rise today on behalf of the official opposition to lead off debate on Bill 166, the Strengthening Accountability and Student Supports Act.

I want to start out by saying what a privilege it is to be talking about post-secondary education in this place. We don't see a lot of bills that come forward that address post-secondary education, especially under this government, so this is a welcome opportunity to highlight the value of post-secondary education in this province for students, our economy and our well-being, and also to raise issues that are fundamental to the stability and the sustainability of Ontario's post-secondary system.

Our system of post-secondary education is absolutely vital to the success of our province and our hopes as Ontarians for the future of this province. Post-secondary

education is important not just for labour market success of graduates, but also for the health and well-being of all Ontarians. Graduates of our colleges and universities earn higher incomes. They contribute more in taxes and consumer spending.

There is a remarkable success across our post-secondary institutions in preparing students for the labour market. We know that 90% of university grads—more than 90% of university grads—are employed within six months after graduating and 83% of college grads.

But of course, Speaker, post-secondary institutions do much more than just train workers for employment, and that is particularly the case at the university level. Our colleges and universities are truly anchor institutions in our communities. There are 200 communities with college campuses. I understand there are about 70 communities with university campuses. These anchor institutions support local and regional economies. They respond to local labour market needs. They work with local employers, businesses and non-profits to solve problems and advance innovation. They are a significant source of local employment for the faculty and the staff who work at colleges and universities. They are cultural institutions, often with art galleries, musical theatre, sports facilities, and they are focused on developing human capital.

Speaker, at a time of rapid economic and social change, we know that investing in people is vitally important. The jobs of tomorrow won't look like the jobs of today. We need creative, resilient critical thinkers with communication, collaboration and problem-solving skills. Colleges and universities foster human development and personal growth, enabling students to reach their full potential. They generate new knowledge and tackle the wicked problems, the grand challenges of our time. Think about the work that was done by Banting and Best on the polio vaccine and, more recently, the work that was done by our world-class universities in developing the COVID vaccines and the work that is being done on climate change, on climate adaptation and mitigation strategies.

In all of this we can see how critical the public post-secondary education system is to our well-being as a province. It is very much and truly a public good because we all collectively benefit from an engaged and active citizenry and a highly educated workforce. And Ontario has built a truly world-class system of post-secondary education, with universities that consistently rank among the highest in the world. Our college system is the envy of many other provinces and jurisdictions.

But, Speaker, our system today is on the brink. We have seen successive governments in this province demonstrate that they do not understand the fundamental value and

importance of post-secondary education. For four decades, Ontario has been dead last in Canada in terms of per student funding for PSE. We fund, on a per student basis, less than every other province in this country. At the same time, as we were dead last in per student funding under the Liberal government, we had the highest undergraduate tuition in all of Canada.

Now, one of the things that this government did shortly after they were elected in 2019 was they announced that tuition was going to be reduced 10% and it has been frozen at that level ever since. That was the right decision, as I said. The legacy of the Liberal government was a university system that had the highest undergraduate tuition in the country. But what this government did wrong is they removed those tuition dollars from our system and they did not replace them. They did not replace them with anything. What that has meant since that change was implemented in 2019 is an accumulated revenue loss of \$2 billion for Ontario's colleges and universities. This government just said, "We're going to do this; you figure out how to manage it."

At the same time that the government was doing that, they also decided it was a great time to cut operating grants. We have seen a 9% decline in the amount of operating funding that goes to our colleges and universities accompanying that significant loss of tuition revenues. Government operating grants now represent just 30% of the funding that colleges and universities receive. The rest is mainly tuition. Two thirds of the revenues that come into our colleges and universities come in through student tuition.

#### 0910

When you take that all together—the changes to tuition and the year-over-year cuts to operating grants that have escalated under this government—we have seen a 31% decrease in base funding for colleges and universities since 2010. When you look in comparison to other provinces—think about this: For every dollar that other provinces spend on colleges in Canada, Ontario spends just 44 cents. We are at 44% of the average of other provinces. For every dollar that other provinces spend on universities, Ontario spends just 57 cents.

Of course, our colleges and universities have not been immune to the impact of skyrocketing inflation, escalating costs across the institutions that have further impacted their ability to manage budgetary pressures. We've seen them dealing with the multi-million dollar impact of Bill 124 and this government's decision, again, back in 2019, to legislate an unconstitutional cap on wage increases for public servants, including the public servants who work in our public colleges and universities.

We have seen a quarter cap funding formula that means that there are thousands of unfunded domestic students who attend our colleges and universities. The quarter cap, what it is, is it's a limit on the number of students that the government funds on a per student basis within 3%, plus or minus. The rationale behind this is that if enrolment declines, it will provide some stability for institutions, and if enrolment increases, it just gives some wiggle room in

terms of the number of students who are funded at each institution. The reality is that right now in this province we have 20,000 unfunded domestic students who are attending Ontario universities; we have 2,500 unfunded domestic students who are attending Ontario colleges; and the cost to our colleges and universities is \$178 million. When you take all of this into account, it's not surprising that we have at least 10 universities in this province currently running deficits.

Our post-secondary system was already at the breaking point. It was on the brink, after all of these decades of chronic underfunding, when the federal government announced the cap on international study permits. Some people have estimated that will mean an additional \$1.8-billion hit to the bottom lines of our colleges and universities.

The cap on international study permits was important, and it has a particular impact on Ontario, which has seen the number of international students skyrocket. Since 2018, there has been a doubling in the number of international students. In our college sector, three quarters of all tuition revenue is now generated by international student tuition. International students contribute \$3.3 billion in tuition for our colleges, which is much more than the \$1-billion domestic tuition and the \$1.9 billion that the government contributes in operating grants. Ontario colleges have tripled international student enrolment since 2016, and at 10 of our 24 colleges there are now more international students than domestic students. And the Ford government, as they were reducing operating grants, as they removed those tuition dollars from the system, creating a huge revenue hole for our colleges and universities, was quite happy to watch the growth of international student enrolment. In fact, they actively promoted the growth of international students.

Back in 2017, under the Liberal government, we had six colleges that had public-private partner agreements; that is, an arrangement where a public college partners with a private provider, typically located in the GTA, and the staff at that private provider deliver curriculum that is developed by the public college. So students pay tuition to the public college, the public college pays a fee to the private provider so they get compensated, and the student may never go near the actual campus of the public college. It's a good arrangement for the public college: They get the revenue. The private provider gets the fee and the student is able to graduate with a credential from the public college. The importance of that is that public college credential makes them eligible for the federal government's post-graduation work permit, which then sets them on a path to immigration.

As I said, in 2017, there were six colleges with those public-private partner arrangements. Today, there are 15. What we saw under the former Liberal government was a policy decision to phase out public-private partnerships. The government of the day commissioned a report which decided that the risks of these partnerships were too great, which is why the government of the day said that they would be wound down. But the Ford government, follow-



ing those tuition changes and the decrease in operating grants, decided to reverse the decision. They saw these partnerships as an easy solution to replace the funding that had been removed from our public colleges.

I thought it would be helpful, Speaker, to review some of the cautions that David Trick raised in the report that he delivered to the Liberal government back in 2017 that led to the Liberal government's decision to phase out these public-private partnership arrangements. These are some of the key findings that came out of his report. He said, "Colleges that have formed partnerships with private providers have acted rationally given the circumstances and incentives they face"—because, as I said, they're able to create a campus in the GTA, attract lots of international students who pay tuition revenues that are as much as four, five, six, eight times the amount of tuition that domestic students pay.

The report also notes, "The partnerships do not serve an important public purpose and are an inefficient way to provide needed revenue to colleges."

He found, "The partnerships pose risks that are inherently difficult to manage," risks related to "academic quality, legal liability, reputation, quality of student services ... financial loss, federal government policy change"—now, that was a prescient point to include in this report—and finally, "accountability to the Legislature."

He said, "The risks potentially affect all colleges, not just" the six at the time that had private partners.

He also said: "The risks potentially affect the government." "Without timely action, the risks will become larger." "The government needs to find better solutions to the problems that colleges actually face."

So the Liberal government decided to act on his recommendations, phase out those arrangements. This government decided, nope, they like those arrangements because they allowed those international student tuition dollars to flow into the system.

**0920**

David Trick, in the report he provided to the Liberal government, was not the only person to flag some of these concerns with the overreliance of our public colleges and our universities on international student tuition. The Auditor General has done a series of reports, and I want to just highlight some of the findings of the reports that she did on public college oversight and financial management in the university sector.

In 2021, in a value-for-money audit on public colleges oversight, her first finding was high financial dependency on international student recruitment, enrolment and fees. She found that "between 2012-13 and 2020-21, domestic enrolments declined 15%, while international enrolments grew 342%."

She also found that "the ministry does not have a strategic plan for the college sector to mitigate the risk of high reliance on international students," and that five of the six public colleges that had those public-private partnerships back in 2017 "could have incurred operating deficits had they not received a share of international

student tuition partnership revenue." She also noted limited oversight of public-private college partnerships.

In that same year, 2021, the auditor did a value-for-money audit of private career colleges oversight, and she also noted in private career colleges an increase in international students. She said that the number of international students enrolled had increased by 420% between 2015 and 2019, so just over a period of four years, from about 2,000 to over 10,000.

She concluded, "The ministry does not effectively administer, oversee and enforce the legislation and ministry policies that are in place to protect the interests of existing and prospective students of private career colleges in Ontario."

The following year, in November 2022, she did a special report on Laurentian University, following the unprecedented bankruptcy of that public university—not something that anyone in this province ever expected to see, and quite possibly the first of many in the wake of this government's decisions not to appropriately fund our post-secondary system. But in her review of Laurentian University, one of her key recommendations was that the government needed to do a thorough analysis of the impact of tuition reductions and freezes on all universities prior to implementation to determine if universities can sustain the impacts of these policy decisions.

Now, I don't think the government did that analysis when they made their budget announcement last week, because if they had, they would have understood that you can't just remove \$2 billion in tuition revenue from our system without replacing it with something to ensure the financial stability of the sector.

In November 2022, the auditor did another value-for-money audit on financial management in universities. She also noted the risks to the system of the overreliance on international students and recommended that there be a strategic plan and actions put in place to ensure the stability of our universities in this province.

Again, she made recommendations specific to the increased reliance on international students despite the inherent risk. In 2023, last year, she did an audit of York University operations and capital, again noting increased reliance on international student tuition revenue. She found that international students accounted for 18% of York's total enrolment, but almost half of its revenue.

Clearly, Speaker, you can't run a system that is so overreliant on international student tuition at both our public colleges, at those public-private partner campuses, at the main campuses of the public colleges, and in our public universities. This has been noted by David Trick and by multiple reports from the auditor, but did this government do anything to address these concerns, to look at the sector and figure out how to properly fund it so that it wasn't being subsidized by international student tuition dollars? No, they did not.

There was an interesting story that came out from Global News in January with some internal documents that were FOIed, showing that the ministry was very much aware that it had an overreliance on international students,

but “was in the midst of a plan to ramp up its international student program despite the worries articulated by provincial staff.” And that is particularly concerning, Speaker, that the ministry was prepared to ignore all of these red flags that have been raised by the auditor and still wanting to proceed with its plan to aggressively continue to recruit international students.

Now, some may want to ask why the government was so determined to do this and maybe some insights were provided as to why this may be. A story that was reported in the media a couple of weeks ago said that the college minister had raised \$24,000 from private college executives at a meet-and-greet. The story actually says that the Progressive Conservatives, as a whole, “have raked in over \$151,000 from directors and executives of private schools that partnered with public colleges since 2018.” In the minister’s riding, she “raised more than \$27,000 from directors and executives of” those public-private partnerships “since she was appointed to the ... portfolio,” and almost all were from a single event on March 7.

Another interesting context for this government’s fondness for using international student recruitment to maintain the budgets in our college sector comes from the fact that college surpluses, the cash flow that goes in and out of our public colleges, appears on the provincial balance sheet. All but one of Ontario’s 24 colleges reported surpluses of more than \$660 million in 2022, and that goes into the province’s book; it shows up as a surplus. It helps the government say what a good job they’re doing as the colleges are bringing in more and more international students and the tuition dollars that they bring with them.

Now, all of the government’s plans came to a crashing halt on January 22, when the federal government announced the 35% reduction in international study permits. And, of course, we’ve seen some finger pointing between the federal Minister of Immigration and the provincial Minister of Colleges and Universities, but really, as this government was moving forward with its plan to ramp up the recruitment of international students, we did see the federal government also happily signing off on all of those visa applications, which led to this skyrocketing of the numbers of international students in this province. But one of the fallouts of the federal government’s sudden announcement on January 22 is that everything has come to a complete halt. We are at a standstill.

**0930**

And when you look at those significant revenue dollars that are represented by international student tuition for our colleges and universities, it’s very difficult for them to do any planning until they know how this government is going to proceed. The federal government delegated to the provincial government the responsibility for allocating those new caps on international study permits. Ontario is going to get about half of the number of permits that were in place before. The provincial government has to figure out how to allocate those caps and also put in place a process for attestation letters to be attached for all of the applications. So I’m hearing from colleges and universi-

ties that are in a bit of chaos right now and total uncertainty in terms of budget planning until they know how those caps will be allocated and how many international students they will be able to enrol.

Before I go any further, Speaker, I do want to be very clear: When the federal government made the announcement, it was made with some claims that international students were causing the housing crisis in this province, were contributing to the health care crisis in this province and we had to crack down on the numbers of international students, which is actually quite shameful, to scapegoat international students as somehow being the cause of the challenges that we are confronting in this province. It’s deeply wrong and unconscionable. International students are incredibly important to the vibrancy of our post-secondary campuses and also very important to helping address labour market challenges when they graduate as the skilled workers that Ontario needs, as the health care workers that we so desperately need, but also while they are studying.

I know so many international students fill those low-wage jobs in tourism and hospitality, as servers, working at Tim Hortons and as Uber drivers. They are very important to keeping our economy functioning. They deserve so much more than being exploited just for the high tuition fees that they pay. They deserve access to adequate housing. They deserve a social infrastructure that doesn’t leave them going to food banks. International students are one of the highest new users of food banks in our province. We have heard just appalling stories of the exploitation that they have faced, the substandard housing conditions that they have been forced to live in, the unsafe circumstances in which they find themselves. They should not be scapegoated. We have an obligation to support the international students that come to Ontario to study.

At the same time, the government has an obligation to take real action to start to address the housing crisis. We have talked so many times in this Legislature about all of the things that the government could do to start to solve the housing crisis, starting with a public builder to build those non-market homes—because that is what housing experts have said; that’s where the bottleneck is. It’s at the low end of the housing spectrum. Right now, in Ontario, only 4% of our housing stock is social housing, and in other parts of the world—social housing accounts for 18% of housing stock in the UK; it accounts for 17% of the housing stock in France. And until we can get those non-market units—the social housing, the supportive housing—in place; until we can provide real rent control so that the lowest-income tenants, the most vulnerable tenants, aren’t economically evicted from their units by landlords who are taking advantage of the opportunity to charge larger rents; until we can get those protections in place, we will not be able to address the housing crisis in this province.

That takes me to some of the announcements that the government has made since the federal cap. I don’t think I’ll talk about the initial announcement, but I’ll go straight to the announcement of the package of measures that the

minister brought in on February 27, which included the bill that we are discussing this morning.

There was an interesting piece that was written by Steve Paikin on February 29 about the media conference that the minister held to announce the package of measures the same day that the legislation was tabled. The title of Steve Paikin's article is "An Anatomy of a Bungled Press Conference"—because, basically, it was a disaster. Paikin wrote: "Reporters got increasingly frustrated by the fact that the minister was so blatantly ignoring their quite reasonable questions."

The minister announced a package of \$1.3 billion. The reporters were saying—it sounds like a lot of money: "But your own blue-ribbon expert panel said \$2.5 billion was necessary. Why have you only done half the job?"

The reporters were saying: "Yes, you're complaining that the federal government dramatically cut back on visas for foreign students, thereby depriving the system of \$1.8 billion it desperately needs. But was it your original underfunding that forced post-secondary institutions into an overreliance on foreign students to begin with?"

These were questions asked by reporters that were completely ignored by this minister.

Let's look at the announcement that was made on February 27. As the minister repeatedly said, it was a historic \$1.3-billion investment into the sector which, as the reporters noted, sounds like a lot of money. It is a lot of money. It is a lot of scarce and precious public dollars. Funding that is provided by this government into our post-secondary system is an investment in our collective future.

The government struck an expert panel to take a look at the sustainability of this sector. What the expert panel said was that institutions need \$2.5 billion in public funding over three years just to stay afloat, just to stay at the level that they need to be, which is twice the amount that the government committed in the historic investment on February 27. The blue-ribbon panel's recommendation for \$2.5 billion—many people said that was too modest. There are estimates that we would need \$4 billion just to get Ontario from last place in the country in terms of per student funding to ninth place in the country, or second-last place in the country, in terms of per student funding. We would need \$7 billion just to reach the average funding on a per student basis in post-secondary education that is provided across the province.

The historic \$1.3 billion includes about \$903 million over three years through a new post-secondary education sustainability fund. That's broken down into \$700 million over three years for all 47 institutions—for the 23 universities and 24 colleges—plus \$203 million in top-up funding for institutions with greater financial need.

**0940**

I had a briefing with the ministry staff, and I appreciate the minister's co-operation in making that happen, but one of the things that the ministry staff said is that the criteria to access that \$203 million in top-up funding includes greater reliance on international students and exposure to greater revenue decline.

Now, Speaker, as I have said, international student tuition was generating \$3.3 billion in funding for Ontario colleges. Half of that—at least half of that—is potentially gone with that cap on international study permits, and the minister is offering \$203 million in top-up funding to help institutions who may have greater financial need.

The other key thing to note, Speaker, is that this government's investment was not an increase to operating grants, which is what institutions have been clamouring for. It's what they have been pushing for. It is what they need, but that is not what this government gave. Again, the blue-ribbon panel had recommended that 10% increase to operating grants, but this government decided that its historic investment was going to be provided in the form of time-limited funding, three-year funding in new grants. This in no way addresses the long-term financial sustainability of the sector, and it puts student programs at risk, the programs in our institutions that are so vital for the success of the young people who attend colleges and universities.

Currently, the Council of Ontario Universities, COU, estimates that within the university sector, they spend an estimated \$1.6 billion on student services: on career counselling, on work-integrated learning coordination, on academic counselling, on accessibility services, on all of these supports that are so important for students to be successful. These are all programs that will be at risk unless we can figure out how to keep this sector sustainable, and I'm already hearing from students about reductions in library hours, which reduces their access to the materials that they need and the resources, the librarians who can assist them.

We are going to see a decline in the quality of the education that we provide if classes get bigger, as students get less contact with faculty. We're going to see even more precarious work on campus, more contract faculty. We already know that within the post-secondary sector in this province, half of academic faculty are contract faculty. That means they do not have full-time jobs. They do not have job security. They do not have the benefits that go along with secure full-time work. These are precarious jobs.

We are seeing more and more of the support positions in our colleges and universities shift from full-time to part-time, to temporary jobs, to contract positions, forcing these support workers—who are research assistants, teaching assistants, administrative staff, custodians, maintenance workers, you name it. In so many of our institutions, these are the workers who are having to work multiple jobs just to make ends meet, because the wages that they are earning in the college or university where they work are not enough to provide a livable income.

That's what we're seeing right now at York University: a strike over livable wages, a strike to get improved job security, a strike to strengthen protections in the workplace. We saw U of T come down to the wire with a midnight agreement reached to avert a strike there from their teaching and research assistants. We are seeing institutions leaving vacancies unfilled, not replacing people who are retiring. What I'm hearing from workers

within the sector is greatly increased stress, burnout, workload pressures as they're having to take on more work as more employees are going off sick. That directly affects the quality of education that students receive in our colleges and universities.

I'm going to quickly go through some other parts of the government's announcement. There was \$167 million over three years in additional funding for capital repairs and equipment. This is highly necessary funding to enable renewal of existing facilities and to purchase new equipment, but let's put that in the context of the backlog in maintenance and repair. This was one of the questions I asked in the 2023 estimates process and the minister told me there's a \$5.1-billion maintenance and repair backlog in the university system and a \$1.2-billion maintenance and repair backlog across our colleges. Yes, this \$167 million is great, but it is not going to do very much at all to deal with that backlog.

There is one-time funding of \$10 million through the Small, Northern and Rural Grant for colleges and the Northern Ontario Grant for universities. This funding is available to 11 colleges in our system. Hopefully it will make a difference, but as I said, when you look at the overreliance on international student tuition that these colleges have been functioning on, it is highly unlikely whether that is going to enable them to maintain their financial stability.

We know, particularly in northern and rural Ontario, where the population is much smaller to draw students from, that it's much more costly to maintain the institution, to run the gamut of programs that students need to prepare for the labour force. But one of the ongoing concerns, particularly in northern Ontario, is that if those opportunities aren't there, then students are going to leave, students are going to go get their education in a larger urban centre and not come back. That speaks very much to the importance of maintaining those small, rural and northern colleges and universities.

There was funding—\$65.4 million—for research and innovation. That again—yes, that's good; I'm glad that the government has recognized their obligation to support research and innovation. But one of the findings from the blue-ribbon panel report is that Ontario provides the lowest funding for research—no surprise; Ontario is dead last in all of these indicators—of any other province. It's interesting, Speaker, as we see this government having no problem at all giving huge subsidies to companies, they do not seem to understand the importance—the value—of investing in the research that is conducted at our colleges and universities to grow the companies of the future, to develop intellectual property, to create new products and services, research to solve societal problems around the climate crisis, around growing income inequality, around the housing crisis. This \$65 million, while it is a gesture, is really not the kind of investment the sector needs.

**0950**

There is also \$15 million over three years for a new Efficiency and Accountability Fund to support third-party reviews to drive efficiencies. This minister's initial

response to the blue-ribbon panel report and the recommendations, the \$2.5 billion that was needed, was, "We're not going to do anything until the colleges and universities deal with their inefficiencies, become more efficient, find that \$2.5 billion by making some internal changes." But we know, and the blue-ribbon panel confirmed, that within the sector, our institutions are already operating very lean and efficient. There are lots of examples of shared services that reduce internal costs, that demonstrate efficiency, like joint purchasing agreements, university pension plans. Yes, we can definitely always find more efficiencies, but we're not going to find \$2.5 billion of efficiencies, Speaker.

In my conversations with employee groups, they highlighted the concern that "efficiency" in this government's speak always means contracting out. And as I said, this sector is notorious for the amount of contract work that underlines the delivery of education in Ontario with the overreliance on contract faculty.

The government's announcement also included \$100 million to support STEM enrolments in programs that are unfunded, and that goes back to those 20,000 unfunded domestic students that I mentioned earlier. I understand that this STEM funding is going to support 13,000 of those unfunded program spots, which is great, but that means that there are still 7,000 unfunded domestic students in programs other than STEM. This is something that we have seen repeatedly from this government, a disregard for the value of liberal arts—because we're already hearing from Queen's, from Guelph, from other institutions that are looking at what programs to cut, and liberal arts, humanities are often the first programs that are on the chopping block.

One of the stats that I think it's really important that all of us keep in mind—and I just learned this fairly recently—is that one third of the Fortune 500 CEOs in North America are liberal arts majors. They didn't graduate from STEM or business; they are liberal arts majors, because there is such value in liberal arts in terms of critical thinking, collaboration, communication, all of those soft skills that support entrepreneurialism and that foster corporate leadership skills.

I just want to go onto the legislation that was also part of the announcement on February 27. Really, there are three main parts to the bill. The first is a requirement for all public colleges and universities to have a student mental health policy, describing programs, services etc. that are available. It also allows the minister to issue directives specifying the elements to be included in the policy and what steps would be taken if an institution fails to comply.

The funding announcement did include \$23 million to enhance mental health supports; \$8 million of that was for the Postsecondary Mental Health Action Plan, so that is \$8 million that will go directly to post-secondary institutions over the three years of the funding. Let's do the math, Speaker: \$8 million over three years is \$2.7 million per year; \$2.7 million per year over 47 institutions is \$57,000 per institution in direct student supports for mental health.

And we know how dire the crisis in student mental health services is in our province. We've heard those stories. We saw the horrifying news of student suicides in this province, and so we know that there is a crisis in mental health services in Ontario.

But interestingly, one of the reports that this government commissioned and was released in January of this year was from Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario about best practices in student mental health. One of the findings that they noted is that "long-term planning is complicated by current funding structures and institutional systems, which impede efficiency, impact service provision and contribute to staff turnover.

"About half of interviewees mentioned challenges due to funding structure, citing issues with unpredictability and short spending periods" and "one-time grants for mental health." They also said, "Institutions struggle to keep pace with rising demand for mental health services due to staffing shortages."

Finally, they said that the mental health challenges that they see on campus are deeply affected by social determinants of health, specifically "lack of affordable housing, food insecurity and general affordability challenges."

Speaker, one of the things that this government could be doing, alongside that \$57,000 per institution for the next three years to support the implementation of a student mental health policy, is expanding student financial aid. We know that one of the biggest contributors to anxiety and depression among post-secondary students is financial stress.

The College Student Alliance also found that the biggest barrier to seeking mental health treatment is financial, the second is long wait-lists and the third is a lack of available resources. So what's needed is an investment. It's an investment in the mental health supports that we have in our communities so that students can access treatment. What we need is an investment in OSAP funding.

Again, going back to 2019, it was a busy year for this government, but they also made a \$700-million cut to student financial aid. And then, later, in 2020, they clawed back an additional \$400 million in the funding that had been provided by this government. So they could reverse that cut. They could put that funding back into student financial aid. They could convert all loans to grants, which is something that the NDP has been calling for.

The second big piece of the government's legislation is the requirement for colleges and universities to have anti-racism and hate policies that would address and combat racism and hate, including, but not limited to, anti-Indigenous racism, anti-Black racism, anti-Semitism and Islamophobia. Again, the minister can issue directives specifying the elements of the policy and the steps that would be taken for non-compliance.

