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Mardi
19 mars 2024

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 19 March 2024

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 19 mars 2024

The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Next, we'll have a moment of silence for inner thought and personal reflection.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WORKING FOR WORKERS FOUR ACT, 2024

LOI DE 2024 VISANT À OEUVRER POUR LES TRAVAILLEURS, QUATRE

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 18, 2024, on the motion for third reading of the following bill:

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

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

Mr. Piccini has moved third reading of Bill 149, An Act to amend various statutes with respect to employment and labour and other matters.

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

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

Third reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Orders of the day?

Mr. Trevor Jones: Good morning, Speaker. No further business.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): There being no further business at this time, this House stands in recess until 10:15.

The House recessed from 0903 to 1015.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

SENIORS

Mr. Billy Pang: Speaker, it is my pleasure to rise today to share my recent work aimed at enhancing the well-being and engagement of our cherished senior population. Our government's unwavering commitment to seniors' wel-

fare is evident through initiatives fostering inclusion and community involvement, facilitated by a range of grants.

To empower senior organizations in accessing these opportunities, I recently hosted a hybrid workshop at my community office in Markham–Unionville. This session was designed to equip participants with the knowledge and tools for navigating the grant application process with the Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility.

I am grateful to the dedicated organizations and individuals who contributed to the success of this workshop, whether attending in person or virtually. Their active participation underscored the collective determination to uplift our seniors' quality of life. I am also grateful to the Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility, particularly Mr. Varsava, director of policy, who shared his invaluable insights and practical guidance with our participants.

With the success of this workshop, I look forward to delving deeper into topics of interest to stakeholders in Markham–Unionville and organizing more workshops of a similar nature in the future. Their contributions to our community are invaluable, and it is our collective duty to ensure our seniors' continued well-being and prosperity.

FAUZIA MAZHAR

Ms. Catherine Fife: Last week, I had the pleasure of attending the International Women's Day celebration with the Coalition of Muslim Women of K-W. The event brought together a diverse group of women to celebrate and learn from each other.

Founder and leader of the coalition, Fauzia Mazhar, shared with me how she dreamed of building this community since 2010. It was wonderful to witness her dream come to life and share that experience with her.

Fauzia's story is truly remarkable. She arrived from Pakistan in 2000 and gave so much of herself to others to ensure bonds were built, both within her home as a mother and in her community as a leader. Then, in 2019, she was diagnosed with stage 3 breast cancer. In 2022, when she had finally recovered, she was involved in a near-death collision. The impact caused life-threatening injuries to her head and spinal cord, leaving her in a wheelchair, but that did not stop her.

Fauzia's leadership and dedication to the community are truly inspiring. She has brought together some amazing female leaders, and our community is stronger because of them. Her work in promoting gender equality, cultural diversity and women's rights is commendable. The celebration was a reminder of the strength and resilience of

women, especially in the face of challenges and discrimination.

Fauzia's efforts are making a significant difference in the lives of women in the Kitchener-Waterloo community. The work of these women of the coalition is a shining example of the positive change that can be achieved through advocacy and empowerment.

Thank you, Fauzia, and thank you to the Coalition of Muslim Women.

SAULT COLLEGE COUGARS WOMEN'S HOCKEY TEAM

Mr. Ross Romano: It's with some excitement that I'm here this morning to provide some words of congratulations to our Sault Ste. Marie Sault College Cougars women's hockey team who, on Saturday, March 16, won their second national title in consecutive years with a 3-0 victory over the Assiniboine Community College Cougars at the American Collegiate Hockey Association Women's Division 2 national championship in St. Louis, Missouri.

During the championship game, Emma Lee paced the offence with two goals, with Materia Land adding an insurance marker in the third. The Cougars goalie, Farrah Farstad, stopped 22 shots for the shutout.

There is a history between the Cougar squads, as the Brandon-based Cougars team had handed Sault College their only loss this season in a 4-1 setback at the Northern Community Centre in Sault Ste. Marie on January 20, breaking the team's one-and-a-half-year winning streak. That is correct; they had a one-and-a-half-year winning streak. The Brandon-based team did defeat them and break the winning streak, but ultimately, our Cougars still managed to come out on top in the finals and won their second national title.