We have seen several high-profile incidents of hate on our campuses. At Queen's University, back in 2019, there was a pride flag stolen and there were public death threats made to the LGBTQ community. There was a horrifying stabbing at the University of Waterloo back in June. Last

summer, a gender studies professor and two students were stabbed. And in particular, after the October 7 attack in Israel, we know that the atmosphere on our campuses has become particularly tense, and many, many students are feeling unsafe.

**1000**

There is no common reporting mechanism to collect data on incidents of hate and discrimination that students may be experiencing on our campuses in this province. We know that Hillel Ontario is collecting data on students' experiences of anti-Semitism if they make the effort to go online and report to Hillel. We know that the National Council of Canadian Muslims is collecting data. But there is no common system in our institutions to collect that data. If this policy does that, that will be important so that we can really understand the experiences of hate and discrimination on Ontario college and university campuses.

But what's going to be so important, Speaker, is that the development of this policy—and I've heard legitimate questions asked of me, like, there's a ministerial directive as to what's supposed to be in that policy; who determines what's in that ministerial directive? Who is the minister going to consult with on the content of that directive which will then inform the policies that are going to be in place on our college and university campuses in Ontario? It is critically important at this very fraught time in our world, as we see more than 30,000 people who have been killed in Gaza, as we see 100 hostages still in captivity, as we see those tensions continuing to increase on our campus, that this policy not be used to divide, that it be used to bring campus communities together.

I do want to give a shout-out to Western University and the Western University student council. There was an incident on campus back in October where a poster was removed that was specifically about the hostages. A joint statement was released in the aftermath of that, signed by Hillel Western, Israel on Campus, the Muslim Students' Association and the Palestinian Cultural Club. The statement acknowledged that students have been feeling unsafe and commits to ensuring that Western is a safe place on campus "where the debate of difficult issues can be conducted respectfully and with an understanding of the real impact on affected communities." That is a lesson that I hope this government will study and learn from and make sure that the policies that are being required at our colleges and universities respond to the lived experiences of those who will be affected by them.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** Before we move to questions and answers, I'd like to acknowledge a member who has joined us in the gallery: the former member representing York South–Weston, Faisal Hassan. He represented the riding in the 42nd Parliament.

Questions?

**Ms. Natalie Pierre:** Good morning. Through Bill 166, our government is continuing to work to ensure students have access to the right conditions to support their well-being and achieve success at colleges and universities by introducing legislation that, if passed, would enhance

student mental health supports, increase ancillary fee transparency and continue to ensure our college and university campuses are safe and inclusive learning environments.

Speaker, every student has a right to study at a college or university. Removing barriers of mental health, racism, hate and cost will assist students with obtaining a better campus experience. Will the member opposite support this bill to develop policies which will protect students?

**Ms. Peggy Sattler:** I appreciate the question from my colleague across the way. One of the reasons that I spent so much time at the beginning of my remarks in providing a context for the financial situation that Ontario colleges and universities face is to emphasize that no policy, however perfect it is, is going to be effective if there are no resources to implement it. We have reached a situation, in the post-secondary sector, where our post-secondary institutions are literally on the brink.

We heard from the government's own research report that was released in January 2024 about mental health supports on campus that universities and colleges are already struggling with the ability to resource the mental health supports that are supposed to be available. So we need to have that funding—

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

**MPP Lise Vaugeois:** I want to thank the member from London West for a very thorough presentation.

The post-secondary sector has been chronically unfunded—wages for contract lecturers are minimum wage; people still paying off their PhDs; no time to share with students; doubling of class sizes; international students with the pressure of their families' life savings riding on their backs; successive policies that have basically put the post-secondary sector on fire, and a bill offering up what I'd say is the equivalent of a hand-held fire extinguisher.

Do you see these conditions as being root causes of the mental health crises pervading the post-secondary sector?

**Ms. Peggy Sattler:** I do appreciate the question from my colleague.

As lots of research has highlighted, financial stress is very much a contributor to student mental health issues.

We know that investing in OSAP, in making student financial assistance much more accessible to students would go a long way to removing the financial barriers that students face, not just to enter post-secondary education, but to continue their studies.

As I mentioned, we have seen post-secondary students, international students among the largest group of food bank users because of their struggles with food insecurity, because the affordability crisis that we are seeing in this province is affecting—

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

**Mr. Stephen Crawford:** I have a question for the member opposite.

You just mentioned the affordability crisis that we have in the province, and I think there's pretty unanimous

consent here in the House that we have seen that, with inflation and costs going up.

I want to read a quote from Vivian Chiem, who is with the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance: "The decision to maintain the domestic tuition fees for the next three years is very welcoming news to students. Amid a cost-of-living crisis and limited opportunities for income, this move will help with post-secondary affordability and allow students to put money towards basic necessities like rent and food."

Clearly, students are supportive of our decision to maintain this tuition freeze. Is that something that the official opposition is supportive of as well?

**Ms. Peggy Sattler:** I'm glad that the member gave me this opportunity, because I didn't get to read another quote from Vivian Chiem, president of OUSA. She said, "While we appreciate the continued freeze on tuition increases ... it's evident that this allocation falls short in ensuring the sustainability of the sector. The continued underfunding of the sector, coupled with the federal caps on international students, will exacerbate an already fragile funding model."

She goes on to say, "This commitment does little to tackle the serious lack of investments in Ontario's post-secondary sector and continues to burden students, especially international students, to fund the quality of post-secondary education."

So while they may be supportive of the requirement to have mental health policies and racism and hate policies, students are very concerned about this government's failure to address the fundamental—

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

**MPP Jamie West:** What we have here is a mess that started long ago with the Liberal government, with the lowest provincial funding—the member talked about it being 44% of the average of other provinces' funding. Very low funding led to precarious work—a rise in sessional precarious professors teaching our young ones. That led to the exploitation of international students. The massive growth, a 343% increase—a 420% increase in private international students, attracting people to fill the coffers and pay the bills that the Conservative and Liberal governments are refusing to pay. The federal announcement is going to result in about a \$2-billion cut. The Conservative government's solution to this is to provide an approximately \$23-million top-up.

**1010**

To the member: What is wrong with these governments? They don't understand that we need to provide proper funding to our post-secondary institutions so that students can be successful. It's not about freezing fees or slightly reducing tuition. It's about paying the system properly so that post-secondary institutions, like Laurentian University, aren't in fear of going into bankruptcy and so our students can be successful without a lifetime of debt.

**Ms. Peggy Sattler:** Thank you to my colleague for that question. Certainly, we have seen the track record of this

government is that they don't value post-secondary education. They don't value public institutions in general. They don't value the public hospitals who deliver health care to Ontarians that are completely at the breaking point.

They don't value health care workers. We saw them introduce Bill 124 in 2019, which imposed an unconstitutional wage cap on public sector collective bargaining. They have shown a fundamental disregard for the work that public sector workers do in this province.

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

**Mr. David Smith:** I want to thank the member from London West. You made mention that across Canada, we have the highest tuition. As we work towards reducing the tuition and creating a freeze on it, I would like to ask—both the NDP and Liberals have come out to call the increase in tuition—they both want an increase in tuition. Our government, under the leadership of the Premier, has cut and frozen tuition by 10%. Our government is also following up by regulating—

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

**Mr. David Smith:** Question: Will the member support this bill?

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** Further and final response.

**Ms. Peggy Sattler:** I'm glad that the member raised the question of tuition, because the NDP has been calling for reductions in post-secondary tuition while this Liberal government was in power and undergraduate tuition was the highest in Canada, and under this Progressive Conservative government.

But what the NDP would have done differently is that when you remove that almost \$2 billion in revenue that is represented by tuition, you have to replace it. You have to ensure that there are public dollars there to sustain the stability of the sector. That is something that this government failed to do, and that is why we find ourselves on the brink. That is why the sector is in such a very serious crisis at this moment. And this government's investment will do very little to solve the problems that have been created.

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

*Second reading debate deemed adjourned.*

## MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

### JULIANNA WONG AND ETHAN WONG

**Ms. Patrice Barnes:** Today, I rise to recognize and applaud the remarkable achievements of Julianna and Ethan Wong: two amazing young people representing the constituency of Ajax.

Last summer, Julianna and Ethan proudly represented Ajax and Canada at the Ju-Jitsu International Federation world championship in Astana, Kazakhstan. Julianna secured gold for Canada, under the female under 18 blue belt and up category, earning the prestigious rank of

number one in the world by the Ju-Jitsu International Federation, a truly remarkable young lady with a great dedication to her sport. The amazing duo later showcased their skills at the 2023 Ontario Provincial Ju-Jitsu Championship, clinching double gold for each, for a total of four medals for Ajax.

Speaker, their contributions extend beyond the realm of competition. Julianna and Ethan generously impart their expertise to the community through complimentary and affordable training seminars for all age groups. Acting as mentors and instructors, they nurture budding talents and inspire future champions. Participation in sports fosters not only physical well-being but cultivates invaluable traits such as self-esteem, confidence and sportsmanship.

I extend my heartfelt congratulations to Julianna and Ethan for their well-deserved accolades and their continued success.

## GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

**MPP Lise Vaugeois:** Because of the advocacy of the Northwestern Ontario Women's Centre, the Thunder Bay committee to end woman abuse and the Naadmaagewin Indigenous Domestic Violence Committee, on September 25 Thunder Bay's city council declared gender-based intimate partner violence an epidemic.

The rates of gender-based violence and sexual assault in northwestern Ontario are amongst the highest in the province, but in small, northern communities, vast distances and sparse populations make it extremely difficult for women to access support. It's not possible to escape if there are no shelters where you live. And when funding is based on population numbers and not the geographic realities of the north, it's guaranteed women will have nowhere safe to go.

The court system is also failing survivors. Because of court backlogs, plea bargains are pushed, women are silenced and perpetrators are released. Femicide, the killing of children: These still shock, yet they are only the extreme end of the everyday coercive control that keeps people living with abuse.

We need the Conservative government to listen to survivors, provide sustainable funding, fix the court system and act on all the recommendations of the Renfrew inquest, beginning with the first recommendation: Declare gender-based violence as the epidemic it is.

Meegwetch. Marsi. Merci. Thank you.

## SOCIAL WORKERS

**Mr. Deepak Anand:** Speaker, in any given year, one in five Canadians experiences a mental illness. Within these statistics lie the stories and struggles of individuals with a unique journey of mental health challenges. By age 40, one in two have or have had a mental illness. Each number represents a person, a story and a struggle.

In Ontario, 24,000 social workers tirelessly navigate mental health care, offering support in alleviating these struggles.

Maya Angelou once said, “I’ve learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.”

Thanks to the Ontario Association of Social Workers, the largest collective of mental health support workers with 9,000 members, for exemplifying compassion and resilience by providing comfort and understanding to those in need.

As we honour Social Work Week from March 4 to 10, let’s recognize the crucial role of social workers in Mississauga–Malton and across the province. Whether you are a social worker or have been touched by one, I invite you to explore this year’s theme of “Social Work Opens Doors” at oasw.org.

Let’s remember: With every open door, we pave the way for hope, healing, a bright future and a brighter Ontario.

### BLACK MENTAL HEALTH WEEK

**MPP Jill Andrew:** This week is Black Mental Health Week in Toronto.

To quote blackmentalhealthweek.ca: “TAIBU Community Health Centre, in partnership with the city of Toronto, hosted the inaugural Black Mental Health Day in March 2020, citing the Toronto Black community’s demand to end 400 years of oppression and the ongoing mental health impact of persistent, systemic anti-Black racism in all settings....

“This year, Tropicana Community Services, Strides Toronto, Delta Family Resource Centre, Black Health Alliance and Women’s Health in Women’s Hands are joining TAIBU Community Health Centre to ensure more voices are heard.”

Heal in Colour, the Mental Health Benefits of Representation; Painting as Therapy: Black Student Engagement Wellness Night; Breaking Down Barriers to Mental Health in Black Communities; Mental Health Law 101, Managing through Grieving and Loss; Tools to Help Black Families Navigate the Complexities of Social Services; Social Connections for Senior Mental Health; Black Men’s Mental Health Panel; and Black Survivors: the Intersection of Race and Human Trafficking are just a few of the courageous conversations programmed for this week.

On Saturday night, you can check out When Sisters Speak, a spoken word showcase, at St. Lawrence Centre for the Arts, Jane Mallett Theatre.

Black Mental Health Week will have its closing ceremony in my community of Toronto–St. Paul’s at the Toronto Archives at 255 Spadina Road, and I invite all of you to join us.

### 1020

I want to take this opportunity to thank the city of Toronto’s Confronting Anti-Black Racism unit. Thank you, Kemba, your team, community partners and advisers for your community “heart work.”

It is my hope this Legislature will follow suit and declare this week formally as Black Mental Health Week

across the province of Ontario as so many of us have asked the Legislature to do.

### INTERNATIONAL WOMEN’S DAY

**Ms. Laura Smith:** Tomorrow, we celebrate International Women’s Day and work towards a gender-equal world. I’m a proud member of a caucus that has 21 female members and eight female ministers.

Sadly, as we celebrate our victories, we still live in a world where inequity and gender-based violence occur. Human trafficking and intimate partner violence are realities in our community, and unfortunately these happen silently too close to home.

After October 7, we were shell-shocked by the brutality of the attack on Israel, an attack that used premeditated rape and sexual mutilation as weapons of war. These acts were made more painful because their existence was widely denied and that denial was defeating and deafening. These women’s voices were silenced. Their stories were not believed.

Our government has zero tolerance for violence against women and children in all its forms, and we stand with the victims of violence. That’s why, this year, we invested nearly \$247 million to support victims and almost \$29 million in violence prevention initiatives. Our province is investing an overall \$1.4 billion over the next three years to end gender-based violence and support victims.

Last year, we invested \$5.5 million in the Women’s Economic Security Program to expand and increase training opportunities for low-income women to equip them with the skills, knowledge and experience to increase their financial security.

Our government supports women. We believe in women. We listen to women. Thank you.

### GOVERNMENT APPOINTMENTS

**Ms. Bhutla Karpoche:** Ontarians want an independent justice system, judges who are fair. The Conservatives have appointed two former staffers of the Premier’s office on the committee that selects judges, staffers who remain in close communication with the government through their roles as lobbyists.

When asked about it, Premier Ford said he wanted to appoint like-minded judges. And in the face of public pushback, what did the Premier do? He said he’s going to double down, triple down, quadruple down, even quintuple down. This might sound funny, but this is a serious issue. He’s a man on a mission.

Conservatives always talk about how meritocracy is the way to go, but it appears as long as you are with the same mindset as the Premier, you’re good to go. What happened to the fundamental principle of judges being neutral, of the impartiality of the courts? A judge who bows down to political pressure would be in clear breach of their oath of office.

Speaker, this is not only bad for the quality of the justice system but also for the perception of fairness of the courts



by the public. People will feel like they're being judged by Premier Ford, and I think it's fair to say he's not a good judge.

#### BRIAN MULRONEY

**Mr. Nolan Quinn:** Before I start, I must say it was hard to get all my feelings out in 90 seconds.

On February 29, 2024, Canada and the entire world took notice of the passing of the Right Honourable Brian Mulroney, my favourite Prime Minister.

First and foremost, my condolences go out to Caroline and her whole family. I went from watching Prime Minister Mulroney on the daily news with my father to hearing him speak to caucus after the general election of 2022. Talk about a pinch-me moment. He truly made me realize the gravity of being elected and the importance of our roles as MPPs.

The accolades are strong with too many to mention. Only some of these achievements are the acid rain accord, NAFTA and ending apartheid in Africa. In my opinion, GST has set up Canada for prosperity. Our country would not be what we know today without it.

As Prime Minister Mulroney stated, time will judge his actions. I am guided by the same principle, stated in my maiden speech: "If my kids don't approve of what I'm doing today when they get older, I know I could have done better."

It has been 40 years since he first formed government and his work has proven the test of time. With Caroline following in her father's political footsteps and the success of the rest of the family, Mr. Mulroney left a vast and long-standing legacy.

Thank you to the Mulroney family for sharing your father with Canada. Mr. Mulroney, thank you for your service and commitment to Canada and the world.

#### RAMADAN

**Ms. Stephanie Bowman:** As Muslim residents in Don Valley West and across Ontario prepare for Ramadan, a sacred month when they fast from dawn to dusk, self-reflect, show gratitude and offer charity to those who are less fortunate, I would like to highlight two local organizations in my riding that are doing just that. The Canadian Community Services Organization and the Thorncliffe Park Autism Support Network have organized their annual Ramadan food drive and free meal distribution to support those in need.

As we navigate these challenging times, it's wonderful to see the generosity that is so present in Thorncliffe Park. I'd like to thank Masood Alam, Shakhlo Sharipova, Azhar Bokhari, Saifuddin Nasir Malik, Najia Zewari and Muhammad Ahmad Alam, some of whom are here today in the gallery, and all their volunteers and donors for their efforts to support those in need during Ramadan.

I also want to acknowledge the contributions of those strong women who are working hard to make a difference on this day in advance of International Women's Day. I

have attended several CCSO food drives, and seeing the piles of meals Shakhlo and her team distribute, it's wonderful to see people of all ages, from teens to seniors, giving back.

To everyone getting ready to observe Ramadan: Ramadan Mubarak.

#### BRUCE POWER

**Mr. Rick Byers:** Colleagues, Tuesday morning I had the pleasure, along with Ministers Todd Smith and Lisa Thompson, of attending a great event at the Toronto board of trade, at which Bruce Power presented its 2023 annual review and energy report. It was an excellent presentation that outlined all the terrific things the company is doing.

Let me give you a few highlights. Operations at Bruce Power are going very well. Bruce Power is the largest operating nuclear power plant in the world—amazing. To keep these great operations going, the company is actively under way with its historic life extension program, Ontario's largest private sector clean energy infrastructure project, which will extend the life of the existing units to 2064. Under this program, unit 6, which powers more than 900,000 homes in Ontario, was returned to service last fall on budget and ahead of schedule.

Of course, there's Bruce Power's exciting work with medical isotopes. For cancer patients, medical isotope technologies and treatments allow for fewer hospital visits, shorter treatment durations and hospital stays, and fewer side effects. They have the potential to revolutionize cancer care—truly amazing.

To CEO Mike Rencheck and the thousands of hard-working staff at Bruce Power, thank you for all you're doing to produce clean energy that will power Ontario now and into the future and for your exciting work to beat cancer. This is legacy work and is truly appreciated by us all.

#### HEALTH CARE FUNDING

**Mr. Matthew Rae:** It is a pleasure to rise today to highlight some recent announcements I was able to make on behalf of the Minister of Health in my riding of Perth–Wellington. Last month I was pleased to announce not one but two local family health teams would be receiving funding to expand primary care in our rural communities.

The Minto–Mapleton Family Health Team will receive over \$560,000 to hire two additional nurse practitioners, an RPN and a medical receptionist. This funding will ensure an additional 1,600 residents can access primary care closer to home.

The Listowel–Wingham family health team will receive over \$822,000 to expand primary care to serve an additional 2,000 residents.

Speaker, it truly was a historic day for our rural public health care sector. The province-wide investment of \$90 million represents the first expansion of primary care in Ontario's history, ever. It is disappointing the previous Liberal government, supported by the NDP, had 15 years

to expand primary care in rural Ontario, and they chose not to, Speaker. In fact, the current Liberal members and the current NDP members voted against our historic expansion.

**1030**

Despite these obstacles the previous Liberal government put in place, we are rebuilding our public health care sector. We're expanding medical school spots and nurse practitioner spots. We expanded the clinical extern program. Speaker, our government will continue to expand primary care.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** That concludes our members' statements for this morning.

### INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** We have with us in the public galleries today outstanding women from across the province here for the Legislative Assembly's women's forum. Throughout the day, they will meet with current and former parliamentarians and discuss new perspectives on becoming engaged and strong leaders in their communities. I hope today's activities will inspire them to take an even greater role in public service or even politics. Please join me in warmly welcoming them to the Legislature today.

*Applause.*

**Hon. Stan Cho:** I want to just say "barev" to our wonderful friends visiting us from the Armenian Community Centre: Greg Koko Chitilian, Jack Hagop Torossian and George Shahnazarian. Welcome to the Legislature. I know Aris Babikian brought them here. Thank you for all your advocacy and everything you do for the Armenian Canadian community.

**Miss Monique Taylor:** Mr. Speaker, first of all, I'd like to thank you and your team for hosting the Remarkable Assembly women's breakfast this morning. I'm happy that I had the opportunity to meet so many remarkable women who have joined us here in the Legislature. Welcome to the Ontario Legislature, formally.

Secondly, I'd also like to welcome the Ontario social service workers' representatives: Dr. Deepy Sur, Kaelen Boyd and Justin Dela Pena. Happy social worker service week.

**Ms. Aislinn Clancy:** As a former social worker, we don't always feel very celebrated. It's hard work. I want to thank our Ontario Association of Social Workers for doing fine work to spread the word about social work in our province. I want to welcome Dr. Deepy Sur, Kaelen Boyd and Justin Dela Pena, all from the OASW.

I'd also like to welcome Brooklin Wallis and Shiva, who are here as part of the women's forum, and their plus-one, Ashvin. Thank you for coming to the House. I hope you have a great day.

**Hon. Jill Dunlop:** I, too, would like to introduce a remarkable woman who is here today. I know this personally because she's a good friend of my daughter. It's Ceren Kasap. Welcome to Queen's Park.

**Ms. Chandra Pasma:** It's my pleasure to welcome this morning, from the riding of Ottawa West–Nepean, Maria Choque, who is here to participate in the Remarkable Assembly women's forum. I hope Maria and all the remarkable women here today have a wonderful day at the Legislature.

**Hon. Charmaine A. Williams:** On this International Women's Day, I want to say welcome and happy International Women's Day. But I want to also thank all of the young women who have come here for the Remarkable Assembly women's day, and in particular, Nailani Cavero from Brampton Centre. Welcome to Queen's Park.

**MPP Jill Andrew:** I've got several thanks to give today. I'd like to thank the Mount Dennis community that joined us today in a presser earlier in the morning: Neiland Brissenden, the spokesperson from save Eglinton Flats coalition; Cynthia Bell, executive director of the ENAGB Indigenous Youth Agency; Hassan Mohamud; David Roberts; David Anderson—Neiland, I mentioned—Simon Brissenden, his son; Kim Bradshaw; Jessica Murray; Mark Dieu; Heather McKinnon; Andrew Watt; Simon Chamberlain; Judith Hayes; Natalie Vojno; Brandon Machado; Curtis Power; Matthew Barrigar; Bob Murphy; Jamie McQuaig; Lisa Derksen; Floyd Ruskin; Reed Giroux; Frank Kottner; David Kidd; David Anderson; Nicole Strachan; Mike Mattos; Grainne O'Donnell; Cynthia, as I mentioned earlier; Shayla Manitowabi; Tyrell Wemigwans; Goran Nikolic; Lijida Nikolic; Martha Parrott; Vanda Zanini; Ron Runch; Michelle Lopez; Sivert Das; and Linda Gonzalez.

I'd also like to welcome and thank the former MPP for York South–Weston who is also here, Faisal Hassan.

**Ms. Stephanie Bowman:** I want to just again formally welcome the constituents from my riding who came here today: Masood Alam, Azhar Bokhari, Muhammad Ahmad Alam, Saifuddin Nasir Malik, Najia Zewari. Thank you again for coming, for your good charitable work. We appreciate it all.

**Hon. Lisa M. Thompson:** Today, I'd like to welcome to the House representatives of the College of Veterinarians of Ontario; representatives of the Ontario Association of Veterinary Technicians; two veterinary technician students, Elizabeth Crouchman and Joner Kuo; as well as representatives from the Ontario Federation of Agriculture and Farm and Food Care. Welcome to Queen's Park. We're going to have a good day.

**Ms. Marit Stiles:** Good morning. I'm really pleased. I want to also lend my voice in welcoming former MPP for York South–Weston Faisal Hassan here this morning and the folks from Mount Dennis. But I also want to—yes, hello—welcome my parents, Geoff and Kathy Stiles, who are joining us in the members' gallery today.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Unless there's an objection, I'd like to continue with the introduction of visitors.

**Mr. John Fraser:** I'd like to welcome Dr. Deepy Sur, Kaelen Boyd and Justin Dela Pena from the Ontario Association of Social Workers, who are joining us here

this morning. We're celebrating Social Work Week and all the social workers across Ontario and their contributions to our communities.

**Mr. Graham McGregor:** Believe it or not, I actually come from a large family. A lot of my uncles and aunties are in the gallery here with us today. We have many seniors coming from Brampton North. The trip was organized by the Guru Nanak Mission Centre. Particularly, thank you to Manohar Singh Bal and Kanwaljit Kaur for organizing the trip. Welcome to your House.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** I'd like to welcome a constituent from the great riding of Waterloo, Shiva Subramanian. She's participating in the Remarkable Assembly women's forum. Subra, welcome to your House. I hope you have a great day.

**Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady:** I'd like to welcome, from Haldimand-Norfolk, Leah Bauer and Sarah Dolina, here to participate in the Remarkable Assembly women's forum. Have a great day. I'll see you at noon.

**Mr. Deepak Anand:** I'd like to introduce Dr. Deepy Sur, CEO; Kaelen Boyd, director of policy and stakeholders; and Justin Dela Pena, social policy adviser, from the Ontario Association of Social Workers as we honour social workers week in Ontario. Welcome to Queen's Park.

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** It gives me great pleasure to welcome, from Hamilton West-Ancaster-Dundas, Starus Chan, who is participating in the Remarkable Assembly women's forum. Welcome to your House and thank you so much for all the work you do.

**Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon:** Good morning, everyone. I just want to welcome all the women participating in the remarkable women's assembly today. It's great to have women in the House, in this chamber. This is your House. You belong here, as do all women.

**Mr. Aris Babikian:** Good morning, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the Minister of Long-Term Care for recognizing the presence of the Armenian Community Centre long-term-care board members. I am not going to repeat the names, but I also would like to welcome my legislative assistant Aris Movssesian, commonly known as Junior.

1040

**Mrs. Lisa Gretzky:** It's my great pleasure to introduce a constituent from my riding who is here for the women's forum today, Jana Jandal Alrifai. Welcome to Queen's Park. Enjoy your day here.

**Mr. Stephen Crawford:** I have the honour of introducing a great constituent from my community in Oakville. We have, in the members' gallery, Scott Barber.

**MPP Jamie West:** I was looking forward to welcoming Kayleigh Jeanveau this morning. I worked with her dad, Dan, for many years at Vale. She was coming down for the Legislative Assembly's women's forum. Unfortunately, there was a family emergency and she had to return home. I just want to let her know that she is welcome here at any time.

**MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam:** Good morning, everyone. I'd like to extend a very special welcome to all the

participants of the Remarkable Assembly women's forum, including Reena Shaw Muthallay from Toronto Centre. It is wonderful to see you here today.

I have a few more introductions. I'd also like to welcome Floyd Ruskin, who is doing remarkable work in saving the Ontario Science Centre. We would also like to extend a special welcome to David Anderson, of the Moss Park Coalition as well as from the Toronto Community Benefits Network, who has been here this morning to support the community of Mount Dennis.

**Mr. Hardeep Singh Grewal:** I'd like to welcome some amazing individuals from my riding from Young Sports Club: Palwinder Sidhu, Jaswinder Sarai and Harvinder Singh. Thank you and welcome to your House.

**Mr. Tom Rakocevic:** I'd like to also welcome members of the Armenian Community Centre. Also, I'd like to especially welcome my friend and neighbour, former MPP Faisal Hassan.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** This will be the last one. The member for Toronto-St. Paul's.

**MPP Jill Andrew:** I also would like to welcome the remarkable women who took part in the Remarkable Assembly women's forum today at Queen's Park. Thank you for your work and for your leadership. May you one day fill these seats, because goodness knows we need more women.

I'd also like to thank Charlie the Chaplin. I was at the Ontario Prayer Breakfast this morning. It was an incredible opportunity to really be in a non-partisan space and to celebrate one another and to give great gratitude to one another. Thank you, Charlie the Chaplin, for your support.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** That concludes our introduction of visitors.

I'm going to remind members that it's best if you keep your introduction of your guests brief and devoid of any political commentary or partisan statement.

## HOUSE SITTINGS

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** I beg to inform the House that, pursuant to standing order 9(h), the Clerk has received written notice from the government House leader indicating that a temporary change in the weekly meeting schedule of the House is required, and therefore the House shall commence at 9 a.m. on Monday, March 18, 2024, for the proceeding orders of the day.

## TRAGEDY IN OTTAWA

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

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** Residents in Ottawa woke up to the news of a horrific tragedy this morning, so I'd like to seek the unanimous consent of the House to remember the family—four children and two adults—who were found killed in their home last evening in Barrhaven, which is a suburban community of Ottawa.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Mr. Blais is seeking the unanimous consent of the House to allow for a moment's silence in memory of the family in Barrhaven who lost their lives last night. Agreed? Agreed.

Members will please rise.

*The House observed a moment's silence.*

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Thank you. Members may take their seats.

#### INDEPENDENT MEMBERS

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** I've been informed the member for Scarborough–Guildwood has a point of order she wishes to raise. I'll recognize the member.

**MPP Andrea Hazell:** Mr. Speaker, I seek unanimous consent that, notwithstanding standing order 40(e), five minutes be allotted to the independent members as a group to respond to the ministerial statement today on International Women's Day.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** The member for Scarborough–Guildwood is seeking the unanimous consent of the House that, notwithstanding standing order 40(e), five minutes be allotted to the independent members as a group to respond to the ministerial statement today on International Women's Day. Agreed? Agreed.

#### WEARING OF SCARVES

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** It is now time for oral questions—

*Interjections.*

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** I'm sorry; I didn't see her. I didn't hear her say, "Point of order." Thank you for drawing it to my attention.

I recognize the Associate Minister of Women's Social and Economic Opportunity.

**Hon. Charmaine A. Williams:** I seek unanimous consent of the House for members to be permitted to wear purple scarves in honour of International Women's Day.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** The minister is seeking the unanimous consent of the House to allow members to wear purple scarves today in honour of International Women's Day. Agreed? Agreed.

We're ready to start question period. I recognize the leader of His Majesty's loyal opposition.

#### QUESTION PERIOD

##### GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

**Ms. Marit Stiles:** Good morning, Speaker. My question is to the Premier. Everything old is new again. Just over 10 years ago, the official opposition discovered that the government had been using code words to cover up misconduct. That was the Liberal government, and they were found to be using the term "project vapour" as code for their gas plant cover-up.

Now we know that the current government also used code terms, like "G\*" and "special project" to cover their tracks on the greenbelt grab. So my question to the Premier is, is special project "G\*" this government's "project vapour?"

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

**Hon. Paul Calandra:** I think the Integrity Commissioner has addressed that. I think I've addressed it on a number of occasions in the House.

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

**Ms. Marit Stiles:** Okay. The Integrity Commissioner said Ryan Amato identified Patrick Sackville, who is now the Premier's current chief of staff, as the decision-maker in the Premier's office for the greenbelt "special project."

We have emails with "special project" in the subject line sent between Mr. Amato and Mr. Sackville, and it is clearly the \$8-billion greenbelt scheme. They sent emails with details about the scheme, like removal criteria, but they never actually say the word "greenbelt."

So my question to the Premier again—I think the people of Ontario would deserve a response from the Premier himself. Did anyone in the Premier's office direct that government officials avoid or destroy any paper trail that could expose their greenbelt discussions?

**Hon. Paul Calandra:** Again, Mr. Speaker, I think the Integrity Commissioner has addressed that, as has the Auditor General, and I've answered that question on a number of occasions in the House.

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

**Ms. Marit Stiles:** Well, Speaker, I understand why the government doesn't want to address these questions, but the people of Ontario deserve answers.

It's a question of integrity. It's a question of accountability. The use of code terms is evidence of intent to conceal. Someone was trying to cover their tracks, and that's not all. The Auditor General found that political staffers were not just deleting emails related to the greenbelt; they were also using their own personal emails to avoid detection. The Premier himself conducts government business on his personal phone, but refuses to disclose his phone records as required by law.

When the Liberal government got caught covering up a scandal during project vapour, someone went to jail. And guess what? It was the Premier's chief of staff. Why is the Premier following the Liberal government down the same path of code words, cover-ups and criminal investigations?

1050

**Hon. Paul Calandra:** Again, if the Leader of the Opposition has additional information that she would like to share with the Integrity Commissioner, I invite her to do so.

##### HEALTH CARE

**Ms. Marit Stiles:** Don't worry, that's going to happen. That's going to happen.

Speaker, we spend a lot of time in here talking about this government's scandals—the greenbelt grab, the cover-up, G\*, the RCMP criminal investigation of this government—but one of the biggest scandals in this province is the fact that more than 2.2 million Ontarians don't have a primary care doctor. The health of Ontarians is at risk and that risk increases with every single passing day that this government fails to deliver.

My question to the Premier is, exactly how long will he keep people waiting for a doctor?

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** The Deputy Premier and Minister of Health.

**Hon. Sylvia Jones:** I love these questions because it gives me an opportunity to talk about the investments that our government, under Premier Ford, has been able to make in primary care multidisciplinary teams—78 new or expanded primary care teams, multidisciplinary teams, which means doctors working with nurse practitioners, working with nurses, with dietitians, with mental health workers. It is historic that we have seen this investment and, respectfully, the investments are happening across Ontario: 78 different teams in Toronto, in Ottawa, in Orillia. Where we see the need, we have made those investments, a tripling of the investment that we announced under our Your Health plan.

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

Supplementary question.

**Ms. Marit Stiles:** Speaker, this government likes to make these issues sound complicated, but health care workers have been offering up a simple solution for years, and I really hope that the Premier is listening to this. Doctors say they can take on an additional two million patients if someone else could handle the paperwork. You heard that right: We can cut down the primary care wait-list by 90%, Speaker, if the government would help get this paperwork off doctors' desks.

My question to the Premier is, why is this Premier letting paperwork stand between doctors and patients?

**Hon. Sylvia Jones:** We have an ongoing regular conversation and a committee with the Ontario Medical Association to talk specifically about where there are opportunities for different clinicians to be able to do some of the necessary and needed paperwork that is part of serving our patients.

But having said that, we've already made changes. The expanded scope of practice that we have announced and embarked on, particularly in pharmacies—we now have over 800,000 people who are accessing their local community pharmacist to deal with minor ailments. Those are changes that our government has been able to put in, working with our partners. We've expanded scope of practice for nurse practitioners. We've expanded scope of practice for RNs. And we continue to do that work because we know people need to be able to see the appropriate clinician, depending on the issues and illnesses that they're dealing with.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** And the final supplementary.

**Ms. Marit Stiles:** Well, Speaker, talk is cheap. Talk is cheap.

Minister, doctors are leaving the system faster than anyone can recruit them because of this exact issue. Doctors should be spending their time with patients, not with paperwork. Why does the government continue to complicate this issue? Doctors are spending 19 hours per week on administrative tasks. If they could spend that time with patients instead, it would be like adding 2,000 more doctors. That would reduce the primary care wait-list by 90%, Speaker—a practical solution, a simple solution.

Why won't the government get the paperwork off doctors' desks?

**Hon. Sylvia Jones:** Where was the member opposite, where was the party opposite, when they were propping up the Liberals and they did nothing to prevent the Liberal government at the time to cut 50 residency positions in the province of Ontario? Imagine, Speaker, how many more physicians we would have practising in the province of Ontario if the Liberal government hadn't cut those 50 positions.

Speaker, numbers matter. It would have been over 200 new physicians in the province of Ontario.

We are actively working with our partners like the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario. A single ministerial directive letter ensured that internationally educated graduates who are waiting and want to practise in the province of Ontario have that opportunity. The direction was to quickly assess, review, and when appropriate, license people who are waiting to practise in the province of Ontario. We'll continue to get the work done. Thank you.

## HEALTH CARE

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** Good morning. Last weekend, a nursing station in Cat Lake burnt down. This is a letter from a 10-year-old worried about his access to health care:

“Dear Sol Mamakwa MPP,

“I am 10 years old and from Cat Lake First Nation.

“Our health clinic burnt down this past weekend.

“We need your help. I am feeling sick as I write this.

“Please take this seriously and get us help.

“Brysen Wesley, Cat Lake.”

To the Premier: Will you make sure Brysen and Cat Lake have the access to health care that they need?

*Interjections.*

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

To reply, the member for Thunder Bay–Atikokan and parliamentary assistant.

**Mr. Kevin Holland:** We are deeply saddened to hear about the fire at the Cat Lake nursing station. Minister Rickford has reached out to Cat Lake First Nation Chief Russell Wesley to reassure him and the community of Cat Lake that our government will be there to support them.

We remain in contact with Cat Lake leadership as the Provincial Emergency Operations Centre carries out their work. Our government stands with the families and

community members of Cat Lake and is mobilizing quickly to ensure supports are available.

Nurses are still in the community and working out of the MNR building. Additional nurses and emergency medical equipment have already been sent to the community. We continue to monitor the situation, and we will also continue to work with community partners in Cat Lake to address this tragic situation.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** And the supplementary? The member for Nickel Belt.

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** Access to health care is the responsibility of the Minister of Health. For decades, residents of Cat Lake had access to excellent nurses and nurse practitioners, but their nursing station burnt down. They cannot just go to the nearest walk-in clinic. This is a fly-in First Nation community. They have no access to care.

Is the Minister of Health going to simply abandon the 650 residents of Cat Lake, like the 2.2 million Ontarians that do not have access to family physicians?

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

**Hon. Sylvia Jones:** You know, when I had my conversation with Grand Chief Fiddler on Sunday morning, it was deeply disturbing to hear about the fire in Cat Lake. I immediately made a phone call to the federal minister, Mark Holland, to share how we can work together to make sure that the citizens of Cat Lake are protected and continue to provide health care.

There is no doubt, when these catastrophic events happen, that we all need to work together. The member opposite knows that this was a federal nursing station. We will absolutely be there as a provincial partner, but we have to make sure that all of us are working together for the people of Cat Lake. Thank you.

## TAXATION

**Mr. Rick Byers:** My question is for the Minister of Energy. People in my riding of Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound are concerned about the harmful impact of the federal carbon tax. So far, the federal government has increased the carbon tax not once, but five times.

To make things even worse, they plan on increasing it another seven times by 2030. This is ridiculous. Since the implementation of this tax, Ontarians have been paying more and more every single day for food, for services and for transportation. These dire effects are felt by our trucking industry, which serves a crucial role in transporting the goods we need in our daily lives.

Can the minister please further explain the impact of the federal carbon tax on Ontario's trucking industry?

1100

**Hon. Todd Smith:** Our Minister of Transportation has explained this on many occasions in the Legislature, but I'm happy to join in the chorus of two thirds of the people across Canada who are saying they cannot afford another increase to the carbon tax on April 1—a 23% increase to the carbon tax.

Mr. Speaker, our truckers are the ones who are out there delivering goods from the farm gate to the distribution centre to the grocery stores.

And if you wonder why the cost of everything is going up, you only have to look at one place: Justin and Jagmeet's carbon tax. It's making life unaffordable in the province of Ontario.

The budget officer on Parliament Hill says people are paying more than they're getting back in these phony carbon tax rebates.

The Bank of Canada has said that the carbon tax is also having a massive impact on the rise that we've been experiencing in inflation.

In spite of all of this, our government is doing everything we can to ensure that life in Ontario is affordable for the people of Ontario.

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

**Mr. Rick Byers:** Thank you to the minister for that response.

Speaker, it's not just truckers who are being adversely impacted by the carbon tax; it's all commuters. The rising cost of fuel is affecting individuals and families in every corner of our province. They should not have to be burdened with additional costs when it comes to driving to work or driving their kids to school.

We know the people of Ontario deserve better. That's why our government will continue to keep costs down for Ontarians so they can keep more money in their own pockets where it belongs.

Can the minister explain what our government is doing to counteract the federal carbon tax and make life more affordable for Ontario commuters?

**Hon. Todd Smith:** Again, the member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound is spot-on. The carbon tax is driving up the price of everything across Canada.

We're doing everything we can. We've taken 10.7 cents off the price of a litre of gasoline—the Ontario gas tax. We've eliminated the tolls on our highways across Ontario. We have eliminated licence plate sticker fees. We have lowered taxes.

And just a couple of weeks ago, One Fare Thanigasalam here, our Associate Minister of Transportation, announced One Fare for all transit riders in the GTHA. That move alone by this minister is going to save commuters \$1,600 a year.

Our government is taking action when it comes to making life more affordable.

Bonnie Crombie and the Ontario Liberal Party are still supporting the federal carbon tax. It's—

*Interjections.*

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

## PUBLIC TRANSIT

**MPP Jill Andrew:** My question is to the Minister of Citizenship and Multiculturalism.

During the 2022 provincial election, the minister said Pearen Park would be a priority as construction on the

Eglinton Crosstown LRT extension takes place. In fact, I'll quote from a letter the minister wrote to the community: "If elected as your representative at Queen's Park ... I will be in the best position to bring your concerns forward to Metrolinx and will work with you directly on this issue."

Speaker, members of the Mount Dennis community are here today, and they haven't heard from their minister in two years despite their countless appeals to get his ear and to have meetings.

So my question is a simple one: Minister, why did you break your promise to your community?

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

To reply, the Minister of Transportation.

**Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria:** Mr. Speaker, here you have it again: absolute NIMBYism everywhere you go. Anywhere this government is trying to build a project, the NDP and the Liberals oppose every single thing that we are doing.

The previous Liberal government—15 years of absolute inaction in this province, doing absolutely nothing to build.

And what does the NDP do when we're making record and historic investments of over \$70 billion in the next 10 years? They're standing with those who want to protest and stop the building of transit in our communities across Ontario.

The time to build is right now. Our government is getting shovels in the ground. We will take no lessons from the NDP or the previous Liberal government that did absolutely nothing to build infrastructure in this province. That is why we are committed to building \$80 billion, over the next 10 years, in public transit and investing close to \$30 billion in highways and roads across this province. The people of this province deserve it, and we'll get those shovels in the ground.

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

**MPP Jill Andrew:** My question is back to the Minister of Citizenship and Multiculturalism, and I hope that he will respond himself this time. According to his community, he is rarely seen at community events and he has ignored community appeals to protect Pearen Park.

Our friends from Mount Dennis here today can affirm this is true. Mount Dennis residents face an opaque and arrogant Metrolinx bureaucracy that would rather rip up 1,500 trees and bulldoze parkland than listen to community concerns.

Speaker, we can have great public transit and urban forests right here in Ontario, but we need leadership to help get that done.

My question is back to the minister: Will you keep your promise and fight for the people of Mount Dennis, Minister of Multiculturalism and Citizenship?

*Interjections.*

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Members will take their seats. Once again, I'll ask members to make their comments through the Chair.

Minister of Transportation.

**Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria:** Mr. Speaker, there's no one that works harder in their community than that member, the Minister of Multiculturalism. He's talking to residents every single day. He's talking to the people that elected him in his riding to get transit built.

We're not going to take lessons from the NDP or the Liberals that did nothing for 15 years when it came to building this province.

*Interjections.*

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Member for Ottawa Centre, come to order.

**Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria:** We're getting shovels in the ground. We're not going to let a protest group hold us up from getting shovels in the ground.

*Interjections.*

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** The member for Toronto—St. Paul's will come to order.

**Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria:** It's going to take 6.5 million cars off the road. It's a reduction of 11,000 GHG emissions in this province—

*Interjections.*

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** The member for Ottawa Centre perhaps didn't hear me. He will come to order. The member for Toronto—St. Paul's perhaps didn't hear me. She will come to order.

The Minister of Transportation has a few extra seconds to finish up his answer.

**Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria:** Mr. Speaker, that line will have 60% faster service than the current bus service that that community has right now. We will continue to build across this province, because that is what we were elected to do, and that is why the Premier—

*Interjections.*

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Stop the clock. The member will take a seat.

We have with us in the Legislature a former member who was here for many years as the member for Leeds—Grenville: Bob Runciman. Welcome back to the Legislature. It's great to see you here. Your timing, as always, is perfect.

We've long had a convention in this House that we don't make reference to the absence of a member who might be away for any given reason from the House on any given day. I don't think it's a road we want to go down where we start drawing attention to whether or not members are attending a sufficient number of community events. I think if we give that some thought, we'll conclude that that's not a good road that we want to go down—if we think it through.

Start the clock. The next question.

## TAXATION

**Mr. Steve Clark:** Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade. I'm glad that my predecessor Senator Runciman is here, because I know he agrees with this question.

Speaker, there is fierce competition across the globe to attract and retain skilled, talented workers. We know affordability issues are a big consideration when workers are deciding where they should call home. That's why, as a government, we've taken concrete action to do our part to lower costs for households.

But unfortunately, the Liberals are proceeding with hiking their carbon tax on April 1. Their carbon tax is going to see the price of gas increase by 37 cents a litre in 2030 while home-heating costs skyrocket. It's almost like they're deliberately trying to hurt the pocketbooks of hard-working families and chase those talented workers out of our province. It's a shame that the Liberals in this House still support the carbon tax.

Speaker, can the minister please explain how the carbon tax hurts the Ontario workers that are powering our economy?

1110

**Hon. Victor Fedeli:** We all know that the carbon tax is a tax on every single family, on every single worker in Ontario. We have the best talent pool in the world. We're better educated than any OECD country: 71% of Ontarians have a post-secondary degree, 70,000 annual STEM grads, 420,000 tech workers, 100,000 auto workers, 85,000 AI workers, 72,000 life sciences workers. Our economy needs these workers, but the carbon tax hurts them and the carbon tax risks chasing all of them away. We need to axe the tax.

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

**Mr. Steve Clark:** Back to the minister: I want to thank him for his answer. I think we can all agree that the talent we have in Ontario is second to none. As economies across the world grapple with aging populations that are exiting their workforce, the race for talent is going to heat up. It has never been more important for us to foster the conditions to retain and to attract skilled workers. That's why we've been so adamant as a government in our efforts to put more money back into the pockets of hard-working Ontarians who have earned it.

The Liberals want to do the opposite with their carbon tax. They want to take more money out of people's pockets with a carbon tax hike every single solitary year. We've never supported the Liberal tax grab, and I can assure everyone in this House that, under the leadership of Premier Ford, we will never support the carbon tax.

Can the minister please highlight how the carbon tax jeopardizes the progress that we've made in key sectors?

**Hon. Victor Fedeli:** Speaker, the Liberal carbon tax comes up in every corner of the world. Despite this tax, we've still been able to land \$28 billion in auto and EV. Bloomberg now ranks us as number one in the global EV battery rankings. We've added \$3 billion in life sciences, tens of billions of dollars in tech. Companies are investing in Ontario because we've reduced the cost of doing business. We've lowered taxes. We've shown the Liberals that lower taxes equal higher jobs: 700,000 jobs have been created in Ontario because we lowered taxes.

The Liberals need to stop making it harder for these companies to expand and to grow. They need to scrap the tax today.

## HEALTH CARE

**Ms. Jessica Bell:** My question is to the Minister of Health. Yan Ping Ye lives in the Chinatown area, and she doesn't have a family doctor. After not sleeping and feeling dizzy for four days, she had no choice but to go to the Toronto Western emergency room, one of the busiest hospitals in Ontario. Yan waited seven hours overnight, but eventually left without a prescription or help because there was no one in the emergency room who spoke Cantonese or Mandarin, and Yan is not fluent in English.

Minister, do you think it's acceptable that thousands of people in the Chinatown area have to go to an emergency room for non-urgent care because they don't have access to a family doctor?

**Hon. Sylvia Jones:** With the greatest of respect, where was the member when we were increasing scope of practice for pharmacies to ensure that people did not have to access emergency departments as their only option but had the opportunity to visit their local community pharmacy? Some 800,000 people since that policy was brought into place in January 2023 have accessed that service. It's critically important.

I look at all the investments that we are making in the Toronto region specifically related to the primary care expansion: \$110 million that we're increasing access to primary care. We are getting it done by making the investments very strategically to ensure people get access to care.

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

**Ms. Jessica Bell:** Minister, Yan went to her pharmacist, and it was her pharmacist who told her they were not able to give her a prescription. That's how we found out about this issue.

The family doctor shortage in Toronto is bad and it is getting worse. In Chinatown, five doctors have already retired and two more are about to retire, which means over 7,000 people are going to be without a family doctor.

I am worried that this government is driving the primary health care system into the ground.

Minister, what is your plan to address the worsening family doctor and primary care provider shortage in underserved areas like Chinatown?

**Hon. Sylvia Jones:** The plan is working, and we've already announced it—\$110 million. Davenport-Perth Neighbourhood and Community Health Centre, expansion; Sherbourne Health centre; St. Michael's Academic Family Health Team, expansion; House Calls-SPRINT Senior Care, expansion and new mobile; Unison Health and Community Services, expansion and new mobile; West Toronto CHS—it goes on and on.

When we make investments of \$110 million to make sure that we have sufficient primary care access in the province of Ontario, this member and this party votes against it. That's what we are seeing in this government.



## GOVERNMENT APPOINTMENTS

**Mrs. Karen McCrimmon:** This government is relentless. If there isn't a ready-made opportunity, they will create a way to insert their friends and insiders into every public good in Ontario. They did it with the greenbelt. They did it with Ontario Place. They did it with ServiceOntario. And now they're putting their own former Conservative staffers into the judicial system.

My question is for the Premier. How can Ontarians trust a court that has been overtly and intentionally poisoned with blatant political bias?

*Interjections.*

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

The Attorney General.

**Hon. Doug Downey:** I just want to cast back to last year, when the member from Oakville North–Burlington brought a motion forward on Keira's Law, saying that we should require that judges take mandatory training, as they come to the bench, and JPs take mandatory training, as they take their positions, on sexual assault and sexual violence. Do you know what happened with that motion? It was unanimously supported by this House, Mr. Speaker. When we then incorporated Keira's Law into the Strengthening Safety and Modernizing Justice Act, 2023, everybody in the House spoke in favour of that piece of legislation.

When we talk about diversity and we want to increase the diversity of the bench, people say, "Absolutely, you need to do that." And when we talk about raising awareness of victims' perspectives and issues, people say, "Absolutely." And I can tell you, Mr. Speaker—you know where this is going—when we say we want to have tough-on-crime judges and JPs, the House says, "Oh, no, no. We can't have a perspective." Well, we do have a—

*Interjections.*

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

The supplementary question.

**Mrs. Karen McCrimmon:** The new chair of our judicial appointments advisory committee is not only a former Conservative staffer, he is also a registered lobbyist for Colt's Manufacturing, the manufacturer of the notorious AR-15. The families of this province are looking for tighter gun controls, not an industry friend meddling with our judges.

Trust in our judicial system is absolutely key to the functioning of our democracy. One only needs to look to our neighbours to the south to see where the politicization of justice leads.

How could the Attorney General possibly think that this overt and blatant politicization of our judicial system won't erode that trust—unless that is the endgame.

*Interjections.*

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

To reply, the Premier.

**Hon. Doug Ford:** Mr. Speaker, let's just go back 15 years. The Liberal government was the weakest government when it came to crime.

They're okay with people kicking the doors in, putting guns to people's heads, asking for their keys, terrifying the neighbourhood, terrifying people. We're seeing it everywhere. And guess what happens, Mr. Speaker? They get out on bail the next day to go and do it again. And then what happens? They go out on bail again.

My great Sikh community up there that I absolutely love, they're being extorted because these people are threatening their families, shooting up the streets if they don't pay money. Because when we catch the people, they get out on bail, and then they get targeted again.

Everywhere I go, Mr. Speaker, I'm hearing one thing: "Keep going. Make sure you appoint judges that are tough on crime, that are going to throw the criminals in jail that are terrorizing our neighbourhoods."

1120

## TAXATION

**M<sup>me</sup> Dawn Gallagher Murphy:** My question is for the Minister of Long-Term Care. When I speak to my residents in the great riding of Newmarket–Aurora, they continue to express their top concern, which is over the ever-escalating costs of living. At a time when all communities need to be supported, the federal government continues to penalize the people of Ontario by hiking the carbon tax.

As our parents and grandparents age, the cost of building long-term-care homes remains high, and the carbon tax is making it worse. Seniors helped build our province, and our government must ensure that they continue to receive the quality of care and the quality of life that they need and deserve in a long-term-care home.

Can the minister please tell this House what our government is doing to protect Ontario families, especially our seniors, from the negative impact of the carbon tax?

**Hon. Stan Cho:** Speaker, the member is absolutely right: Seniors did build this province and our community, so happy International Women's Day to the many women seniors who live in our long-term-care homes. Thank you for everything that you've done.

I hear that concern the member raises every day in Willowdale. It's exactly why our government embarked on a historic plan—a historic plan, led by this Premier, to build 58,000 new and upgraded spaces, the most aggressive capital plan in this country's history. But there are challenges, and one of the biggest challenges is the cost of doing business and building, a cost that will rise, thanks to the federal Liberals' carbon tax, 23% in the very near future.

Our government is fighting to keep costs low, fighting to build Ontario. But right now, when we are trying to build the homes for seniors to age in comfort and dignity, the carbon tax is standing in the way. Every time we try and make it easier to build, the Liberals and the NDP get in the way. I challenge them to stand up and do the right thing. Let's scrap—

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

**M<sup>me</sup> Dawn Gallagher Murphy:** Thank you to the minister for that response. The carbon tax is increasing the price of everything, including building, materials and transport. And as the minister just said, come April 1, it's going to get more expensive, with another 23% increase to that carbon tax. This has, is and will impact construction costs in our province.

While our government has been speaking out against the carbon tax since day one, the opposition NDP and the independent Liberals continue to ignore the harmful impact this tax is having on Ontario families. Despite the inaction and the lack of the sense of urgency from the opposition, we will continue to uphold our commitment to seniors in Ontario and ensure we build homes in the communities they helped build.

Can the minister please further explain how the carbon tax is affecting the long-term-care sector?

**Hon. Stan Cho:** Well, isn't it unbelievable, Speaker? While the member is addressing such an important issue that's affecting our seniors and long-term-care homes, you have the members from the NDP heckling the question, and saying, "Get over it," as if the carbon tax isn't affecting the daily lives of those who built our communities. Shame on them, Speaker, because we believe that the most vulnerable deserve a place to call home.

Unfortunately, the Liberals, led by the queen of the carbon tax, Bonnie Crombie, wants to do what she did in Mississauga: She wants to stop building everywhere. I've heard from workers, I've heard from lenders, I've heard from the operators, and they are saying that this tax on everything is costing Ontario's long-term-care sector. It costs more to build. It costs more to take care of our seniors. It costs more to get equipment to our seniors. Costs have risen 30% in only five years.

This Premier will continue to fight for the hard-working people, the seniors who built our communities. We're not taking any lessons from the heckle party over there. We're getting it done—

*Interjections.*

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

*Interjections.*

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Order. The House will come to order so we can continue with question period. Thank you.

Start the clock.

## HEALTH CARE

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** My question is to the Minister of Health. For years, the Ontario Medical Association has been sounding the alarm on the shortage of doctors in the province. In Kitchener, there are currently 55 open physician positions on the provincial recruitment program.

The KW chamber of commerce has said, "There are somewhere between 60,000 and 70,000 people in Waterloo region right now who don't have ... a ... doctor."

Kitchener is not alone; there are 2.2 million Ontarians who do not have a family doctor, and that number is going to surge to 4.4 million by 2026.

Speaker, my question to the Minister of Health: When will this government prioritize the patients and families waiting for care in Waterloo region.

**Hon. Sylvia Jones:** Everything that our government is doing is prioritizing the patient. Whether it is expanding scope of practice for clinicians who are already trained and ready to step up and do additional work, like pharmacists, like nurse practitioners, like registered nurses, we are working directly with them.

And I would say, when we have historic investments of \$110 million in 78 primary care expansions, including one in the member's own region of a nurse practitioner-led clinic, we are making those investments.

Will the member opposite stand up, support those expansions, support that nurse practitioner-led clinic that is going to be able to expand and offer new services and additional patients in your region?

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** The member for Waterloo.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** It is so very clear that your plan is not working. Every Ontarian is feeling the pain of your incompetence.

A shortage of doctors causes more people to visit the emergency room, increasing wait times and putting further financial strain on this already overburdened health care.

KW is not alone; there are currently 32,000 people in Peterborough alone without a family doctor, another 28,000 in Kingston, another 10,000 in Sault Ste. Marie. This Conservative government is failing to provide Ontarians with access to primary care that they definitely deserve.

Back to the Minister of Health: When will this government finally address the crisis in Ontario and the 2.2 million people who do not have access to a family doctor?

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** To respond, the Premier.

**Hon. Doug Ford:** To the member across the aisle, why does she always vote against the increase of \$20 billion more we're spending on health care, compared to when they were in power? Why did she vote against the 10,800 more doctors that are working now than there were five years ago? Why did she vote against the 80,000 nurses that have registered to work in Ontario, 17,000 alone? Why did you vote against the medical universities? We're building capacity in Brampton and in Scarborough and up north. Why didn't she vote for more grads and undergrads?

That party, under the Liberals with support of the NDP, cut seats. I'm just wondering. She votes against health care. We're making health care a lot better than it was five years ago. We're going to continue increasing the spend when it comes to health care, but obviously, you don't care, because you vote against every—

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

Once again, I'll remind members to make their comments through the Chair.

The next question.

## PUBLIC SAFETY

**Mr. Vincent Ke:** My question is to the Solicitor General. In 2023, Toronto recorded close to 4,000 residential break-ins, a 30% increase from 2022. Torontonians are anxious about the rise of crime and its traumatic effect on victims who are left feeling vulnerable and violated when they deserve to feel safe in the private sanctuary of their homes.

1130

Speaker, people are also frustrated that convicted criminals serve their time in jail only to resurface in the community to reoffend. They demand immediate action in establishing successful deterrents to crime, from the certainty of being caught to the consequences imposed upon criminals.

Speaker, can the Solicitor General explain this government's approach to deter crime?

**Interjection:** Hire a gun lobbyist, right?

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

The Solicitor General can reply.

**Hon. Michael S. Kerzner:** The member is right. People have a right to be concerned about their safety, and public safety for this government is a top priority.

Let me say this, Mr. Speaker: Just recently, when police service budgets had to get approved in Toronto, Hamilton and in London, proxies for the Liberal Party and the NDP voted no. They do not stand as we do, having the backs, every day, of our police services.

We are not going to live and accept the fact that people can commit violent crimes on our streets and be back the next day. This is unacceptable.

That's why, Mr. Speaker, we will continue to advocate to the federal government to move past C-48, which was a good first step. Do more so that we can keep our province safe.

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

**Mr. Vincent Ke:** Thank you so much to the Solicitor General for his response.

Speaker, punishment alone may be viewed as an appropriate deterrent, but long-term solutions include the rehabilitation of criminals to motivate them to become contributing members of society. It is essential that criminals receive job training to equip them with the skills they need to work for a living rather than surviving by exploiting others.

Speaker, can the Solicitor General tell this House what steps this government is taking to break the cycle of opportunistic crime in our communities?

**Hon. Michael S. Kerzner:** Community reintegration is very important, and we will continue to have the backs of our correctional, probation and parole officers every day for the work that they do, so that when a person is reintegrated back to the communities, it is done so safely.

But Mr. Speaker, I want to go back again: When a person is confronted with their doors being knocked in, and when they are demanded to turn over the keys, when people don't feel safe, when our seniors don't feel safe,

something is wrong. That's why our government will always prioritize public safety, fighting auto theft with over \$51 million, fighting to keep these violent and repeat offenders off our streets with an investment of over \$112 million, and putting more boots on the ground so that we, all over Ontario, can feel safe.

## BROADBAND INFRASTRUCTURE

**Mr. Nolan Quinn:** My question is for the Minister of Infrastructure. Reliable high-speed Internet is key to building a stronger Ontario. People across the province depend on high-speed Internet for education, health services, business operation and to stay connected with their loved ones.

Unfortunately, the previous Liberal government ignored many rural, remote and northern communities when it came to making investments into critical infrastructure. Unlike the Liberals, our government has made it a priority to bring high-speed Internet to every community in the province by the end of 2025.

While significant work is already under way to improve and expand broadband services, we must continue to build on the progress we have made and ensure our rural and northern communities are connected.

Speaker, can the minister please tell the House what our government is doing to bring high-speed Internet access to all communities across Ontario?

**Hon. Kinga Surma:** Of course, thank you very much to the hard-working member.

Mr. Speaker, we were re-elected to build Ontario and part of that commitment is making sure that everyone has access to high-speed Internet. Our goal was to connect everyone by the end of 2025. We have allocated \$4 billion. We have invested \$2.4 billion for 200 projects across this province.

I'm really happy to provide an update. As you all know, we executed on the reverse auction last year where we took lots that were not connected. We put it out to the market, and through that reverse auction we intend on connecting 266,000 premises.

Mr. Speaker, I'm really pleased to say that White River in northern Ontario now has access to high-speed Internet, thanks to the Premier's leadership in making sure that everyone is connected by the end of 2025. This is really important because this just proves how important connecting northern communities is to our government, and we will get the job done.

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

**Mr. Nolan Quinn:** Thank you to the minister for that response. It is encouraging to see our government continue to make historic investment to expand reliable, high-speed Internet across all of Ontario. These investments will make life more convenient for families and businesses in my riding of Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry and all across our province.

Speaker, rural and remote communities have traditionally identified more connectivity challenges. We know

that access to reliable high-speed Internet is a necessity, not a luxury. That's why our government must continue to strengthen communities and deliver on our promise to build broadband infrastructure.

Can the minister please explain how our government is improving connectivity across Ontario so that no community is left behind?

**Hon. Kinga Surma:** Thank you very much to the member. I know how important this is to the member's own riding, Mr. Speaker.

Given the size and the topography of Ontario, we knew that in order to connect every single household in the province of Ontario, we would have to explore all different types of technology and look at innovative solutions.

Mr. Speaker, to close the gaps, we are exploring satellite technology. In fact, on behalf of the province of Ontario, Infrastructure Ontario has led a new procurement. They have now narrowed it down to two satellite providers, and in the summer, we will announce the satellite provider that will connect the remaining 43,000 premises. These are the hardest-to-reach places. These are the remote communities. These are the municipalities that are surrounded by rock. Every option was explored, and we are on our way to connect every home by the end of 2025.

#### HEALTH CARE FUNDING

**Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens:** My question is to the Minister of Health. Niagara is a senior community with higher health needs, so it is concerning that our family doctor crisis is blooming from bad to worse.

Since June, residents in Niagara without a family doctor have grown from 53,000 to 73,000. That number is expected to double by 2026. St. Catharines alone needs 51 doctors right now. Family physicians alarm bell wasn't just rung, it is blaring.

Despite promises, St. Catharines's health teams see no base funding boost to support our already stretched, aging doctors. They are overworked, underpaid and buried in red tape. When will you halt the doctor drain and prioritize St. Catharines and seniors across Niagara?

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** I'm going to ask the members to make their comments through the Chair, once again.

The Minister of Health.

**Hon. Sylvia Jones:** Speaker, you will know that we have made considerable investments in the Niagara region—not, of course, without a lot of advocacy from the member from Niagara West, Sam Oosterhoff.

It is very exciting to see the expansion, the build, the groundbreaking, which, by the way, your member that you sit beside actually attended and acknowledged was great news for South Niagara with the South Niagara Hospital—a multi-million-dollar investment in Niagara region.

The member opposite continues to ignore the fact that as we make those expansions, as we ensure that through a \$110-million investment in primary care expansion—which, by the way—facts matter—includes an increase to the base of the existing health care teams.

*Interjections.*

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** The member for St. Catharines will come to order.

The supplementary question? The member for Hamilton West–Ancaster–Dundas.

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** To the minister: Facts matter. Some 2.2 million Ontarians do not have a family doctor in this province, despite all of your spin. Family medicine is the backbone of our health system. Without access to doctors, we miss important early detection of cancers. Diabetics risk losing their vision without treatment, and families and women go without critical maternal and prenatal care.

Right now, 60,000 people in Hamilton don't have a family doctor and that is expected to double in just two short years. So my question: How long is this Conservative government going to stand by and let people suffer?

1140

**Hon. Sylvia Jones:** So to be clear, there are expansions in Hamilton with the Greater Hamilton Health Network and primary care stakeholder council. Is the member opposite going to support that investment?

There are investments in the—

*Interjection.*

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

**Hon. Sylvia Jones:** —Niagara Ontario Health Team, Bridges Community Health Centre in partnership with—

*Interjection.*

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** The member for Hamilton West–Ancaster–Dundas will come to order.

**Hon. Sylvia Jones:** —family health Ontario. Is the member opposite going to support those investments?

These are historic multidisciplinary teams that are new and expanded across the province of Ontario. Is the member going to support those investments?

Because at the core, what we have is a health care system that was ignored for decades by the previous Liberal government. We are making those changes. We've already announced these expansions. Now, all you have to do is tell your community you are going to—

*Interjections.*

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** The member for Hamilton West–Ancaster–Dundas and the member for St. Catharines will come to order.

Next question.

#### TAXATION

**Mr. Mike Harris:** My question is to the Associate Minister of Transportation. Since the federal government imposed the carbon tax, people in Ontario have been paying more for everything. Residents in my riding of Kitchener–Conestoga tell me that they're finding it more difficult to keep up with the rising costs of groceries and gas.

Speaker, at a time when many Ontarians are already struggling with high inflation costs, they should not have to worry about being able to drive where they need to go. Unlike the opposition NDP and independent Liberals, our

government will continue to advocate for Ontarians and ask the federal Liberals to put an end to the carbon tax.

Speaker, can the minister please explain what impact the carbon tax is having on the transportation needs of Ontario families?

**Hon. Vijay Thanigasalam:** Thank you to the member from Kitchener–Conestoga for that question and for his advocacy against carbon tax.

Mr. Speaker, the member is right. The federal carbon tax is making life more expensive for the people of Ontario, especially forcing parents to face unnecessary costs when they're driving to work, when they're driving their children to school, even for extracurricular activities.

That is why I'm proud that under the leadership of Premier Ford, our government continues to oppose this harmful carbon tax. Unfortunately, the Liberals and NDP are so out of touch that they are happy to support a carbon tax that only hurts individuals and families throughout Ontario. They keep doing what they do best: They are saying no to any measure that provides financial relief to Ontarians. Speaker, they said no to 418 and 412—removing toll. They don't want commuters to save \$300 on the 418 toll, and they don't want \$150 saving on the 412 tolls.

Our government will continue to stand up to keep costs down so that Ontarians can keep more money in their pockets, where it belongs.

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

**Mr. Mike Harris:** Thanks to the associate minister for that answer, and I will say it is disappointing that the opposition NDP and independent Liberals continue to ignore their constituents and support attacks that only hurt the hard-working people of Ontario.

The reality is that the carbon tax is leading to soaring fuel prices that make life unaffordable and difficult for everyone. Mr. Speaker, if you can believe it, the federal Liberals are planning on raising this tax 23% on April 1. It's a cruel joke. We know that cancelling this unnecessary cost will deliver more affordability for Ontario drivers and put more money back into their pockets. That's why our government will continue to call on the federal Liberals to get rid of the carbon tax.

Speaker, can the associate minister please explain how our government is making life more affordable for Ontarians while we continue to fight this awful tax?

**Hon. Vijay Thanigasalam:** Drivers across our province want federal Liberals to get rid of the carbon tax. The carbon tax only serves to punish individuals and families in Ontario by driving the costs up for food, transit and everyday essentials.

Our government continues to fight the adverse effects of the carbon tax by finding more ways to provide financial relief for the people of Ontario. That is why, under the leadership of Premier Ford, we eliminated licence plate renewal fees. As a result of this initiative, over \$2.2 billion went back directly to the pockets of people, of seven million hard-working people in Ontario.

Speaker, whether it's removing fees or eliminating tolls or eliminating double fares with the One Fare program, we will continue to fight to make life more affordable for the people of Ontario.

## HEALTH CARE FUNDING

**Ms. Chandra Pasma:** Far too many of my constituents are going without health care, because Ottawa is short 171 family doctors. Ottawa residents who are sick, anxious about symptoms or even simply looking to renew a prescription are forced to turn to the Queensway Carleton Hospital, one of the busiest emergency departments in the province.

But this government cut funding for emergency care at the Queensway Carleton, meaning that, by April, there will be 10 fewer hours of physician coverage in the ER every single day.

Why does the Minister of Health think people in Ottawa should have to wait hours in an overstretched ER just to receive basic health care?

**Hon. Sylvia Jones:** Well, it is exactly why we have put programs in place like the Dedicated Offload Nurses Program that ensures that a respiratory tech, a paramedic or a registered nurse can work as a team with the paramedics to make sure that they can go back out into community and continue their work.

That program alone has seen amazing results. In the city of Guelph, as an example, we saw decreases of almost 80% in terms of the wait times for individuals who go into emergency departments. I was able to speak to the mayor earlier today to talk about how that one program has impacted their community in a very positive way.

Can we do more? Absolutely—and we will continue to do more. I think it's really important for the member opposite to understand that these programs have been built with the input of our agencies, whether that is hospitals, whether that is nurses like the College of Nurses or the RPNAO, with paramedics, to make sure that the programs we put in place are actually impacting our communities in a positive way—

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

**Ms. Chandra Pasma:** Well, Speaker, the minister's plan is clearly not working, because off-load delays are so bad in the city of Ottawa that the government is looking at creating a pilot project to call taxis—so dial 911 and have Blue Line show up at your house instead of an ambulance.

The minister is expanding funding for primary care, but to only a small proportion of the clinics in Ontario that have actually asked for funding and support to expand. People in Ottawa still don't know when or if their local primary clinic is one of the clinics that will get funding, because the government is refusing to share how they're deciding which proposals to fund and who will actually get funding.

When will this government actually support the people of Ottawa instead of leaving them in the dark?

**Hon. Sylvia Jones:** When I have conversations with Mayor Sutcliffe, he talks about how the innovation that is

happening at the Ottawa Hospital and in his community is making a positive impact in the city of Ottawa and the region. I have to give credit where credit is due. Mayor Sutcliffe and his council voted to expand the number of paramedics and the number of paramedic services that are being offered in the city of Ottawa. We, of course, as the province of Ontario, will be there as a 50% funding partner. We always have been, and we always will.

But we are working with our partners. We're not opposing the innovation and the changes that they want to bring forward to make sure that we have appropriate health care in our communities closer to home.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** That concludes our question period for this morning.

### VISITORS

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** The member for Ottawa Centre informed me he has a point of order.

**Mr. Joel Harden:** A number of members introduced friends of ours from Mount Dennis. There was one name neglected, though, Speaker, that I just want read in for the record: someone who meant to be with us but passed away. His name is Carl Cudlik, and I know he was with us in spirit—one of the fire-keepers from Mount Dennis. Thinking of you today, Carl.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Point of order, the member for Spadina–Fort York.

**Mr. Chris Glover:** I'd like to welcome to the House some members of the Ontario Prayer Breakfast: Charlie Lyons, our local reverend here; Reverend Steven Van Dyck; Michael Mackenzie; and Nicolas Pappalardo.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Point of order, the member for Thunder Bay–Superior North.

**MPP Lise Vaugeois:** I'd like to welcome Brandon Machado, who is here from the Ontario NDP Persons with Disabilities Committee.

I would also like to welcome, from A Remarkable Assembly women's forum, Abby Proteau from Thunder Bay–Superior North.

### DEFERRED VOTES

#### GET IT DONE ACT, 2024

#### LOI DE 2024 POUR PASSER À L'ACTION

Deferred vote on the motion that the question now be put on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

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

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Call in the members. This is a five-minute bell.

*The division bells rang from 1150 to 1155.*

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

Mr. Sarkaria, on February 28, 2024, moved second reading of Bill 162, An Act to enact the Protecting Against Carbon Taxes Act, 2024 and amend various Acts.

On March 6, 2024, Mr. Jones, Chatham-Kent–Leamington, moved that the question be now put.

All those in favour of Mr. Jones's motion will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

#### Ayes

Anand, Deepak	Gallagher Murphy, Dawn	Parsa, Michael
Babikian, Aris	Ghamari, Goldie	Piccini, David
Barnes, Patrice	Grewal, Hardeep Singh	Pierre, Natalie
Bethlenfalvy, Peter	Hardeman, Ernie	Quinn, Nolan
Bouma, Will	Harris, Mike	Rae, Matthew
Bresee, Ric	Hogarth, Christine	Sabawy, Sheref
Byers, Rick	Holland, Kevin	Sandhu, Amarjot
Calandra, Paul	Jones, Sylvia	Sarkaria, Prabmeet Singh
Cho, Raymond Sung Joon	Jones, Trevor	Sarrazin, Stéphane
Cho, Stan	Jordan, John	Saunderson, Brian
Clark, Steve	Kanapathi, Logan	Skelly, Donna
Coe, Lorne	Ke, Vincent	Smith, Dave
Crawford, Stephen	Kerzner, Michael S.	Smith, David
Cuzzetto, Rudy	Kusendova-Bashta, Natalia	Smith, Laura
Dixon, Jess	Leardi, Anthony	Smith, Todd
Dowie, Andrew	Lecce, Stephen	Surma, Kinga
Downey, Doug	Lumsden, Neil	Tangri, Nina
Dunlop, Jill	Martin, Robin	Thanigasalam, Vijay
Fedeli, Victor	McCarthy, Todd J.	Thompson, Lisa M.
Flack, Rob	McGregor, Graham	Triantafilopoulos, Effie J.
Ford, Doug	Oosterhoff, Sam	Wai, Daisy
Ford, Michael D.	Pang, Billy	Williams, Charmaine A.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** All those opposed to Mr. Jones's motion will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

#### Nays

Andrew, Jill	Glover, Chris	Rakocevic, Tom
Bell, Jessica	Gretzky, Lisa	Schreiner, Mike
Bourgouin, Guy	Harden, Joel	Shamji, Adil
Bowman, Stephanie	Hazell, Andrea	Shaw, Sandy
Brady, Bobbi Ann	Hsu, Ted	Stevens, Jennifer (Jennie)
Clancy, Aislinn	Jama, Sarah	Stiles, Marit
Collard, Lucille	Karpoche, Bhutla	Tabuns, Peter
Fife, Catherine	Mamakwa, Sol	Taylor, Monique
Fraser, John	McCrimmon, Karen	Vanthof, John
French, Jennifer K.	McMahon, Mary-Margaret	Vaugeois, Lise
Gates, Wayne	Pasma, Chandra	Wong-Tam, Kristyn

**The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Trevor Day):** The ayes are 66; the nays are 33.

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

Mr. Sarkaria has moved second reading of Bill 162, An Act to enact the Protecting Against Carbon Taxes Act, 2024 and amend various Acts.

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

I heard some noes.

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

All those opposed will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

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

*The division bells rang from 1200 to 1201.*

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** On February 28, 2024, Mr. Sarkaria moved second reading of Bill 162, An Act to enact the Protecting Against Carbon Taxes Act, 2024 and amend various Acts.

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

#### Ayes

Anand, Deepak	Gallagher Murphy, Dawn	Parsa, Michael
Babikian, Aris	Ghamari, Goldie	Piccini, David
Barnes, Patrice	Grewal, Hardeep Singh	Pierre, Natalie
Bethlenfalvy, Peter	Hardeman, Ernie	Quinn, Nolan
Bouma, Will	Harris, Mike	Rae, Matthew
Bresee, Ric	Hogarth, Christine	Sabawy, Sheref
Byers, Rick	Holland, Kevin	Sandhu, Amarjot
Calandra, Paul	Jones, Sylvia	Sarkaria, Prabmeet Singh
Cho, Raymond Sung Joon	Jones, Trevor	Sarrazin, Stéphane
Cho, Stan	Jordan, John	Saunderson, Brian
Clark, Steve	Kanapathi, Logan	Skelly, Donna
Coe, Lorne	Ke, Vincent	Smith, Dave
Crawford, Stephen	Kerzner, Michael S.	Smith, David
Cuzzetto, Rudy	Kusendova-Bashta, Natalia	Smith, Laura
Dixon, Jess	Leardi, Anthony	Smith, Todd
Dowie, Andrew	Lecce, Stephen	Surma, Kinga
Downey, Doug	Lumsden, Neil	Tangri, Nina
Dunlop, Jill	Martin, Robin	Thanigasalam, Vijay
Fedeli, Victor	McCarthy, Todd J.	Thompson, Lisa M.
Flack, Rob	McGregor, Graham	Triantafilopoulos, Effie J.
Ford, Doug	Oosterhoff, Sam	Wai, Daisy
Ford, Michael D.	Pang, Billy	Williams, Charmaine A.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** All those opposed to the motion, please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

#### Nays

Andrew, Jill	Glover, Chris	Rakocevic, Tom
Bell, Jessica	Gretzky, Lisa	Schreiner, Mike
Bourgouin, Guy	Harden, Joel	Shamji, Adil
Bowman, Stephanie	Hazell, Andrea	Shaw, Sandy
Brady, Bobbi Ann	Hsu, Ted	Stevens, Jennifer (Jennie)
Clancy, Aislinn	Jama, Sarah	Stiles, Marit
Collard, Lucille	Karpoche, Bhutla	Tabuns, Peter
Fife, Catherine	Mamakwa, Sol	Taylor, Monique
Fraser, John	McCrimmon, Karen	Vanthof, John
French, Jennifer K.	McMahon, Mary-Margaret	Vaugeois, Lise
Gates, Wayne	Pasma, Chandra	Wong-Tam, Kristyn

**The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Trevor Day):** The ayes are 66; the nays are 33.

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

*Second reading agreed to.*

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Shall the bill be ordered for third reading? I heard some noes.

I look to the minister for a committee referral.

**Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria:** The Standing Committee on Heritage, Infrastructure and Cultural Policy.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** The bill is so referred to the standing committee.

#### LEGISLATIVE PAGES

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** I'm now going to ask the pages to assemble.

It is now time to say a word of thanks to this group of legislative pages. Our pages are smart, trustworthy and hard-working. They're indispensable to the effective functioning of this chamber, and we are indeed fortunate to have had them here.

To our pages: You depart having made many new friends, with a greater understanding of parliamentary democracy and memories that will last a lifetime. Each of you will go home now and continue your studies, and no doubt you will contribute to your communities, your province and your country in important ways. We expect great things from all of you. Who knows? Maybe some of you someday will take your seats in this House as members or work here as staff. No matter where your path leads, we wish you well.

Please join me in thanking this great group of legislative pages.

*Applause.*

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

*The House recessed from 1206 to 1300.*

#### LUSO CANADIAN CHARITABLE SOCIETY ACT (TAX RELIEF), 2024

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** I beg to inform the House that the Clerk has received a submission related to Bill Pr42, An Act respecting the Luso Canadian Charitable Society. Pursuant to standing order 93(a), the submission stands referred to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

#### INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

**Hon. Lisa M. Thompson:** Today, I'd like to welcome some amazing people from our ag and food industry, and specifically representatives from the Ontario Veterinary Medical Association, the Ontario SPCA, Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario, Ontario Veterinary College, Colleges Ontario, ROMA, Equine Guelph, Ontario Goat, Ontario Association of Bovine Practitioners and the Rural Ontario Institute. Welcome to the House. We have a great afternoon ahead of us.

**Mr. Trevor Jones:** I'd like to welcome to the House today representatives from the Beef Farmers of Ontario, Ontario Sheep Farmers, the Ontario Association of Equine Practitioners, Chicken Farmers of Ontario, Ontario Goat, Ontario Equestrian, the Ontario Farriers Association, the Ontario Beekeepers' Association and the Ontario Association of Bovine Practitioners.

As well, I'd like to welcome our deputy minister, John Kelly, and the amazing team from OMAFRA for helping us today. Thank you for joining us in your House today.

**Mr. John Vanthof:** On behalf of the official opposition, I'd also like to welcome all the movers and shakers in the agricultural industry in Ontario, and also the people who work keeping animals healthy. We're all looking forward to finding new ways to get more vets into Ontario. Thank you to all of you.

**Hon. Lisa M. Thompson:** I'd also like to add to the amazing, esteemed list that we have today representatives of Dairy Farmers of Ontario.

## REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

### STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** I beg to inform the House that today the Clerk received a report on intended appointments dated March 7, 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.*

## INTRODUCTION OF GOVERNMENT BILLS

### ENHANCING PROFESSIONAL CARE FOR ANIMALS ACT, 2024

#### LOI DE 2024 SUR L'AMÉLIORATION DES SOINS PROFESSIONNELS PRODIGUÉS AUX ANIMAUX

Ms. Thompson moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 171, An Act to enact the Veterinarian Professionals Act, 2024 and amend or repeal various acts / Projet de loi 171, Loi visant à édicter la Loi de 2024 sur les professionnels vétérinaires et à modifier ou à abroger diverses lois.

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

*First reading agreed to.*

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Would the minister care to briefly explain her bill?

**Hon. Lisa M. Thompson:** Yes, thank you, Speaker. If passed, the Enhancing Professional Care for Animals Act will be enabling legislation that would allow for improved access to animal care by paving the way to better defining the scope of practice for veterinary professionals and streamlining the complaint resolution process to increase transparency, benefiting both veterinarians and the public. The result would be a modernized framework that regulates both vets and registered vet techs while also recognizing roles of non-veterinary professionals that also have a role to play in the area of animal care.

## INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

### 1000151830 ONTARIO INC. ACT, 2024

Mr. Saunderson moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill Pr40, An Act to revive 1000151830 Ontario Inc.

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

*First reading agreed to.*

### LUSO CANADIAN CHARITABLE SOCIETY ACT (TAX RELIEF), 2024

Mr. Cuzzetto moved first reading of the following bill: Bill Pr42, An Act respecting the Luso Canadian Charitable Society.

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

*First reading agreed to.*

### AFFORDABLE ENERGY ACT, 2024

#### LOI DE 2024 SUR L'ÉNERGIE ABORDABLE

Mr. Tabuns moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 172, An Act to improve energy affordability through distributed energy resources and deep retrofits / Projet de loi 172, Loi visant à rendre l'énergie plus abordable grâce aux ressources énergétiques distribuées et aux rénovations majeures.

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

*First reading agreed to.*

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Would the member care to briefly explain his bill.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** The bill gives the government the authority to set up affordable energy Ontario to finance and organize the deep retrofit of homes across Ontario and the provision of distributed energy, primarily solar, to homes and communities across Ontario. And a gripping bill, it is, Mr. Speaker—a gripping bill it is.

### INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE EPIDEMIC ACT, 2024

#### LOI DE 2024 SUR L'ÉPIDÉMIE DE VIOLENCE ENTRE PARTENAIRES INTIMES

MPP Wong-Tam moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 173, An Act respecting intimate partner violence / Projet de loi 173, Loi concernant la violence entre partenaires intimes.

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

*First reading agreed to.*



1310

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Would the member care to briefly explain their bill?

**MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam:** I would. Thank you very much, Speaker, for the opportunity.

The bill enacts the Intimate Partner Violence Epidemic Act, 2024. The act requires the government of Ontario to recognize that intimate partner violence is an epidemic in Ontario. The Renfrew county inquest into the deaths of Carol Culleton, Anastasia Kuzyk and Nathalie Warmerdam at the hands of intimate partner violence yielded 76 recommendations. This bill would enact the first recommendation of the inquest and formally declare that intimate partner violence is an epidemic in Ontario.

The tragic deaths of the Renfrew county women should not be in vain. This bill is dedicated to them and all Ontarians who have experienced intimate partner violence, and to those working tirelessly to end it.

## STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

### INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

**Hon. Charmaine A. Williams:** I am honoured to stand in the House and recognize International Women's Day. On March 8 each year, Ontario joins communities around the world to celebrate the countless achievements of women. International Women's Day is an important opportunity to highlight the actions we are taking to remove barriers and create better opportunities for women and girls.

Women are the beating heart of our province. They are teachers, scientists, tradespeople and farmers who work hard every day to build Ontario. They are our mothers, our wives, and sisters and daughters—the people in our lives who mean so much to us. They are inspirational role models who show future generations of girls that they can be anything they want to be.

*Interjections.*

**Hon. Charmaine A. Williams:** That's right.

This past year, the world's top professional women's hockey league, the PWHL, was established with teams in Toronto and Ottawa, and the first game in league history was played right here in Toronto.

Two women directors with close ties to Ontario were nominated for Oscars. Nisha Pahuja, based here in Toronto and in Brampton, was nominated for her documentary *To Kill a Tiger*. It's a phenomenal movie. And Celine Song, a Queen's University alum, received two nominations for her film *Past Lives*. I know the House will join me in wishing them all the best this Sunday at the Oscars.

We are grateful to all the women who make our province great. However, despite the progress we have made, women and girls do continue to face disproportionate barriers to achieving their full potential. As

Ontario's Associate Minister of Women's Social and Economic Opportunity, my job is to ensure that women have the support they need to overcome these barriers.

The theme for this year's International Women's Day is "Invest in Women: Accelerate Progress."

The government of Ontario is making historic investments to support women to succeed in their careers, in their communities and in their lives. Women represent half of Ontario's workforce, but they are more likely to be employed in part-time or minimum-wage jobs. With the rising cost of living across the province, it is this government that's standing up for Ontarians. We increased the minimum wage just last fall, and we continue to raise the minimum wage with annual increases to reflect the cost of living.

We're also working across government to make life more affordable. We introduced the CARE tax credit, which will provide about 300,000 families with up to 75% of their eligible child care expenses, and the low-income individuals and families tax credit—the LIFT tax credit—which will result in Ontario personal income tax being reduced or eliminated for about 1.7 million people.

In order to continue to bring children out of poverty, our government invested roughly \$1.2 billion last year in the Ontario Child Benefit.

Our government knows that access to safe and high-quality child care is also vital for families. That's why, under the leadership of our Minister of Education and Premier Ford, we have delivered unprecedented cost-saving measures for parents in need of child care. High-quality child care plays a key role in supporting a family's economic prosperity and increasing women's participation in the workforce.

Children are a blessing—I know, because I have five of them—but many women are now choosing not to have kids because of fear that having a child impacts their ability to build a career and their earnings and all the access that there is to future leadership positions. Mothers in Ontario often see their earnings decline, take more time off work for family responsibilities and are given less consideration for management roles, but nobody should have to choose between their children and their career.

Effective December 31, 2022, average child care fees in Ontario were reduced by 50% from 2020 levels, relieving parents of over \$1.1 billion in child care costs in 2022-23. To date, our government has increased access to safe, reliable and affordable child care through the creation of over 46,000 child care spaces since taking office in 2018, including over 31,000 in publicly funded schools.

A strong child care and early learning sector will help more women achieve financial independence and better enable them to provide for their families. In fact, the Financial Accountability Officer found that the labour participation rate of mothers with children between the ages of zero to five increased from 76.5% in 2021 to 78.9% in 2022. It's a 2.4% increase in just under one year, and that's the highest increase on record since 1976 for all core-age mothers participating in the job market. That's something to celebrate.

I'm particularly proud of the expansion of the Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care program, the CWELCC. It is helping to build a stronger Ontario by increasing women's participation in the workforce.

Speaker, Ontario is facing pressing labour shortages over the next decade. Small businesses in Ontario are missing out on more than \$16 billion in revenue in 2022 because of labour shortages. Our Associate Minister of Small Business is out there actively advocating for the many women who have small businesses that are helping to drive Ontario's economy, and we thank her for that. But because of these labour shortages, according to the study of the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, \$16 billion in revenue is being lost.

Women are under-represented in higher paying roles and sectors like the skilled trades and STEM fields. In 2022, women accounted for only 8% of the labour force in the trades, transport and related occupations in Ontario. Our government is determined to see these numbers improve. We're taking action to encourage more women to start a career in the skilled trades and land a better job with a bigger paycheque.

My colleague the Minister of Education is modernizing Ontario's curriculum, increasing exposure to STEM, skilled trades and apprenticeship pathways at an earlier age. My colleague the Minister of Colleges and Universities recently invested \$100 million to support STEM programming at publicly assisted colleges and universities. These changes will help ensure that more girls and young women grow up considering and preparing for rewarding and in-demand careers, including sectors where women are traditionally under-represented.

I recently participated in a round table with the Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development, where we listened to women in the skilled trades and discussed solutions. It was such a vibrant conversation about the real barriers that women are facing on the jobsite. That's why we've implemented solutions like ensuring that there are washrooms designated for women on construction sites and requiring that women have properly fitted personal protective equipment on the job.

As a part of our government's \$1-billion skilled trades strategy, we are also working with schools to build passion for the trades in early life. Through the Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program, we've invested \$22 million to give high school students the chance to explore the trades through co-operative education courses, introducing young women to the trades earlier and providing them with supports and guidance they need from when they're first interested, and all the way to the job site. It's so crucial to getting them hooked in and enjoying a vibrant career in the trades.

**1320**

To ensure we are retaining women in the skilled trades who can be leaders for the next generation, we are creating Skills Development Funds Training Stream, which supports organizations that empower workers and job seekers who face higher barriers to entry, and the results speak for themselves.

Just last year, we saw a historic increase in apprenticeship registrations, including nearly a 30% jump in the amount of women. Not only that, more women are getting jobs than ever before. I had the chance to go into mines and go on different job sites and speak to women who have had their lives completely changed because they started working in the skilled trades.

I met one woman recently at George Brown College who lost her job during the pandemic—because of the pandemic—and had a young five-year-old to take care of. She said, "You know what? I've got to make a change," and Lilly went and registered at George Brown College and now, she is working at George Brown College after going through the welding program.

In three years, her life has been changed, and now, she feels empowered and is able to be a role model to her son and all of the women who are going through George Brown College into the trades. It's significant.

So last year alone, 180,000 jobs were created in Ontario, and in 2023, Ontario created more manufacturing jobs than all 50 states combined. That's significant. Last month, Ontario led the nation in job creation. Nearly 24,000 new jobs were added in our economy just in the month of January, and 9,700 of them were in construction. Ontario accounted for 65% of all jobs created in the country and we're leading the nation in job creation.

It's a fact that under the previous Liberal government, we lost 300,000 manufacturing jobs. And because of the leadership of Premier Ford, who was elected to bring this back, to make a turn, we've seen now 700,000 men and women go back to work. A strong economy means opportunity for women.

So if we continue down this road, we can only build, if we all join together against and ban this carbon tax. That is going to significantly impact women in Ontario.

You know, it was only a few years ago that Reuters announced there would be \$300 billion spent on electric vehicles across the world and zero of it was coming to Canada. But thanks to our Minister of Economic Development, three years later, \$28 billion in electric vehicles has landed in our province, putting men and women back to work every single day.

Bloomberg has now said that Canada is the number one jurisdiction around the world for electric vehicle parts. This is where we are. That is where we are. We have dethroned China from being the number-one position for the very first time, and our plan is to continue to build Ontario, make it the best place to do business in, and women are an integral part of that.

That's why we're helping more women create jobs for themselves and in their communities. Women are rising in the workforce leadership as entrepreneurs, with Canada ranking among the top three countries globally for female entrepreneurship.

We also know that women entrepreneurs face more barriers to accessing financing in growing their business. On average, women launch businesses with 53% less capital than men. As well, businesses with fewer than 20 employees and those in the service sector were among the

hardest hit by the pandemic. Now, these are the two sectors where women-owned businesses were strongly represented. And that's why Ontario has been leading initiatives to support small businesses and women entrepreneurs. One program I am particularly proud of is the Women's Economic Security Program. This program provides training for low-income women to equip them with skills, knowledge and experience to find a job or start a business and increase their financial independence. Program participants can also access additional wrap-around supports to help them succeed, like child care and transportation.

Last year, we built on the success of the Women's Economic Security Program by increasing our investment by \$500,000, bringing our total investment to \$5.5 million, marking a nearly 10% increase in the program alone. We also expanded the Investing in Women's Futures Program, bringing the total number of locations to 33 across Ontario. The Investing in Women's Futures Program is about job readiness. It funds organizations across the province that provide safe spaces in skills training to help them gain financial independence but, most importantly, help them develop the confidence to be successful in any career that they choose. It helps them rebuild their lives after abuse and gives them counselling supports to empower them and lift them up. From 2021 to 2023, these programs have helped more than 14,000 women by providing flexible programs, wraparound services and have helped more than 3,600 women start their own businesses or get further training in education. And when you help one woman, you don't just help her, you help the whole community around her—her children, her siblings, everyone.

The budget in 2023 included numerous programs to equip entrepreneurs with the tools and training needed to succeed in today's digital economy—launching our \$10-million new Digitalization Competence Centre, which provides training and support to small businesses looking to leverage emerging equipment and processes, and then there's Futurpreneur Canada that helps young entrepreneurs access mentorship services and collateral-free loans and capital to grow their business.

I met some really amazing women and saw some new products like green cleaning products, a woman that has maternity-style workout clothing with the flaps for breastfeeding—amazing, practical solutions that women are creating businesses around and changing their whole lives.

These programs that we fund are really having an impact, as well as the 17 regional innovation centres and the 47 small business enterprise centres. They're helping entrepreneurs across Ontario grow their businesses, hire employees—and that's a big one. When you have a woman on the leadership team—or women—who are the heads of these companies, you have more diversity in your employees, and that's what we want to see. When we have women at the head, you have more women in these companies. This is empowering the women to see themselves in these leadership roles, to see themselves being the CEO and the decision-makers. We are changing the

course of our future for so many businesses, and women are at the forefront of it.

We're helping women participate in the workforce. Helping them empowers them. It empowers them to support themselves and their families to achieve financial independence and increase their safety. We are increasing women's safety through financial independence, because you're allowing women to have the choice—the choice to get out, that ability to leave an abusive relationship, not be stuck in it because they can't afford to leave. I'm telling you, it's having an impact, and we're seeing that every day when we go across Ontario and meet women who say, "Your programs helped me. Without your programs, I would still be stuck. Thank you."

As we celebrate International Women's Day, I'm proud of the steps our government is taking to empower women. Together, we can continue to improve opportunities for women, empower them to pursue their dreams and to build a stronger Ontario, because when women succeed, Ontario succeeds.

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

**1330**

**MPP Jill Andrew:** Before I begin, I want to thank my mother and my partner for their unwavering support, their love and their endurance during this last year, one of if not the hardest for us three. We've stuck through it together. I love you both dearly. And I'm glad to stand, of course, representing you two, constituents of mine and the many other community members in St. Paul's.

It's my honour to stand and speak today in recognition of International Women's Day on behalf of the ONDP official opposition. Each of us in this Legislature has at least one woman in our lives, past or present, whom we could never thank enough for us being who and where we are today. And I have to believe that we would do everything in our power to ensure the amazing women in our lives are well supported throughout all life stages so they can thrive. For those of us who have lost beloved women in our lives, I'm certain we continue to hold their legacy strong, and the life lessons they have left with us.

This year's International Women's Day theme centres inclusion. It demands of us that we remember, as Rosemary Brown, the first Black woman to ever run for federal leadership in Canada, said, "Until all of us have made it, none of us have made it." Said otherwise, no one is free until we are all free. Well, what is freedom? According to the dictionary, freedom means the power or right to act, speak or think as one wants without hindrance or restraint; the absence of subjection to foreign domination or a tyrannical government; the state of not being imprisoned or enslaved.

Social conditions, I would argue, also contribute to women's ability to be free. We need freedom over our reproductive rights and our choices. We need contraceptives available under OHIP. This government is free to do that today if they so choose and invest the political will to do so. Freedom involves having and enjoying the safety and stability of an affordable home where you can live

without the fear of displacement, where you know your rent is never in danger of skyrocketing rent increases without limits. Shout-out to rent control—we can have it any day now if it's this government's political will, and it will help women in Ontario.

Housing, shelter, is and should be a human right but, in practice, especially under this government, we are far away from that—very, very far, as far as they are from their 1.5 million homes.

Freedom involves having access to nutritious and diverse food choices. It means not living in fear of food price gouging or having to mix your child's milk with water to stretch it over their favourite cereal.

Women, we are resilient. We are creative. We are excellent problem-solvers. But this doesn't absolve the government from their responsibility to adequately fund our education system so we can see the fruits of investment in the very young women and girls we're all talking to in our communities tomorrow for International Women's Day at our local elementary and post-secondary schools.

Freedom means having access to a justice system properly invested in by a government that doesn't revictimize survivors of violence but instead believes them, takes their cases seriously and ensures they see their day in court. I worry that this cannot get done with the inappropriate and, frankly, dangerous comments we've heard from this Premier about his desire for like-minded judges. I don't want judges with like-minded values of this Premier, who seems to think it's okay to chronically underfund rape crisis centres, sexual assault centres, to cut victims' support services or legal aid, or who has silenced the very voices of women in this Legislature. That is not allyship.

And there is no freedom without women's economic freedom, without equal pay, without safe workplaces without harassment. I believe the government actually voted down a bill on helping to create safe workplaces in municipal workplaces. That's pretty sad, actually.

Women still haven't seen the reality of pay equity here in Ontario although the legislation passed some 30 years ago, and this government's tinkering with pay transparency, well, has barely begun to scratch the surface. We have witnessed this government take midwives to court, fight education workers, all of whom are predominantly women and, frankly, even racialized women at that. We've seen them refuse to cover 100% of take-home cancer drugs, for goodness' sake, even at a time when we see rises in breast cancer.

All this to say, I want to thank women for being strong, for being tenacious, but I know that our strength and resilience isn't enough; and it shouldn't be enough. We need to have a government that stands up for all women in Ontario, especially those who have experienced the most marginalization.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** Responses? I recognize the member for Scarborough—Guildwood.

**MPP Andrea Hazell:** Madam Speaker, it gives me great honour to stand before you and the members of this Legislature to speak about International Women's Day and what it should mean to all of us in this chamber.

We must always find opportunities to impact the lives of women and young girls by showing up for them and giving them a shot at having equal opportunities. This year's UN-designated theme is "Invest in Women: Accelerate Progress," so let us aim at tackling this empowerment that comes with gender inequality.

International Women's Day is never to forget to celebrate the achievement of women, whether small or great. Awareness of our triumphs must not only be raised on this day, but every day. We must encourage a world that is diverse, equitable and inclusive; a world where we all value and celebrate our self-worth. We must come together collectively at all levels of government, corporations, institutions, to collectively work towards an inclusive and equitable world for women and young girls. We must raise awareness about discrimination, gender-based violence and gender parity, including this chamber, where only 47 of our 124 members are women. This is 2024. Gender parity is non-negotiable.

I hope that this government chooses to reflect on why they initially chose to deny us Liberals the right to address the chamber today and that they only relented after public pressure and media attention. I know that Ontarians noticed that the Conservatives chose to make International Women's Day a partisan issue, instead of a moment for all of us to come together and celebrate women.

I wanted to start today championing women, because that's what I love to do and that's what I live for. Instead, I was forced to fight for my right to speak up to men, like countless women before me. I want to give one last shout-out to my caucus colleagues and other independents, as we stood side-by-side to call out this government for preventing us from speaking. I thank you.

To the member from London West: Thank you for standing in solidarity with us as well.

To the women in the governing party: I sincerely hope you felt our pain and raised your voices to the men who stood in our way, because loyalty to your party should never come second to standing up for all our women and our young girls.

I'm standing here very proud, representing my daughter—her name is Rayan Hazell—and all of our daughters today. I'm here fighting for their future and for their freedom of speech. I will always stand up for women, equality and women-inclusiveness. I want to always encourage every one of you in here today to stand-up for women and young girls, to help break barriers, inspire change and shape our society.

The people of Ontario elected us to represent them. They matter to all of us. May this message be delivered very strongly to our young girls who are tuning into this session, who are listening to us, who are looking up to us to lead them through these challenging times that women and young girls face on a daily basis just trying to be women. May this be a lesson learned: that collectively we

will always be stronger, collectively we will inspire change and collectively we shall all overcome.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** Responses? I recognize the member for Don Valley West.

**Ms. Stephanie Bowman:** I'm grateful for the chance to speak on International Women's Day, despite the government's attempt to prevent the independent members from speaking and representing their constituents. They misused their power to silence opposition, contradicting the democratic principles they were elected to uphold. It's wrong that we had to fight for the right to speak on behalf of our constituents in the Legislature today, and it was wrong when the government did not first give us unanimous consent on the first request to speak.

When you do the wrong thing, the right thing to do is apologize. I'm calling on the government to do that today.

But I am thankful, and I'm encouraged by the solidarity that I've seen here today among our independent colleagues, our NDP colleagues and the men who stood with us. That is what has always advanced women's rights.

1340

Now I'd like to focus on women's issues in my community of Don Valley West. Supporting women benefits the economy and our society. Fair wages for nurses, who are mostly women, will improve our health care system.

My mother was a retired nurse and she was asked during the Harris years to work for free due to budget cuts, and that underscores the need to respect nurses. I stand here today for her and others like her, and to ensure my daughter and all of our daughters do not experience the same thing.

We can do more to support women, and we demand that support today from the government. I hope the government listens to these women's voices.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** That is all our time for responses.

## PETITIONS

### ENDOMETRIOSIS

**MPP Jill Andrew:** March is Endometriosis Awareness Month, and I'm going to present a petition entitled "Improve Endometriosis Care and Education."

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas one in 10 women, trans and non-binary people who menstruate suffer from endometriosis;

"Whereas the diagnosis of endometriosis can take more than five years;

"Whereas the average wait time to see an endometriosis specialist in Ontario is" anywhere from "seven to" 11 "years;

"Whereas Canada has a shortage of health care providers and specialists trained in endometriosis, forcing many to go untreated or spend thousands of dollars to receive surgeries out of the country;

"Whereas there is societal stigma and discrimination surrounding menstruation and the reproductive health of women, trans and non-binary peoples;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

"To make significant investment in Ontario's health care system to ensure patients with endometriosis have access to publicly funded care in Ontario in a timely manner;

"To increase funding in endometriosis research;

"To improve medical program requirements on knowledge of endometriosis;

"To train more endometriosis specialists."

I could not sign this with more pride and in more support. I want to thank the members of Toronto–St. Paul's, especially folks from midtown and also folks from endometriosis events, for all of their leadership and advocacy on this. Thank you, guys. I love you, guys. I'm standing with you. Thank you.

### ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE

**Mr. John Jordan:** This petition is titled "Encouraging Passage of Bill 121, the Improving Dementia Care in Ontario Act, 2023.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Alzheimer's disease affects over 250,000 people in the province of Ontario;

"Whereas it is estimated that approximately 400,000 individuals will be diagnosed with dementia by 2030;

"Whereas by the year 2050, more than 1.7 million Canadians are expected to be living with dementia, with an average of 685 individuals diagnosed each day;

"Whereas Alzheimer's disease is not a normal part of aging and is irreversible;

"Whereas 69% of LTC residents are living with dementia;

"Whereas 45% of care partners providing care to people living with dementia exhibit symptoms of distress. This is almost twice the rate compared to care partners of older adults with health conditions other than dementia, which is only 26%;

"Whereas caregivers of those living with dementia decrease their participation in the economy;

"Whereas upstream investments in dementia, prevention, and care are needed to reduce the strain on capacity and resources;

"Whereas strategies to mitigate stigma and combat ageism should be at the heart of the strategy.

I'm going to sign this petition and give it to page Mesapé.

### SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

**MPP Lise Vaugeois:** This is a petition to raise social assistance rates, and I would like to thank Waheed Malik from Ancaster, Ontario, for signing this petition. Ancaster is actually my birth town, where I lived the first eight years of my life.

“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 OW and \$1,308 for” people on “ODSP;

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

“Whereas small increases to ODSP have still left these citizens below the poverty line. Both they and those receiving the frozen OW rates are struggling to survive at this time of alarming inflation;

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

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

I fully support this petition. I will put my signature to it and hand it to Sarah. I would also like to thank Dr. Sally Palmer for gathering so many signatures.

#### ENERGY POLICIES

**Mr. Deepak Anand:** “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Ontario is expecting to continue to see rapid population growth and investments, the province needs additional reliable, affordable, and clean energy that businesses can rely on. To meet growing electricity demand this decade, Ontario is expanding generation capacity, conducting Canada’s largest clean energy storage procurement, and expanding energy efficiency programs; and

“Whereas new electricity transmission infrastructure is needed to meet growing electricity demand in the province. Last year, Ontario acted to ensure the efficient and timely development of five new electricity transmission infrastructure projects in southwestern Ontario, with additional new projects proposed in the coming years including three new transmission lines in northeastern Ontario to power forecast electricity growth, including the conversion from coal to electric arc furnaces at Algoma Steel as well as from growth in the mining sector; and one new transmission line to power growth in the Ottawa region and across eastern Ontario; and

“Whereas Ontario has launched the largest clean energy storage procurement in Canada’s history. The procurement, which is contracting 2,500 megawatts of clean energy storage, will increase the efficiency of Ontario’s clean electricity grid; and

“Whereas energy storage will support the operation of Ontario’s clean electricity grid by drawing and storing electricity off-peak when power demand is low and generation typically comes from non-emitting sources as well

as returning the power to the system at times of higher electricity demand; and

“Whereas with the increasing demand for energy, the province is leveraging the Ontario nuclear sector’s experience and expertise in this safe, reliable, and clean energy source to develop the” new generation and the “next generation of nuclear power; and

“Whereas expanding Ontario’s SMR program enhances Ontario’s position as a global leader in new nuclear technologies, creating new export opportunities that will drive economic growth;

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

“To urge all members of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario continue to create reliable, affordable clean energy while meeting the demands of a growing population.”

I fully support this petition and I will send it through Sarah.

#### EDUCATION

**Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady:** I have 9,418 signatures here, collected from across Ontario, on a petition that reads:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas we, the people of Ontario, have lost faith and confidence in the Ontario school system;

“Whereas the sexualization of our children, indoctrination and the material being taught with regard to this is unacceptable;

“Whereas the bullying of children is rampant in our schools with little or no consequences for the child who is the bully, the teacher who watched it happen or the school board;

“Whereas we are tired of labour disruptions and want the stability of in-person learning, in an environment that we as their parents wish for them;

“Whereas these are not the government of Ontario’s children, they are ours and we refuse to let you raise them as you wish;

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

“To return our educational tax dollars in part or in full so that we as parents can redirect these dollars to the school or learning facility of our choice.”

**1350**

I will affix my signature to the bottom of the petition and send it to the table with page Mesapé.

#### SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

**Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens:** This petition is labeled as “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 OW and \$1,308 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 (OW) and the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP);

“Whereas small increases to ODSP have still left these citizens” well “below the poverty line. Both they and those receiving the frozen OW rates are struggling to survive at this time of alarming inflation;

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

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

I cannot think of a better petition to affix my name to, and I will send it down to the table with page Isaac.

### AIR QUALITY

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** This petition is entitled “Petition to Improve Air Quality for Our Children.” I want to thank our education critic for developing this.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas good air quality reduces the spread of infectious diseases, lowers the rate of chronic health conditions like asthma and allergies, improves test scores in reading and math, reduces absences and improves worker morale;

“Whereas there is currently no requirement for publicly funded schools and licensed child care centres to monitor air quality in Ontario, which would identify classrooms and other learning spaces where air quality is poor;

“Whereas other jurisdictions, including Quebec, require schools to measure and publicly report on air quality;

“Whereas children, teachers, education workers, child care workers, and administrators in Ontario also deserve to work and learn in a space with clean air;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to require the Ministry of Education to begin to take action to improve air quality for our children by supporting and adopting the Improving Air Quality for Our Children Act, 2023.”

It’s my pleasure to affix my signature, Madam Speaker, and give it to page Anushga.

### SCHOOL SAFETY

**MPP Lise Vaugeois:** This is a petition entitled “Keep Classrooms Safe for Students and Staff.” I would like to thank Zoë Dubek of Thunder Bay for signing this petition.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

“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;

“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;

“Properly fund our schools and ensure smaller class sizes with more support staff.”

I fully support this petition, will put my signature on it and give it to Ellen.

### ORDERS OF THE DAY

#### STRENGTHENING ACCOUNTABILITY AND STUDENT SUPPORTS ACT, 2024

#### LOI DE 2024 POUR RENFORCER LA RESPONSABILISATION ET LES MESURES DE SOUTIEN AUX ÉTUDIANTS

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 7, 2024, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 166, An Act to amend the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities Act / Projet de loi 166, Loi modifiant la Loi sur le ministère de la Formation et des Collèges et Universités.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** Resuming debate, the government side. I recognize the member for Burlington.

**Ms. Natalie Pierre:** I’m pleased to build on Minister Dunlop’s remarks about the proposed legislative changes under the Strengthening Accountability and Student Supports Act, 2024; changes that will help our colleges and universities become beacons of mental health and wellness, and create the best conditions for students to learn and thrive. That’s why I’m proud to show my support for the new Strengthening Accountability and Student Supports Act.

As Minister Dunlop explained, the first initiative in this legislation is a clear sign of our government’s commitment to post-secondary students. If passed, this legislation will require all publicly assisted colleges and universities to create and follow through on policies for student mental health. These policies will clearly outline all the mental health and wellness programs, supports and services available to students at their post-secondary institution.

To stay accountable to our students, we would require colleges and universities to publish these policies on their websites and report to their boards every year, making sure that all mental health programs, supports and services are

implemented effectively, and truly improve the mental health and well-being of students. To stay current with the best mental health guidance and available supports, these policies would be reviewed at least once every five years.

To turn these mental health policies into reality, our government is investing \$23 million to help institutions enhance their mental health supports, including \$12.5 million in 2024-25 for Get A-Head, an online platform that enhances post-secondary students' access to virtual mental health service, all while expediting the graduation of post-secondary students in mental health fields, as well as an \$8-million investment over three years, starting in 2024-25, for the post-secondary mental health action plan.

For many years, I've been a committed mentor and coach to high school, college and university students, and have had the privilege of working first-hand with diverse learners. I can tell you that with each year students face more complex mental health challenges. In fact, mental health supports can be the single difference between a student who succeeds, getting the most out of their educational experience, and one who, unfortunately, does not. That's why we need to give our students the best chance we can. We can do that by working in partnership with post-secondary institutions to make sure every campus has mental health supports for their students and that every single student can easily access these supports when they need them.

Over the past year, I've had the opportunity to visit many colleges, universities and Indigenous institutes, and what struck me was just how widespread and complex student mental health issues are. As I met with students, faculty and administrators, common threads emerged. I came to understand that students don't know what mental health services and supports are available at their institution, and they don't know how to access them. Students also told me that it's complicated to navigate the maze of mental health services and that they don't know how to access the supports that are available to them.

Our post-secondary sector has made student mental health a priority and is committed to providing mental health services and supports to students, many of whom are living on their own for the very first time. We know mental health is essential to student success and we also know that young people aged 15 to 24 are more likely to experience mental illness and/or substance use disorders than any other age group. That's why it's time to eliminate barriers to mental health supports on campus, because when we invest in mental health, we invest in the future—a future where every student can thrive and learn and contribute.

I'm proud to say that the legislative actions we are introducing through the Strengthening Accountability and Student Supports Act, 2024, build on the significant steps we have taken to support the mental health of post-secondary students. In fact, in 2023-24 we are investing more than \$32 million in mental health supports. This includes funding provided directly to post-secondary institutions through multiple grants. For example, the Mental Health Services Grant helps colleges and

universities develop and expand mental health services on campus, such as specialized supports for at-risk groups, peer-to-peer supports, as well as mindfulness and resiliency-building programs.

#### 1400

There is also the Mental Health Worker Grant, which helps post-secondary institutions hire mental health professionals like counsellors, social workers, nurses, care coordinators—all to help the mental health needs of students. In 2022-23, more than 160 positions were filled with the help of this grant, which resulted in shorter wait times for students and less pressure on campus-based services.

Supporting ongoing initiatives that help provide direct one-on-one support for students also continues to be a high priority for our government—initiatives like the Good2Talk mental health helpline for post-secondary students. In 2023-24, our government is investing \$5 million in this initiative so the organization can expand its services to continue to provide free, bilingual and confidential services to students. Good2Talk provides confidential services for post-secondary students in Ontario 24/7, 365 days a year, by phone, text and live chat. When students are feeling anxious, misunderstood or overwhelmed, just having someone to talk about it, someone who is truly there to listen, can make all the difference in the world.

To ensure all students in the province have access to mental health services, our government also invested more than \$12 million in 2023-24 in another important resource: the Get A-Head portal. Students seeking care can access the portal to match with a counselling student in training and their supervisor, based on an area of support, gender, age and ethnicity. This tool not only provides critical and timely mental health services to post-secondary students at low to no cost, but it also gives students in mental health fields of study the opportunity to gain experience delivering supports. I'm pleased to report that in 2022-23, the Get A-Head platform served over 27,000 post-secondary students. And according to a survey carried out by those overseeing the online tool, more than 80% of the students who responded reported improvements in their mental health and well-being, and about 70% of the graduate student trainees surveyed believe the platform enabled them to deliver effective care. What a winning combination. That's why I'm pleased that our most recent investment in this platform will expand access across all publicly assisted colleges, universities and Indigenous institutes in Ontario.

In 2023-24, our government also provided \$750,000 for another important initiative, the Centre for Innovation in Campus Mental Health. This is a partnership between Colleges Ontario, the Council of Ontario Universities, the College Student Alliance, and the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance. With this additional funding, the centre will continue to promote the exchange of knowledge in the student mental health sector, foster collaboration and research, and facilitate access to expertise to meet the mental health needs of all students.

The Ministry of Colleges and Universities is also a partner in this government's multi-year mental health and



addictions strategy that is led by the Ministry of Health. The strategy, Roadmap to Wellness: A Plan to Build Ontario's Mental Health and Addictions System, seeks to address key challenges in the system, including long wait times, barriers to access and uneven quality of service. Our government has committed \$3.8 billion over 10 years in this strategy. We have fulfilled this commitment by flowing \$525 million in new annualized funding into the system since 2019-20. These investments are helping to deliver high-quality care and filling important gaps in the care continuum.

Through these efforts, we want post-secondary students to know they are not alone and that help and resources are always available. The legislative amendments proposed today would further build on our government's efforts to support the well-being of students, requiring all public colleges and universities to have blueprints for their mental health supports and services that will help students in Ontario have access to the right resources when they need them the most.

In closing, I'll say this: I feel optimistic about the historic changes being proposed as part of the Strengthening Accountability and Student Supports Act, 2024. I strongly believe that the new legislative amendments and investments for mental health that Minister Dunlop and I outlined, combined with other important amendments introduced to address incidents of anti-hate and increased transparency of student fees, will go a long way to improving the overall experience of Ontario's post-secondary students. As such, I appreciate your support as we move forward.

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

**Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens:** Through you, Madam Speaker: Considering the blue-ribbon panel recommendation for an urgent \$2.5 billion investment over three years to sustain our post-secondary institutions and the current plan to provide less than half of this amount, that's starving the sector until it implodes—well, it's imploded. This is a crisis created and not found.

Can the government explain how it plans to address the remaining financial gap to prevent the undermining of quality and accessibility of higher education in Ontario?

**Ms. Natalie Pierre:** Thank you to the member opposite for that question. Last week's announcement of \$1.3 billion represents the single largest investment into Ontario's post-secondary system in over a decade. Under the Liberals, colleges and universities had ballooning costs, with students having to pay for the increases.

Unlike the Liberals, propped up by the NDP, we are not going to fund colleges and universities on the backs of the students. Ontario is in the midst of an affordability crisis and asking students to pay more is irresponsible. While inflation is rising and students are needing to focus on paying for heating, eating, housing and other essentials, we will not be asking them to pay more for their education.

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

**Mr. Rick Byers:** I certainly thank the member for her comments on this bill and her direct involvement in it. I

really like the variety of things that we're doing here to support post-secondary institutions with the sustainability fund, and also the efficiencies and operations we'll be working with them on, and the tuition freeze, of course.

But I'm curious, member: You have had direct experience on the mental health front—and just your reflections on how this bill will help that community in our post-secondary institutions. I would appreciate your additional thoughts on that.

**Ms. Natalie Pierre:** Thank you to my colleague. The Ministry of Colleges and Universities has invested and will continue to invest in mental health supports, including the Mental Health Worker Grant and the Mental Health Services Grant, providing institutions funding to support front-line mental health across college and university campuses.

The disparity we see sometimes does not necessarily come—so institutions and different supports and different services vary from colleges and universities, and really, the spirit and intent of this legislation is to make sure that colleges and universities have a policy in place and that students understand how to access the supports and services that are available to them.

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

**MPP Lise Vaugeois:** My question is for the member from Burlington. Highly educated contract lecturers make up 50% of those teaching at our colleges and universities. The pay is abysmal. There are few, if any, benefits, and contract lecturers have to reapply every year for yet another short-term contract. It is ironic that so many of those nurturing the learning and success of upcoming generations are low-wage, precarious workers.

1410

Is there anything in the government's plans to address the inequity and starving of people who are doing so much of the teaching?

**Ms. Natalie Pierre:** As the member opposite will know, Bill 166 addresses student well-being, and it's talking about enhancing mental health services and supports, fee transparency and ensuring that campuses are safe and inclusive learning environments. Ontario is putting students first with a continued focus on efficiency, accountability and sustainability in our world-class education system.

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

**Mr. David Smith:** The number of hate crimes in the province has skyrocketed in recent months. Anyone who reads the newspaper has seen articles describing the hate and alienation many students experience because of their religion, ethnicity and nationality. What is the government doing to ensure that students can learn in an environment that is safe, respectful and inclusive?

**Ms. Natalie Pierre:** The Premier, Minister Dunlop and other members of our caucus have made it abundantly clear that hate has no place in Ontario. Universities and colleges have an obligation to ensure that the rights to learn, to teach and live in peace are upheld on college and

university campuses across the province. Bill 166, if passed, will give the minister the option to issue directives to schools who may fail to meet their responsibilities. Today, we are sending a message to students, to faculties and their families that we will always have their back.

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

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Thanks for the commentary on this piece of legislation. Our critic this morning did a full hour on and really untangled this particular piece of legislation.

I come from a riding where there's the University of Waterloo, Wilfrid Laurier and Conestoga. The issues of mental health on these campuses have been compounded by poverty, by a lack of housing, by a lack of resources. I'm thinking of when the Liberals once mandated and legislated student well-being in the education system, but the funding never flowed. The resources were not there.

What can the member say about legislating a responsibility on these post-secondary institutions? Your own blue-ribbon review indicated that there's core fundamental underfunding on operational funding. So how are these institutions going to meet this moment when you are intentionally underfunding them and setting them up to fail, and by doing so, I think, from a moral perspective, hurting the students in the post-secondary institutions across this great province?

**Ms. Natalie Pierre:** Thank you to the member opposite for her question. I will share that I did, in my tour of various colleges, universities and Indigenous institutes, spend time at the University of Waterloo and spent time at Laurier University and spent time at Conestoga College. During those months of consultation, we were able to identify the issues impacting institutions' mental health policies. We met with students, we met with administrators, we met with faculty members to better understand some of the issues and challenges that students, most importantly, were experiencing on campus. What we heard was that they didn't know what mental health services were available to them on campus nor did they know how to access them or find them. That is one of the reasons why we are moving forward with Bill 166: to make sure that this information is readily available and understood by students on all campuses.

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

**Mr. Deepak Anand:** Before I start, I want to acknowledge the member for Burlington. I had an opportunity to meet her in Mississauga when we are at Sheridan College. It was really good to have you there. Thank you for the passion and the compassion that you have.

Madam Speaker, as you know, my daughter just recently has gone to the University of Windsor. She's doing nursing, first year. My goodness, hats off to these young students. University can be difficult and challenging. In fact, many of my constituents and members have talked about it, that navigating the university and college mental health program often requires a degree of its own.

The question to you is, you've brought this bill. What will this bill do to help those youth?

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** A 30-second response: Back to the member for Burlington.

**Ms. Natalie Pierre:** Thank you to my colleague. Bill 166 will require every college and university to have a mental health policy in place and publish that policy online. It will also require each university to review their institution's mental health policy at least once every five years. This allows students to know and understand their institution's mental health policies, where to go to get support when they need it—

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** That's all the time we have for questions and answers.

Further debate?

**Ms. Bhutla Karpoche:** As always, it is an honour to rise in this House to speak on behalf of the residents of Parkdale–High Park, today to Bill 166, Strengthening Accountability and Student Supports Act.

Our post-secondary institutions are at a breaking point, and this is because of decades of Liberal and Conservative underfunding. That didn't happen overnight. This has been years in the making. Action on this file is long overdue, and we need serious and sustainable solutions to address this crisis. This bill that the government has brought forward just doesn't meet the moment.

We value our world-class post-secondary institutions, and we know the positive impact they have on staff, students and surrounding communities. The Ontario NDP is committed to ensuring that everyone who lives, works and studies at a post-secondary institution has the support they need. That is why we're calling on this Conservative government to immediately commit to serious and reliable funding for colleges and universities and strengthen oversight to end the exploitation of international students.

I'm going to talk a little bit about what's in this bill. The bill requires public colleges and universities to have a student mental health policy that describes the programs, policies, services and supports available at the college or university. The minister may issue directives specifying the elements to be included in this policy and the steps the minister intends to take if the institution fails to comply. The policy would have to be posted on its website, reviewed at least once every five years and reported annually to the board of governors on the implementation and effectiveness.

I agree, we need to have student mental health policies, and I think many or most universities and colleges have a student mental health policy. What they don't have is the funding to provide the support and services to the students. We know from data we see year after year that the demand for mental health supports is increasing.

Speaker, in my first term in office, when I got elected in 2018, the first bill I tabled in this House was to ensure that every child and young person had the right to receive access to timely mental health care. The bill proposed that, for any young person, basically 24 and under, if a mental health support was identified as being needed, they would get access to it within 30 days. This was an ask from

Children's Mental Health Ontario. It was part of the Kids Can't Wait campaign. It was a fully costed plan. And, Speaker, when that bill was brought before this House and debated and voted on at second reading, it actually received unanimous support. But then, after that, the bill languished at committee. The government refused to take any action on it.

1420

Already it was too late to be taking action because the wait-lists were growing and wait times were getting longer. But even if we had taken action then, we are talking about four or five years of work that would have already gone into ensuring that everyone, especially young people, have access to timely mental health care.

This bill also requires public colleges and universities "to have policies and rules to address and combat racism and hate, including but not limited to anti-Indigenous racism, anti-Black racism, anti-Semitism and Islamophobia." Again, the minister may issue directives specifying the elements of the policy and the steps the minister intends to take if an institution fails to comply. This policy, again, would have to be posted on the website, reviewed at least once every five years, and reported annually to the board of governors on the implementation and effectiveness.

Speaker, again, it's very important to have policies, and we support that. We want to ensure, and we must actually ensure, that every student, staff—anybody—in post-secondary education feels welcome and that it's a safe learning and working environment. But we need to make sure that our action as government, and particularly with this Conservative government, is not limited to just policies on paper, that there is proper funding in place to ensure that action can be taken.

Finally, it enables the minister to issue directives to colleges and universities specifying information to be provided to the public about costs associated with attending the institution, such as the ancillary fees, cost of textbooks and other learning materials.

It's very, very important that this bill was tabled as part of a package of announcements that the government made following a report that came out in November, the blue-ribbon panel report—and, of course, the federal announcement of the cap on international study permits.

So, that package that this government announced in March—just last week—includes extending the tuition freeze for Ontario students for at least three or more years while allowing institutions to increase tuition by 5% for out-of-province domestic students, funding totalling just under \$1.3 billion over three years. There is regulation to allow the minister to grant applied master's degrees and the commitment to engage with colleges and universities to create tuition fee transparency.

Now, all of this is important, but I think that, again, it goes back to how for years students—important stakeholders within post-secondary education—have been ringing the alarm bells when it comes to the crisis. And the actions that I just outlined really are very, very small steps when it comes to addressing the scale of the crisis, which

is why, as I said earlier, this bill does not meet the moment. The response to a crisis has to be able to solve the crisis or at least, at minimum, make a significant dent in the problem. But this does little—very, very little.

Speaker, let's not forget that the post-secondary institutions are in a financial crisis for a number of reasons, starting with chronic underfunding. Ontario's per student operating funding, which is really the bulk of the funding from the government, is well below the national average. This has been the case for decades. The Liberals underfunded post-secondary institutions and under the Conservative government, this current government, that funding has decreased even further. Of course, the government has talked about freezing tuition, but has not actually provided the funding to replace the revenue lost from tuition. I agree: We need to reduce tuition. Tuition should not be a barrier to attending a college or a university. But we need to provide the supports to offset that, and that has to be done through increased investments—increased public investments, I should add, because what we do not want is privatization in our public institutions, in our post-secondary institutions.

Of course, as for everyone else and in all sectors, inflation has been an issue. Higher Education Strategy Associates estimates that, accounting for inflation, the stagnant government funding and the tuition freeze have meant that Ontario's public colleges and universities have lost about 31% of the funding, of the government-controlled revenue or the funding that the government provides, since 2010. That's a huge figure: 31%.

Of course, as a result, what has been happening is colleges and universities unfortunately have developed an overreliance on international students. Post-secondary institutions have become dependent on international students. This actually started and ramped up under the Liberals and, under the Conservatives, it has skyrocketed. The Auditor General reviews both colleges and universities. I think multiple reviews have included warnings about this, again, over many years, but the government has failed to act on the AG's recommendations.

I do want to acknowledge here that this growth in international students is happening across the sector. Of course, it's not limited to private career colleges or public-private partnerships, but it is disproportionate in the private career colleges and public-private partnerships. In fact, international students at private career colleges that are partnered with the private colleges have seen skyrocketing increases in enrolment. I think some of the graphs that show the percentage of the increased enrolment have been shared around on social media, and it's just unbelievable. There's one—I don't want to name any institution right now—but it's an increase of 600% when it comes to international students.

Speaker, as you can see, the underfunding of our post-secondary institutions has led to a lot of other new problems as a consequence of the underfunding. What the government has announced in terms of this "historic funding" really is a drop in the bucket. It's far from solving the crisis, but it does not even make a significant dent in the problem.

Don't take it from me, Speaker. Let's listen to what stakeholders had to say about this legislation. I'll start with OCUFA. I'm going to quote directly from OCUFA's statement: "The Minister of Colleges and Universities recognizes that we are facing a funding crisis, but the gap between what has been provided and what is needed is massive." That's from Nigmendra Narain, who is the president of OCUFA. They go on to say, "This is a one-time drop in the bucket." As well, "The solution to the chronic underfunding of Ontario's universities is simple: political will to make a true investment in per-student funding to get us up to the Canadian average."

The request from important stakeholders like OCUFA is simply to have enough funding to be at the Canadian average, because right now, Ontario is dead last, and we have been dead last for many, many years.

**1430**

I will add to that and say we should make it a goal to be the best. We want to be leaders. Investing in post-secondary institutions, investing in our students, in the supports and services—and in providing that funding—has huge economic benefits. It pays for itself and more in the long term, so it is extremely important. As OCUFA has said, at the very least we need to be at the Canadian average.

Another stakeholder, Council of Ontario Universities, goes on to say, "The sector will continue to adapt and evolve to better serve students and find even more innovative ways to drive greater efficiencies, as outlined in the sector's efficiency update. However, the funding gap is just far too large to close through efficiencies alone. Ontario's universities remain committed to working with the government on a longer-term solution to fix a broken funding model that is impacting all universities, so that they can continue to support student success and create the highly skilled talent and innovation our economy needs."

Speaker, they go on to say, "We are calling on the Ontario 2024 budget to provide the additional multi-year base funding as recommended by the panel." They're of course referring to the blue-ribbon panel.

I don't have too much time, but I do want to include the voices of students. First maybe I'll share reaction from the workers, particularly CUPE.

Actually, before I go on to that, Speaker, I do want to state in the House that since the government tabled this bill, the past number of days, CUPE 3903, representing contract faculty, teaching assistants, graduate assistants, research assistants and part-time librarians and archivists at York University, has been on strike, and we all know why, really. In fact, it's not a surprise. The low wages that CUPE 3903 workers experience do not come near to protecting workers from the skyrocketing inflation, the cost-of-living crisis. It is really heartbreaking when you hear that university workers—the workers who are really carrying a big percentage of the burden of teaching and the day-to-day operation of our classrooms and of the universities and colleges—have to rely on food banks to survive, and also have to work multiple jobs to survive. What kind of message are we sending to Ontarians? But

also, what kind of message are we sending when it comes to what we value as Ontarians?

Speaker, I was quite surprised to learn that, in fact, it's been a trend. A lot of the teaching assistants, the graduate assistants, they not only are now making up a larger percentage of the faculty, they're now actually doing more than 50%—they teach more than 50% of the courses, and they are the precarious workers of our post-secondary education system.

I only have two minutes left. I did want to make sure I included voices from the students, so I will share a quote from the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance, who were here just recently as part of their lobby day. They say that—they go on to add some of the things that they welcome, but they really want to make sure that a lot of the funding need that exists on campuses when it comes to mental health services is focused. They're appreciative that there's some action on this, but of course, a lot more needs to be done.

Speaker, I'll just end by saying that there are aspects of the bill that we support, but to truly address the crisis, what is needed is funding. So I urge the government to make the investments to have a world-class post-secondary education system in our province, to not only show that we value that and that we want to support students and faculty and everybody as part of the sector, but that this is something that is going to benefit us all.

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

**Mr. Rick Byers:** I thank the speaker very much for your remarks on this bill; it's an important one.

There are a number of elements to this bill that I think are so supportive for post-secondary institutions: the sustainability fund, which provides underlying support for the sector, working with universities and post-secondary institutions—to work with them on their operations to make them work toward long-term sustainability; the tuition freeze, such a benefit for students; and, of course, the work on the mental health element for student support.

My question to the member is, isn't this a wide range of measures that you could see supporting through this bill?

**Ms. Bhutla Karpoche:** I thank the member for his question. As I stated in my remarks, there are certainly steps that have been taken in this bill that are addressing concerns that have been raised by stakeholders, especially students; however, so much more needs to be done. At the end of the day, we can have amazing, strong policies in place that are posted on the website and that everybody is aware of, but it doesn't mean that in reality anything is changing, because the funding is lacking.

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

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Thanks so much to the member from Parkdale–High Park. I love the fact that she focused on the experience of international students.

I've spent a lot of time with Conestoga students in my riding. One student from India told me that she came to Ontario to learn, to gain experience, to build Canadian relationships. She didn't come here to learn online.

Can you imagine, Madam Speaker, coming here just to learn online? I hope we can all agree that this is wrong.

Alex Usher, who has been a very vocal voice, obviously, on post-secondary institutions, says that—that of declining domestically sourced funding, because of Liberals and now this Conservative government, you've now offered only \$700 million over three years in new public money, and about a third of what its own panel recommended.

To the member: How do you think post-secondary institutions are going to cope with this chronic and institutional underfunding going forward?

**Ms. Bhutla Karpoche:** I want to thank the member from Waterloo for her question. She's absolutely right; we really have to also focus on what we can do for the international students who are here. For a number of years, they have been exploited. They came to Canada and to Ontario with such high hopes and dreams, only to be sorely disappointed after they've arrived. Not only do they also have to go through the challenges of the cost-of-living crisis—student housing is lacking in a big way—but then to find that classes are online and to struggle to be able to put a roof over your head while you are trying to also get an education; that is not right.

1440

If we don't increase the funding, what is essentially going to happen is that more supports and services, even the existing ones, are under threat and at risk for cutting.

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

**Mr. David Smith:** I want to thank the member from Parkdale–High Park for her contribution to this discussion. Students, before coming to Canada to do their studies, I'm sure did a lot of research before deciding to come here. And they have seen a lot of great things that are here that can well fit into molding their careers into better global citizens. Bill 166 is a major win for students and post-secondary transparency across the province.

I'm worried that members of the opposition may choose to vote against this bill. I want to remind the House that this additional transparency for students—

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

**Mr. David Smith:** Question: Will the opposition vote to increase transparency for students and their families and support Bill 166?

**Ms. Bhutla Karpoche:** I thank the member for his question. I'll say two things: One, I think your time would be better spent worrying if you're actually doing something to help students. Again, as I shared reaction and thoughts from stakeholders, I have not heard a single stakeholder call this bill, as the member called it, a massive win—no. In fact, we're hearing the opposite, that the government has finally decided after, again, decades of inaction—not just under you, the Liberals and you, but it has gotten worse under the Conservatives for sure. This is a small step. Even the funding is a drop in the bucket. There's a lot more that needs to be done.

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

**MPP Jill Andrew:** Earlier today, the government and other members of the House spoke about the importance of International Women's Day and the importance of us nurturing the leaders of tomorrow. I would like to ask the member for Parkdale–High Park how important it is to invest in said institutions, in our colleges and our universities, that are nurturing these leaders of tomorrow. Because I suspect it's impossible—it's impossible—for us to continue having women CEOs, presidents, chancellors, MPPs, all of these phenomenal women that we want to celebrate on International Women's Day, without proper funding.

So, when the government's own expert panel recommends \$2.5 billion over three years, and the government invests roughly half that, what's that impact on our post-secondary sector and students?

**Ms. Bhutla Karpoche:** I want to thank the member from Toronto–St. Paul's for her question. I'll say this: Many decades ago—I mean, a century ago—there was no strong public education, right? But over time, governments, leaders and people realized that you really need to invest in education, and so primary education became essential; everybody had the right to go to gain a primary education. Then, years later, they realized, “Oh, no, if you want to succeed, at the very minimum everybody needs a high school education.” So up until high school, everybody had a right to go to school and get an education, and governments actually funded that.

In this day and age, you need a master's. It's the minimum you need—a bachelor's for sure. Certainly, I don't want to—I'm not talking about the trades. There is obviously that pathway as well. But I'm saying, in terms of—

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

**Ms. Natalie Pierre:** Students have a responsibility for their education, and that means they need and deserve to know exactly where their hard-earned dollars are being spent. One of the three aspects of Bill 166 deals with matters of basic transparency around costs associated with ancillary fees, the cost of textbooks and other materials.

Speaker, can the member inform us on how they plan to vote on Bill 166 and if they support transparency in student fees in our post-secondary sector?

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

**Ms. Bhutla Karpoche:** I thank the member for her question. Before I respond to her question, Speaker, I want to just finish my thought from the previous question and again make it very clear that, of course, there are many, many pathways to getting good jobs. We have a very strong skilled trades system in Ontario, which we want to strengthen and improve. We are fully supportive of that. We're very appreciative of the contribution of skilled trades in Ontario's economy.

But when it comes to—

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** That's all the time for questions and answers.

I recognize the member for Don Valley East for further debate.

**Mr. Adil Shamji:** It's an honour and a pleasure to rise in the chamber today to speak about Bill 166, the Strengthening Accountability and Student Supports Act.

At face value, this bill is about three things: combatting racism and hatred, increasing mental health supports and services, and then increasing cost transparency. You'll forgive that I'm a little bit skeptical about the government's actual intention to deliver on these promises when, for example, on the issue of racism, we have a government that, immediately on taking power, slashed racism funding.

You'll forgive me if I'm skeptical about a government that says it wants to fight anti-Semitism and Islamophobia yet, when given the opportunity to pass the Our London Family Act, chooses not to do so.

You'll forgive me if I'm skeptical about a government that wants to introduce more mental health services and yet has been underfunding our primary care and health care system, leaving many people without access to a family doctor, which is for most people their main source of mental health care.

Finally, you'll forgive me for being skeptical about this government's interest in cost transparency when, under this government, the term "transparency" has become an oxymoron.

Furthermore, this bill is on the background of, currently, our province being dead last for funding post-secondary education, dead last for supporting operating budgets and dead last for contributing a fraction of our GDP on post-secondary education. Now, why is that and how did we get here? Because immediately on taking power, this government started hacking away at colleges and universities. They cut OSAP by 40%. They eliminated the six-month interest-free grace period for students for repaying their loans. They capped funding for domestic students; consequently, right now, there are 20,000 students in public universities for which those universities receive no public funding.

Because our universities and colleges are suffering, because 10 of 23 universities are currently running a deficit because they can't balance their books, international student admissions have gone up under this government by 82%; and this government has opened the floodgates to private career colleges, with there presently being over 500 of them.

For a government that wants to address mental health challenges, let's take a moment to reflect on that. Because what we know is that amongst international students—again, I remind you that international student rates have gone up dramatically under this government—we have an epidemic of mental health challenges. We have an epidemic of international suicides right now.

Not only will I point out that these numbers have gone up under the government; I will reiterate my skepticism that this government is interested in doing anything about that because if they were interested, then this bill wouldn't just touch on public colleges and universities. It would be

sweeping enough to ensure that there are mental health supports for students in private colleges and in career colleges, but it's not. So even if and when this passes, even with the investments from last year, there will remain an epidemic of suicide amongst international students at private colleges and career colleges in our province.

**1450**

So let's recap first how we got here in the first place: deliberate underfunding by this government, limited domestic students' access to post-secondary education because they capped that, the slashing of OSAP, and then they've allowed subpar, private diploma mills to take hold in our province. This bill does nothing to address that.

Now, we know a week ago there was an announcement of \$1.3 billion to supposedly stabilize colleges and universities. The government's own task force to look at that, the blue-ribbon panel, the panel that looked at the crisis we have in the post-secondary sector, gave sweeping recommendations that this government is refusing to implement, one of which was an infusion of \$2.5 billion and the best that the members on the other side could come up with was barely half of that. This legislation is entirely inadequate and does not come close to meeting the needs of the post-secondary sector.

This bill could have been an opportunity to fix the shortfalls of their underfunding, to give our institutions the support they need, also recognizing that every \$1 spent on post-secondary education brings back \$1.40 to our province's economy. This is not about spending; this is about investing.

Now, let's actually dive into the content of this bill. We should first acknowledge that universities and colleges in this province do have mental health and anti-hate policies; they're just not properly funded. All this bill does is propose to place a great degree of power in the hands of the ministry, but it implements no requirements to seek input into what those directives should be—not from colleges or universities and not from students or faculty. Mental health policies, anti-hate and anti-racism policies are for helping vulnerable and marginalized groups. They deserve solutions specifically built for those communities, not just handed down from the ministry. So I ask, will the ministry commit to speaking to all affected groups before handing down those policies?

You'll forgive me for saying, yet again, that skepticism is a central theme of my remarks today for a government that proposes to want to support marginalized, vulnerable and under-represented groups. Let's not forget that just about 24 hours ago, on the eve of International Women's Day, they chose to silence the independent female members of our caucus. So how can this government be trusted to wield the power of issuing directives supposedly in support of marginalized and vulnerable communities when they've proven time and time again that they fail to do so and use their power in a harmful manner?

By giving the government so much control over universities and the ability to issue directives unilaterally and without consultation, if done poorly, it could also hamper the abilities of universities to act autonomously,

and they should be allowed to act autonomously. Their policies and priorities are extensively vetted by governing councils, which include professional students, faculty members and a variety of other members who represent universities and colleges. If done poorly, it will not achieve its intended goal of fighting hatred and racism, and I fully acknowledge and support the ambition for all of us to fight hatred and racism in all of its forms.

We can all agree that mental health and anti-hate are great initiatives and should be strongly supported by every member in this House but, as ever, this government has a habit of pointing fingers at others rather than doing anything themselves. What we hear when we talk to colleges and universities is that policy directives are not what they need. They need actual support. It's long past time that this government put their money where their mouth is. For example, this government announced money to mental health supports in the form of a mental health app. That's great. But when a student is in a mental health crisis, what they need is in-person support from a competent and well-funded mental health team. That takes money—again, not policy directives—and this government has not done their share to support that. When students are feeling at risk from hate or racism, universities need more than policy. They need more than words. They need funding for counsellors, for wellness spaces and for all of the wraparound supports.

We value our campuses as safe venues for expressing ideas, but it takes resources—money—to build in the safeguards to bring about those environments. For example, it takes money to hire constables to keep everyone safe on campus, to keep everyone on campus safe during protests, demonstrations or sit-ins. It takes money to bring in campus security for longer hours. For students to feel safe and supported, it costs money.

As it stands, post-secondary institutions in the province are already not receiving enough funding from the provincial government. The recent announcement by the Minister of Colleges and Universities for an investment package of \$1.3 billion falls far short of the recommendations set out by the blue-ribbon panel on colleges and universities, which required \$2.5 billion over the next three years.

Additionally, a key point is that the \$1.3 billion that has been promised is merely a one-time injection. It does nothing to ensure the long-term sustainability of our institutions. It gives universities and colleges no ability to plan their futures, and therein is the key failing. The blue-ribbon panel's report was on the sustainment of our post-secondaries—not seeing them grow and thrive, just sustaining. It's the bottom line, the bare minimum, that this government is still failing to deliver. Our institutions desperately need ongoing and reliable support from the government to offer the services that Ontarians need them to. Colleges, universities offer so much to our province and their communities, and it's a shame that our government cannot see them as the investment that they are.

As a result of this shaky, unreliable support, we are seeing the consequences. As we speak, programs have closed in Guelph, at Queen's, TMU, Nipissing, University of Ottawa, Laurier, Saint Paul, Western, Trent, Brock. These are strong universities that should be confident in their ability to offer world-class programs, but this government's half measures have left them unable to offer the education that Ontario students want and need.

Madam Speaker, I want to use the last of my time to draw attention to the beginning of the bill. It reads, "This section applies to every college of applied arts and technology and to every publicly-assisted university." What's noteworthy in that is what is not said. There are hundreds of private career colleges in Ontario that are entirely left out of this bill, hundreds of colleges for which this government is paying no attention to their mental health challenges, no attention to the proliferation of hatred and racism, no care whatsoever, likely because putting those requirements on private colleges would be cutting into their profits.

While I've spent my time discussing the shortcomings of the bill, I can say, of course, it is essential to support the expansion of mental health supports and the expansion of measures to fight against hatred and racism in all of its forms. But I'm baffled why this government would decide to exclude around 45,000 students from these standards. These colleges have the lowest level of regulation in the industry, and that seems to be continuing under this government.

**1500**

As I reflect on what is offered in this bill, it is incredibly superficial. It skips the underlying challenges that our post-secondary sector faces. It doesn't come with the necessary, substantial infusion of funding that is required in order to fight hatred and racism in all of its forms and to deliver the mental health supports that our students need.

For as long as students are struggling to make their next rent payment, struggling to make their next tuition payment because OSAP is so desperately underfunded—no matter how many policy directives come down from the Minister of Colleges and Universities, we will continue to see mental health challenges and we will continue to see our colleges and universities stumble from month to month, year to year. They deserve better. I thank you for your time.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche):**  
Questions?

**Mr. Rick Byers:** I thank the member for his remarks on this. I was listening to your comments about the challenges that students are facing and certainly understand those challenges. I've got three boys. They're post-school now, but when they were going through it it was a big burden. Frankly, it's even more challenging these days, arguably, with the housing that you mentioned.

Looking at this bill and seeing that it's freezing tuition fees for several more years after the benefits that have been there already, including a 10% reduction—I look at those benefits and say that those are very important benefits for

students. My question is, really, don't those benefits allow you to look at this bill and say, "Yes, I'd like to support it and support students as well?"

**Mr. Adil Shamji:** I thank you for the question. I fully support the tuition freeze. However, what I want to highlight is that at a time of an unprecedented affordability crisis—we know rents have gone up; this government has abolished rent control, for example; the cost of living has gone up; groceries have gone up—what hasn't gone up is the amount of student assistance. In fact, as I referenced in my earlier remarks, the amount of OSAP has gone down by 40%. And even if you qualify for OSAP, that OSAP comes largely in the form not of grants, but loans. Again, as I mentioned, those loans no longer have a six-month interest-free grace period.

So our students need substantially more support. The tuition freeze is part of that, but I would be looking for vastly more, specifically in terms of additional financial support and increasing OSAP as well.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche):** Next question?

**Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens:** My question is to the member from Don Valley East. Finally the government is addressing some of the long-standing post-secondary issues that this Conservative government really has been ignoring. It's not enough, but it is actually a start, and this is true. It's been five years of neglect; that is also true.

But it is also true that the sector had been neglected by the previous Liberal government as well. The leader of the Ontario Liberals has not made any commitment to freeze tuition. Certainly there is no commitment to lowering them, as of yet. Could the member from Don Valley East elaborate on tuition fees and the importance of committing to lowering them within the perspective of how students are struggling after nearly a decade and a half of neglect?

**Mr. Adil Shamji:** I thank you for the question. I can express our party's commitment to freeze tuition, and I'll remind you that under our last government we had the most generous program of student assistance. We had a debt-free tuition program that unleashed the potential for post-secondary education to people from low-income backgrounds who would never have imagined it.

I see that you're encouraging me to think back even further in history. I think something that's often lost in the narrative is that, once upon a time, there was an NDP government in this province. During that period, post-secondary funding was last of all of the provinces in this country.

*Interjection.*

**Mr. Adil Shamji:** Listen, you can watch The Agenda from last Monday night. It is a fact. Let's focus on addressing the challenges that we face right now and acknowledge there is a lot of work that needs to be done, and there has been no government in this province's history that has got it perfect.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche):** Next question?

**Mr. Andrew Dowie:** I want to thank the member for his comments today.

I know that when going to university, I always felt it was a house for freedom of expression. You got to be who you wanted to be and to really say what you wanted to say. So I know many members of our House were alarmed when we saw that at the federal level, MP Charlie Angus tabled Bill C-372, which is a private member's bill that seeks to prescribe jail terms for speaking well of fossil fuels. Do you know what? I'm not here to discuss the potential uses or harms associated with fossil fuels, but I'm incredibly concerned by the Orwellian rhetoric of the opposition's federal cousins. We've seen an onslaught against free speech in the public domain and at our province's universities.

Bill 166 aims to bolster free speech at our universities. Will you vote for free speech or will you send students to 1984?

**Mr. Adil Shamji:** I must admit, I'm thoroughly perplexed by the opposite member's question. I think he's watching too much of the House of Commons, perhaps in preparation of wanting to run there in anticipation of the next election. I don't know.

What I will tell you is that free speech is sacred here. We know that our post-secondary institutions are a bastion of free speech, and we need to make sure that they are safe places. We've seen a wave of various kinds of hatred and racism. We've seen anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, and anti-Arab and anti-Palestinian racism. We've seen hate speech directed to the LGBTQ2S+ community as well, and anti-Asian, anti-Black and towards women as well. So while we fight to ensure that there are safe places for us to speak freely, we do also want to make sure that the protections are in place so that students can study safely and focus on their studies.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche):** Next question?

**Ms. Natalie Pierre:** Thank you to the independent member for his comments. Under the Liberals, students would be paying more for less. The Liberals opposed performance-based funding, opposed a freeze on tuition and supported increasing tuition. So my question is: Will the Liberals again oppose strengthening accountability and student supports?

**Mr. Adil Shamji:** Under this government, we've seen a slashing of OSAP, a slashing of funding for operating budgets and restrictions implemented that have led to international students being seen as cash cows. And so, I consider it very rich for this government to look back years and years in history to largely invent things in order to distract from their own mismanagement and incompetence on the post-secondary file.

If you're asking will I support increased mental health supports, will I increase initiatives that will provide more funding to university and college students so that they don't have to live hand-to-mouth, of course I will support initiatives of those types. The main crux of my criticism here is that this bill doesn't come even close to going far enough to support our post-secondary sector and the students who will be the foundation of our economy going forward.



**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutila Karpoche):** Next question?

**MPP Lise Vaugeois:** Thank you to the member from Don Valley East, and particularly for the reminders about the cuts to actual funding supports for domestic students.

After my PhD, I taught for 11 years in a university, and I've certainly seen the increase of international students and the stresses that they're under, and the exploitation that they're experiencing. We have an institution that's based on the exploitation of international students and the exploitation of the existing talent of the graduates of those very same institutions who are precarious workers. That includes library and support staff.

Now, I doubt that the government intends to be transparent about this aspect of how universities are being supported, but I know that when students learn about the exploitation that underpins their education, they're really shocked. They're really upset. They're asking themselves, "Do I want to be part of this? Is this what it means to get an education?"

So my question is, what do you think the message is to students and Ontarians when our post-secondary institutions are based on exploitation?

1510

**Mr. Adil Shamji:** I thank you for the question because I think it's particularly prescient. When you talk to international students, they know that they are the piggy bank that is funding colleges and universities. It's heartbreaking to hear from them that they were sold on a dream and a promise from faraway lands that they would be able to come here, settle and start a new life with hope for prosperity in the future. When they come here and realize that their tuition is orders of magnitude higher than domestic students and that the promise that was made to them can't be delivered upon, it tells them that their individual dignity does not count; it tells them that they count for nothing more than what's in their bank accounts.

The only thing that they should be focusing on is their education and how they can settle their roots here and give back to our country and our economy.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutila Karpoche):** Further debate?

**Ms. Laura Smith:** It is with great pleasure that I rise to speak to the second reading of Bill 166, Strengthening Accountability and Student Supports Act, 2024. This bill is an amendment to the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities Act that legislates three key pillars. The first pillar: Every college and university is required to have a student mental health policy that describes the programs, policies, services and supports available at the college or university with respect to student mental health. The second pillar: Every college and university is required to have policies and rules to address and combat racism and hate, including but not limited to anti-Indigenous racism, anti-Black racism, anti-Semitism and Islamophobia. And the third pillar: The minister is authorized to issue directives in relation to the information to be provided about the costs associated with attendance at the college or university.

My remarks today will focus on the second key pillar.

The legislation, if passed, works in an effort to reduce hatred and racism within colleges and universities and holds our post-secondary institutions accountable with increased transparency.

Post-secondary institutions should be an inclusive place for all students. As a mother of post-secondary students, I am very aware that the environment on campus should be that of vitality and growth, where our students feel safe, valued and fostered. And these students should know that supports are available if they need help.

I truly wish that this legislation was unnecessary and the issue of hate did not exist, but, sadly, this is a very real circumstance for my community. For example, a constituent whose child was living in residence on campus recently received a note under his door. Drawn on the paper was a swastika and a hateful and threatening anti-Semitic message. I wish I could repeat the message, but the words are actually too disturbing for repetition.

Another constituent contacted me, very upset. Her daughter had been chased out of a university party after other students had learned she was Jewish, forcing that student to run to another location, and she hid there for hours before she felt she could leave and go home.

Another student was targeted by other students who drew over her peaceful walls—she had created a beautiful peace mural, and other students then later decided to write harmful and hateful threats for all to be seen on the walls within that college. That student is now so terrified that she refuses to go back to campus and will not go back to finish her final, fourth year of her degree. She's currently attempting to request leave of the college to complete her final year virtually. The worst part of this situation was that this student felt threatened by not only the other students; it was my understanding that her instructors also took part in anti-Semitic activity that made her feel not only uncomfortable on campus but not able to return.

Another student could not leave his campus residence because of an angry mob of protesters. They were an intimidating group who chanted hateful messages against his faith on the field outside of his room. That young Jewish man only wanted to cross the field on campus so that he could get to the library to study, and that afternoon, he wasn't able to leave his room, not even to go get food in the food hall, to get dinner, because he quite simply did not feel safe.

A last example, Speaker, is yet another campus. An Indigenous student was personally targeted, and paint was smeared on a three-storey mural that nods to Indigenous stories of creation. One of the students on campus told investigators that the sight of such blatant hate made him feel like he had to throw up.

This is just a small, tiny fraction of the countless acts of hate on a variety of university and college campuses which are far more than a distraction or a disruption for learning for our students, especially when these terrible acts of intimidation, abuse and sometimes assault happen without any ramifications against the person or the group perpetrating the hate. Further, when these actions are not

recorded by the university or college or, worse yet, never adjudicated, how does this reflect on the post-secondary educational system?

Life is complicated, but if we cannot protect our children, our students, our future leaders who simply want to learn and grow in an inclusive environment where they can flourish in peace and safety, if we cannot provide that safe environment, or worse, not hold these bad actors accountable, then I believe the time has come for our government to force standards on our post-secondary institutions.

Speaker, it is common knowledge that hate crimes have drastically increased towards students on college and university campuses across Ontario and Canada. It is honestly horrific to think of all the aforementioned forms of discrimination that occur every day in the lives of students in this province, and our government cannot stand for this, which is why I'm proud of the Minister of Colleges and Universities and the PA for introducing this legislation.

Our government is committed to supporting post-secondary education, which is a healthy and sustainable place so that students have the best post-secondary experience possible and are ready for the jobs and careers of today and tomorrow.

Since 2014 there have been over 500 publicly recorded hate incidents on campus, according to an investigative study by the Toronto Star and the Investigative Journalism Bureau. Our government does not condone any of these reported hate incidents, and we also know that so many hate incidents go unreported. This is so disturbing, but something that we must acknowledge and work to address.

Our government understands the realities that many marginalized students face on campus. Whether it's hatred through speech or hatred through actions, these issues need to be tackled for the long-term future success and safety of those in our colleges and universities. But the grim reality is that students no longer feel safe and this rising fear for their safety is impacting their overall mental health and well-being, as well as their academic success.

A new anti-hate policy that creates safer campuses and a streamlined complaint process for students empowers schools to deal with all forms of racism, all while upholding the principles of free speech. Direction to institutions would support greater consistency with how these incidents are dealt with and ensure a code of conduct is clearly communicated to help protect students and ensure they feel safe on campus.

Our government has developed several initiatives to put student safety first. This includes the Campus Safety Grant, a \$6-million investment annually to help assist and support publicly assisted colleges and universities with campus safety programs like safety training; consent workshops; security equipment, such as cameras and emergency systems; safe walk programs; and a variety of violence prevention workshops.

Students in my riding and across this province are being verbally harassed, having their property vandalized and sometimes being targeted into situations that become

violent. The reality is that many students are fearful to report these hate incidents, and when they do, some schools fail to take the appropriate action.

The Ontario Human Rights Code, which applies to all colleges and universities, prohibits discrimination based on race, place of origin, disability, age, religious belief, sexual orientation and more. Since January 2019, all publicly assisted colleges and universities in our province have implemented a free speech policy that meets a minimum standard prescribed by the government and based on best practices from around the world.

The policy protects free speech at colleges and universities, but does not allow hate speech, discrimination, harassment or other illegal forms of speech. But it is very concerning, especially since the outbreak of war between Israel and Hamas on October 7, 2023. I have witnessed this, sadly, first-hand, the rising tension among students on campuses across this province. Concerning incidences have been reported all across Ontario involving students, staff, student groups and visitors to post-secondary campuses. Given the current lack of accountability with respect to hate speech, it is clear that a broader, proactive approach is needed so that incidences are dealt with in a consistent manner.

1520

I support this legislation. As a mother and politician, I have been advocating for this for a very long time, so much so that my advocacy started prior to my being elected. As a government, we will continue to work with our colleges and universities, student groups and other partners to make sure our post-secondary institutions support a bright future for the people in this province.

I want to thank the Minister of Colleges and Universities and the parliamentary assistant for their work. Ontario is putting students first with a continued focus on efficiency, campus safety and accountability from our world-class post-secondary education system.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche):** Questions? The member from Cambridge. No—

**Mr. Jeff Burch:** Niagara Centre.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche):** From Niagara Centre.

**Mr. Jeff Burch:** As many have pointed out, this bill makes some important strides in student mental health, safe and inclusive campuses and transparency. But the bill does nothing to address the financial crisis that successive governments have created in our post-secondary sector. Without adequate resources, it will have little impact on the support and services available to students.

Why would the government come forward with a bill that does some important things but doesn't adequately fund so that those things can actually happen?

**Ms. Laura Smith:** Thank you to the member for his question. There are three pillars involved in this act. Financial issues are strongly at the heart of a lot of what we're doing, including freezing the tuition fees. But not only that, our province is supporting the financial sustainability of the post-secondary sector by creating a Postsecondary Education Sustainability Fund, which will

provide for all institutions in the amount of \$1.3 billion. This fund will support financial sustainability by providing \$700 million in broad base supports to all institutions as well as targeted supports of \$203 million for institutions with greater financial need.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche):** Next question.

**Mrs. Daisy Wai:** We all know that hate crimes and racism have no place in our province. Our government is very clear that we are totally against it. There is no place in it for us. It really bothers me when I hear some of the cases you mentioned of what has been happening in the colleges. I agree with you that I believe in free speech but cannot let the campuses continue to see the rise in speech and the actions that blur the lines across into hate.

My question is, will this bill seek to prevent instances of hate and address instances properly should they arise?

**Ms. Laura Smith:** Thank you to the member for her question. Although institutions are required to follow the law, institutions are also autonomous with great flexibility on how they handle internal matters. This includes free speech. They need to recognize that institutions—there's disparity between what universities have said would be a violation of their codes and how institutions have acted when faced with those instances.

This legislation, if passed, will create a standard process for prevention, reporting and addressing matters of hate and discrimination on campus. Getting this in place, we know that it will make a difference. We've actually heard from schools, and they have said they do not have the ability to properly intervene with these sorts of situations. Frankly, that's unacceptable. This pillar will provide them with the methodology—

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche):** Thank you.

Next question?

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** As the finance critic, I'm very concerned about the operational funding for post-secondary institutions. We do know that these institutions have become very dependent on international students. With the reduction in international students and the failure to meet the moment, we now know that the PSE sector will be seeing a 15% cutback, which is only comparable to 1996 Mike Harris.

How is this government going to support post-secondary institutions in their core business of education?

**Ms. Laura Smith:** The member outlined the federally imposed cap on international students, and Ontario will need to make decisions on how to allocate a reduced, defined number of international study permits to the post-secondary sector on how to address these new provincial attestation letter requirements for the province.

In the coming weeks, Ontario will determine how to allocate the application cap among institutions that are eligible to enroll with international students, with a focus on in-demand labour markets, and implement a provincial attestation letter.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche):** Further debate?

**MPP Jill Andrew:** I'm honoured to stand and share a few words on Bill 166, Strengthening Accountability and Student Supports Act.

The first thing I'd like to say before I start is a huge thank you to the Women and Gender Studies Institute at the University of Toronto. I am a graduate, an alumna, of WGSJ, and yesterday we had a chance to sit on a panel—myself with about 13 other graduates of the WGSJ program—to celebrate International Women's Day. It was really a good reminder of just how important the post-secondary sector is to the social, cultural and economic health of our province. I was reminded just listening to some of the stories of the graduates on that panel about how incredibly important it is for us to invest in post-secondary so we can have the leaders in law, in politics, in food justice, in the arts, in education, in health care that were there last night.

I just want to say thank you to WGSJ. I was a student there back in 2007, a lifetime ago, and my commitment to trying my best to bring equity issues into this House, to grapple with race and gender and class and sexuality and all of our social locations and how they impact our experiences in institutions like politics, I really do owe that analysis, that lens, to WGSJ.

We really do need to properly fund our colleges and universities, because there's no question that they are at the heart of creating our next generation of leaders, and, frankly, at the heart of keeping a sustainable economy, because that's where our future hard workers will come from.

I want to say that I appreciate the government's effort to actually name some equity issues that they're looking to address in our post-secondary sector. Bill 166 claims to want to address the mental health crisis in post-secondary, and that is commendable, as it's written in the bill, that you want to address that.

You also mention that you want to address things like anti-Black racism, anti-Semitism, anti-Palestinian racism, all forms of racism; homophobia, transphobia. Equity issues will be addressed at universities, reportedly, by this Bill 166. While that is a very good thought—it's a good idea; it's a good goal—I worry about the history of this government. I'll never forget: One of the first things that shocked me in this Legislature was a few years back when the Conservative government slashed funding to the Anti-Racism Directorate. At one point, it had a budget of \$1,000 to address inequities here in the province of Ontario.

**1530**

So it's a bit mind-boggling to believe, to be frank, that this government is actually committed to addressing those equity issues that I just mentioned, that are in your bill—and I actually support that piece of the bill, for sure, around addressing equity issues and mental health issues—when this is the same government that has slashed hundreds of millions of dollars in mental health supports. This is the same government that literally attacked our public school curriculum and tried their best to literally erase the lives and experiences of 2SLGBTQIA+ community members in curriculum—the same government, if I may just say, that

voted down our bill to have gender-affirming health care recognized, and a simple advisory committee of, guess what, trans folks and other members from our 2SLGBTQIA+ community to be able to speak to the Minister of Health. So it's difficult to believe that these equity issues are really at the heart of this legislation.

Furthermore, as I heard from my caucus and from other caucuses, the independent members—I wasn't here yesterday, but the thought of the government trying to shut down the voices of women in this Legislature, that's a significant inequity hours before International Women's Day. So again, while I am supportive of what have this bill says in writing about addressing inequities and mental health challenges, based on the track record, I have significant worries about whether or not this is actually the case.

And from my experience, from talking to folks—funny enough, many of whom don't want to be named—from a lot of post-secondary institutions—we've got one institution in my riding. We have George Brown, and we thank God for George Brown, because they have 12 child care centres located around the city, and we have our own Casa Loma Child Care Centre, which is such a beacon of hope for those students who are eager to join our education, early education, care programs. But we also know that many of these programs are graduating students who, within weeks, months, in the industry, realize that they cannot get jobs that allow them to actually afford to live in this province during an affordability crisis. So what happens? We lose ECEs. We lose folks who could be in our communities working, contributing to our economy, if they were able to get the proper salaries that they deserve.

This issue with supporting our post-secondary institutions—and we know that this has been an issue of chronic underfunding for decades, and it is not only the responsibility of this government. I've learned in the five years that I was here that the Liberal government certainly had a thing or two to do with chronic underfunding of our post-secondary institutions. But we are here in 2024, and this is the government of the day, the Conservative government. So I wonder why the government's own expert panel, the blue-ribbon panel, recommended \$2.5 billion of investment over three years just to stay afloat. That's really important: just to stay afloat. So we're not necessarily talking about being excellent; we're talking about "just to stay afloat." Why would this government fund just barely half of that, and what does that message show?

We want to talk about equity. We want to give more students mental health supports. But who is going to do this? Policy needs people power to help implement said policies and initiatives. And if I'm a post-secondary student walking into an office where I'm seeking counsel because I am struggling—maybe it's a mental health situation; maybe I've just been kicked out of my home for coming out; maybe I can't afford food and I'm not concentrating in class and my grades are slipping. If I walk into that office and there's no human body there, how do I get the help I need?

So at the crux, this bill is not addressing the financial crisis that our post-secondary schools are dealing with.

And in fact, the bill does not address that this government and the previous Liberal governments have sort of, you know, stuck the price tag on the backs of international students.

If we think about international students—you know, you're coming here. You may not have many friends, unless you're connected on social media before you arrive. You want to have a little bit of entertainment, if you can, on the side. You want to be able to go to the movies. You want to be able to have a treat at a restaurant. Heck, you might even find someone in this wonderful province and you might want to take them out on a date. These things are highly impossible when your tuition fees are triple or more the tuition of domestic students. And even the tuition rates for domestic students are quite egregious.

So we're not properly funding post-secondary education. We're not addressing the staffing crisis in post-secondary education.

*Interjection.*

**MPP Jill Andrew:** I mean, one of the government members just said, "Yes, we are." Well, tell that to CUPE 3903 over at York University, who are on strike right now. We're talking about teaching assistants, contract faculty, graduate assistants, students, frankly, who are just trying to pull their pennies together, working at their university to afford their education, but also to inspire and enlighten the students in their classes. And it's pretty shameful when we have government—or any authority, at that—trying to interfere with the rights of workers to strike.

Because you know what? When the government turns their back on you, when nothing else seems to work, workers should have the right to say, "Well, enough is enough and I'm going to fight for my rights. I'm going to fight for the wages that I deserve. I'm going to fight for the working conditions that I deserve." And that's part of maintaining our post-secondary sector: Workers speak, student workers speak and government is supposed to listen; and that has not been the case consistently here over the last several years.

I just want to share some words from some of the students that we've connected with over the last while. And I must say, two of the strongest groups of lobbying activists, I might almost call them, have been OUSA, the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance, and also CFS, the Canadian Federation of Students. The students come. They're prepared. They're engaged. They're ready to have deep and deliberate conversations on how to make schooling better, how to make the post-secondary sector better. Well, here's something here that I would like to read from some of the students from OUSA: "Housing and transit:

"Access to quality, affordable housing and reliable transportation is essential to a positive post-secondary education experience. Students entering new municipalities to pursue post-secondary education should have access to reliable transportation and be free from the worry of discriminatory and exploitative rental practices." These are just snippets.

On sector sustainability, OUSA students said: "All willing and eligible students should be able to pursue post-

secondary education. However, the shift from publicly funded to publicly assisted post-secondary institutions in Ontario jeopardizes this reality for some students. Provincial operating grants only account for 31.2% of institutional budgets, while student contributions make up 67%.” I don’t know about you, but again, the government should be carrying the lion’s share, not the students crammed in an apartment or having ramen noodles every evening to make ends meet. I would really recommend that the government, if they haven’t, take a look at some of these recommendations.

1540

Let me see some quotes here: One student says, “Hire more staff and pay them adequately.”

“The wait times for mental health, to see someone, are ridiculous, and I know people who can’t even get their meds filled on time.”

“Expand the number of available counsellors and counselling spots per week so students don’t have to wait a month between mental health appointments.”

Students on affordability: “Students can’t afford anything. The majority of us can barely pay for rent or groceries.”

“School is too expensive, making living unaffordable. Students are drowning. I already work two jobs, and I’m struggling to balance tuition, rent, utilities, food expenses.”

“I’m on ODSP. Increase ODSP.”

All of this stuff, you know, calls for money, and not just kind platitudes, not just promises.

Again, I want to reiterate: We’ve seen a rise of hate, of discrimination, of harassment across institutions, and I want to get behind any legislation—I don’t care which party is putting it forward—that speaks to the need to support our students’ mental health, and not just our students, dare I say, but our faculty. My goodness, the weight on the shoulders of contract faculty, who are, frankly, again, often women, often racialized, often 2SLGBTQIA+—there’s a pattern here to everything I’m saying, you know? I want to support that. I want to support an agenda around ending racism and hate in all its forms, but that requires funding.

And I want to say this as well: Yes, freeze the tuition. Our students don’t have enough to keep paying and paying and paying. The reality is that not everyone has a trust fund, and not everybody has that family support system that they can fall back on, the intergenerational wealth of the bank of mom and dad—or dad and dad, or mom and mom, or whoever it might be. Some folks just have to do it the old-fashioned way of working hard, and when that happens, a tuition freeze is a good thing.

But again, this government cannot balance its budget on the back of international students. You can’t do that one day, and then stand up and applaud them the other day. You’ve got to choose how you show up for all students, and all students should be able to have access to education.

I’m going to read a few of the quotes from—let me see. Where is it here? Where did I find it? Oh, yes—from the Canadian Federation of Students: “The federation calls on the provincial government to immediately begin drafting

legislation to protect students’ rights to organize, which will amplify student advocacy both on campus and within the province.”

This is really, important, because—you know, it’s funny. We come here in politics and we all have our little party umbrella and our political beliefs, and then we argue and debate. If there’s one thing that you get from a post-secondary institution, you meet people who have very different opinions than yours. Some of them you might absolutely despise. But post-secondary education gives you the tools to learn how to critically think through some of those different opinions. Regardless of what side we’re on, I’d like to think that that’s part of the reason why all of us ran for politics—to support our communities, to represent our communities, but also to be able to engage critically in the important items of the day, recognizing that there are diverse opinions. If we do not fund our post-secondary sector properly, then we directly impact the level, the content, the complexities of conversations and solutions that we get to work together—in any institution, not only in politics—to make our communities better.

So I just want to say thank you to our post-secondary institutions that are punching well above their weight; that have been chronically underfunded for decades by this government and the previous Liberal government; that have had to see a scholastic quality decrease because our faculties are burnt out, because faculty members are often having to commit to hours upon hours of unpaid labour, emotional labour, supporting their students as pseudo mental health counsellors—because they’re not available, because they don’t exist—

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** That is all the time we have for debate. It is now time for questions.

**Hon. Michael D. Ford:** I thank the member opposite for her comments in the House this afternoon. The member gave us a history lesson on our funding in combatting hate and racism in the province of Ontario.

I was just wondering if the member knew that the government has invested \$132 million in an anti-racism strategic plan. I’m wondering if the member knows that we’ve invested \$80 million in anti-hate funding initiatives. And I wonder if the member knows that we invested \$27 million into the Anti-Racism Directorate.

We know that communities and people across the province are feeling a sense of angst because of the heightened acts of hate we’ve seen, particularly on campuses.

What message does that send to communities—by the NDP voting against this bill?

**MPP Jill Andrew:** Thank you very much for that question from the Minister of Multiculturalism and Citizenship, who, by the way, couldn’t even address his own community during question period this morning.

*Interjections.*

**MPP Jill Andrew:** Hey, I’m just saying.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** I will ask the member to withdraw.

**MPP Jill Andrew:** Withdraw.

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

**Mr. Deepak Anand:** Madam Speaker, as you know, every student has the right to study at a college or a university. Removing barriers related to mental health, racism, hate, costs will assist students with obtaining a better experience from their campuses.

Bill 166 speaks to taking action in developing mental health policies, combatting hate and racism, and providing students with transparency on the costs being charged by an institution.

To the member opposite: My question is very simple. I'm sure you have read the bill now. What are the good things in this bill?

**MPP Jill Andrew:** While I was trying to listen to the government's question, another member said that I am the most toxic MPP here at Queen's Park.

Here's the deal: As a graduate of women and gender studies from U of T, as someone who has spent the majority of my adult life as a child and youth worker, as a teacher, as a human rights adviser, I come to this place equity-centred. But what I will not do is support a bill that touches on equity and mental health issues in a performative manner and doesn't actually put funding onto those issues. You cannot address those issues without funding staff, funding human beings, funding departments, actual funding tools to actually support your calling to address mental health issues and inequities in the post-secondary institution.

1550

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

**Ms. Jessica Bell:** Thank you to the member for Toronto—St. Paul's. I recently met with representatives from the Taddle Creek Family Health Team. They serve over 20,000 patients. They're located on Bay Street. One of the people that was speaking to me said, "I'm worried about what happens at U of T. You have all these students. We know that there's some very serious mental health challenges that some students are facing. They have some access to mental health on campus, and then they graduate and they're on their own." Can you speak to the government's track record on providing access to mental health care for young people?

**MPP Jill Andrew:** Thank you for that question from the member from University—Rosedale. One of the most impactful things I remember in this House was when the Conservative government cut mental health funding by \$330 million, I believe it was. That spoke volumes about this government's "commitment" to mental health.

The reality is mental health for many Ontarians is something that they need to pull out their credit card for. It's not something that they can access freely. It's not covered under OHIP, necessarily, for everyone. It would be great to see a province that recognizes that mental health is health and that we need to have our mental health services covered by OHIP so that every student, even when they graduate, can get access to the supports they

need, because that's how they become contributing citizens. That's how they can become homeowners. That's how they can become employed and leaders and possibly one day take their—

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

**Hon. Michael S. Kerzner:** Madam Speaker, so many communities, so many students are watching us here today, and they're going to watch for the passing of this bill. They're going to watch to see where parties stand, and I want to go back and ask the member opposite, how important is it that all parties in this Legislature stand up against hate on campus, vote for this bill and send a message of reassurance to the students studying in Ontario that you have a safe place to study?

**MPP Jill Andrew:** Again, I feel like I'm now a broken record. I've said it a million times: I will support any legislation that is making a real effort at addressing mental health, an effort at addressing equity issues. I may even support a flawed piece of legislation that suggests that these issues are necessary to be addressed, but I hope that this government will take our recommendations, because it's a proven track record of you all, where you put forth flawed legislation, we provide amendments and the amendments go nowhere because of our partisanship. So if you actually care about post-secondary students—right?—and you want to get an idea of how to support mental health of these students, listen to our amendments, staff up, provide the funding to universities so they can be sustainable, so they can actually hire the human beings they need to do the good work that you purport—

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** I recognize the member for Toronto Centre.

**MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam:** Thank you to the member from Toronto—St. Paul's for your very passionate presentation. I know that education is close to your heart, and certainly, you are a subject matter expert.

I'm very interested—because one of the biggest contributors of stress and anxiety and depression for post-secondary students is financial stress. It's the biggest barrier for students to actually seek support and treatment. The second, of course, is the wait-list to get access to those services, and the third is the lack of available services. These are all things that the government has the power to do something about. Is there anything in the bill that actually resources the students so that they can actually access the services that they need to combat anxiety and depression?

**MPP Jill Andrew:** Essentially, the member from Toronto Centre has asked me—I was going to say Jill, sorry—if there's anything in this government legislation that actually funds the programs to support students actually getting the mental health supports that they need. I would say, unequivocally, no. That's what I would say.

Again, it comes back to the point: The bill has some very positive first steps. As I said, years ago you all gave the Anti-Racism Directorate a \$1,000 budget. I'm sure some of your suits cost more than \$1,000. So the fact that

you're at least addressing the issues of equity and mental health is a good thing. I'm just saying, put some money behind it. Properly invest in the post-secondary sector so they can actually do this work that you are saying you want to get done.

And listen to us—

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** We have time for one final question.

**Mr. Deepak Anand:** Again, Bill 166 is a major win for students and post-secondary transparency across the province. It deals with matters of basic transparency around costs associated with ancillary fees, costs of textbooks and other materials. I can only imagine—it's a non-partisan issue—Bill 166 will receive unanimous support.

Through you, Madam Speaker, I just want to ask the member, do you support Bill 166, and do you support transparency in the post-secondary sector?

**MPP Jill Andrew:** Thank you for the question from the government member. Again, based on my several years of experience in this role as an MPP—and I recognize I'm learning every day and I do not know everything whatsoever—transparency from this government: That alone gives me shivers, because we haven't seen transparency from this government. What we've seen is a trend of corruption—

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** That's all the time we have for questions and answers.

*Report continues in volume B.*





**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO**  
**ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO**

Lieutenant Governor / Lieutenante-gouverneure: Hon. / L'hon. Edith Dumont, OOnt  
Speaker / Président de l'Assemblée législative: Hon. / L'hon. Ted Arnott  
Clerk / Greffier: Trevor Day  
Deputy Clerk / Sous-Greffière: Valerie Quioc Lim  
Clerks-at-the-Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Julia Douglas, Meghan Stenson,  
Christopher Tyrell, Wai Lam (William) Wong  
Sergeant-at-Arms / Sergent d'armes: Tim McGough

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Anand, Deepak (PC)	Mississauga—Malton	
Andrew, Jill (NDP)	Toronto—St. Paul's	
Armstrong, Teresa J. (NDP)	London—Fanshawe	
<b>Arnott, Hon. / L'hon. Ted (PC)</b>	Wellington—Halton Hills	Speaker / Président de l'Assemblée législative
Babikian, Aris (PC)	Scarborough—Agincourt	
Bailey, Robert (PC)	Sarnia—Lambton	
<b>Barnes, Patrice (PC)</b>	Ajax	Second Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Deuxième Vice-Présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Begum, Doly (NDP)	Scarborough Southwest / Scarborough-Sud-Ouest	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjointe de l'opposition officielle
Bell, Jessica (NDP)	University—Rosedale	
<b>Bethlenfalvy, Hon. / L'hon. Peter (PC)</b>	Pickering—Uxbridge	Minister of Finance / Ministre des Finances
Blais, Stephen (LIB)	Orléans	
Bouma, Will (PC)	Brantford—Brant	
Bourgouin, Guy (NDP)	Mushkegowuk—James Bay / Mushkegowuk—Baie James	
Bowman, Stephanie (LIB)	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	
Brady, Bobbi Ann (IND)	Haldimand—Norfolk	
Bresee, Ric (PC)	Hastings—Lennox and Addington	
Burch, Jeff (NDP)	Niagara Centre / Niagara-Centre	
Byers, Rick (PC)	Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound	
<b>Calandra, Hon. / L'hon. Paul (PC)</b>	Markham—Stouffville	Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / Ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire du gouvernement Minister of Legislative Affairs / Ministre des Affaires législatives
<b>Cho, Hon. / L'hon. Raymond Sung Joon (PC)</b>	Scarborough North / Scarborough- Nord	Minister for Seniors and Accessibility / Ministre des Services aux aînés et de l'Accessibilité
<b>Cho, Hon. / L'hon. Stan (PC)</b>	Willowdale	Minister of Long-Term Care / Ministre des Soins de longue durée
Clancy, Aislinn (GRN)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	
Clark, Steve (PC)	Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes / Leeds— Grenville—Thousand Islands et Rideau Lakes	
Coe, Lorne (PC)	Whitby	
<b>Collard, Lucille (LIB)</b>	Ottawa—Vanier	Third Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Troisième Vice-Présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Crawford, Stephen (PC)	Oakville	
Cuzzetto, Rudy (PC)	Mississauga—Lakeshore	
Dixon, Jess (PC)	Kitchener South—Hespeler / Kitchener-Sud—Hespeler	
Dowie, Andrew (PC)	Windsor—Tecumseh	
<b>Downey, Hon. / L'hon. Doug (PC)</b>	Barrie—Springwater—Oro-Medonte	Attorney General / Procureur général
<b>Dunlop, Hon. / L'hon. Jill (PC)</b>	Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord	Minister of Colleges and Universities / Ministre des Collèges et Universités
<b>Fedeli, Hon. / L'hon. Victor (PC)</b>	Nipissing	Chair of Cabinet / Président du Conseil des ministres Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade / Ministre du Développement économique, de la Création d'emplois et du Commerce
Fife, Catherine (NDP)	Waterloo	

<b>Member and Party / Député(e) et parti</b>	<b>Constituency / Circonscription</b>	<b>Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités</b>
<b>Flack, Hon. / L'hon. Rob (PC)</b>	Elgin—Middlesex—London	Associate Minister of Housing / Ministre associé du Logement
<b>Ford, Hon. / L'hon. Doug (PC)</b>	Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord	Leader, Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti progressiste-conservateur de l'Ontario
		Premier / Premier ministre
		Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / Ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales
<b>Ford, Hon. / L'hon. Michael D. (PC)</b>	York South—Weston / York-Sud—Weston	Minister of Citizenship and Multiculturalism / Ministre des Affaires civiques et du Multiculturalisme
Fraser, John (LIB)	Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	
French, Jennifer K. (NDP)	Oshawa	
Gallagher Murphy, Dawn (PC)	Newmarket—Aurora	
Gates, Wayne (NDP)	Niagara Falls	
Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	
Ghamari, Goldie (PC)	Carleton	
Glover, Chris (NDP)	Spadina—Fort York	
Gretzky, Lisa (NDP)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	
Grewal, Hardeep Singh (PC)	Brampton East / Brampton-Est	
Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Oxford	
Harden, Joel (NDP)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	
Harris, Mike (PC)	Kitchener—Conestoga	
Hazell, Andrea (LIB)	Scarborough—Guildwood	
Hogarth, Christine (PC)	Etobicoke—Lakeshore	
Holland, Kevin (PC)	Thunder Bay—Atikokan	
Hsu, Ted (LIB)	Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les Îles	
Jama, Sarah (IND)	Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	
<b>Jones, Hon. / L'hon. Sylvia (PC)</b>	Dufferin—Caledon	Minister of Health / Ministre de la Santé
		Deputy Premier / Vice-première ministre
Jones, Trevor (PC)	Chatham-Kent—Leamington	Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint du gouvernement
Jordan, John (PC)	Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston	
Kanapathi, Logan (PC)	Markham—Thornhill	
<b>Karpoche, Bhutla (NDP)</b>	Parkdale—High Park	First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Première Vice-Présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Ke, Vincent (IND)	Don Valley North / Don Valley-Nord	
Kernaghan, Terence (NDP)	London North Centre / London-Centre-Nord	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de l'opposition officielle
<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>
Vaugcois, 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	