1020

The Cougars had gone 31-0-0 in winning their first ACHA title last season and started this season with 16 wins and a tie through 17 games, until that loss that I referenced. The Cougars went 3-0 in division pool D, with wins over Mercyhurst University, the United States Naval Academy and Northeastern University. I just want to offer them great congratulations for their second-year-in-a-row victory.

NORTHERN BANDS HOCKEY TOURNAMENT

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Last week, I participated in one of my favourite events of the year, the Northern Bands Hockey Tournament in Dryden, Ontario. Year after year, this tournament brings hockey players, families, friends and fans across the north together to share their love of hockey.

People in Kiiwetinoong face challenges, barriers just to even play hockey. While artificial hockey rinks and hockey leagues are the norm across Ontario, most of the communities in Kiiwetinoong do not have organized hockey

leagues because they do not have artificial ice and rely on outdoor rinks to play.

But hockey plays an important role for many people as we fight the ongoing mental health and suicide crisis in the north. Hockey supports our physical health and wellness. It is a lifeline for our mental health. Hockey is suicide prevention. Also, Northern Bands Hockey Tournament brings our nations together through sport. We reunited with each other, we are united with each other, celebrated, and cheered for all the hockey talent from the north.

There were 44 teams participating. At this time, I want to congratulate the A side champions, the Michikan Lake Mavericks; the B side champions, KI Native Wings; and the C side champions, Cat Lake Snipers on their championships. And to all the teams: Make sure you get in shape for next year. Meegwetch.

WORLD WHEELCHAIR CURLING CHAMPIONSHIP

Ms. Laurie Scott: It is my pleasure today to stand today and congratulate Team Canada for earning a silver medal at the 2024 World Wheelchair Curling Championship. The annual tournament took place from March 2 to 9 in South Korea and featured a total of 12 participating countries.

From the round robin to the playoffs, the team fought hard, but fell 6-2 to Norway in the championship round. This is the second straight silver medal for the team and their third in the last four years.

I wanted to give a special shout-out to two members of the team that hail from my riding of Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock, Jon Thurston from Dunsford and Chrissy Molnar from Bobcaygeon. Thank you to my friend and home coach, Carl Rennick, for recruiting Jon and Chrissy to the team.

Carl has been a wheelchair curling coach since 2006. Jon Thurston made his fifth appearance for Team Canada in the World Wheelchair Curling Championship and represented Team Canada at the 2022 Beijing Paralympics, where the team took home a bronze medal. As for Chrissy, this was her first-ever appearance in the world wheelchair curling tournament after taking a break in 2012 to have her third child.

Congratulations on the hard-fought tournament and thank you both for being strong representatives for our area and for Canada on the world stage.

HOUSE OF COMMONS RESOLUTION

Mr. Joel Harden: I rise with pride this morning to thank colleagues at the federal level, who last night in a historic vote of 204 to 117, voted for a motion that was called "peace in the Middle East."

Now, Speaker, I know on social media this morning, there will be people scoring points and talking about how this was a vote against certain people. I want to remind the members of this House that human rights is inter-jurisdic-

tional. Seeing the value of every person to have peace and security is inter-jurisdictional.

I want to thank people from the Bloc Québécois, from the Green Party, from the Liberal Party and from my party, the New Democratic Party, who stood up last night to tell our government that we need to be a voice for peace. This is what Canadians have been calling for for months. It's not easy to march in the rain, to march in the snow, to feel like you're not being heard, to feel like your humanity is not being seen. But it was seen last night at the House of Commons, Speaker, and I want to thank MPs Heather McPherson and Matthew Green for leading that.

I want to end on a note of great pride from Albert Dumont, Algonquin elder, poet laureate of our city in Ottawa, who told me when I got elected, "Joel, you can use your platform to tear other people down, or you can use it to heal your community and to heal our country and heal our world." So I want to thank the parliamentarians last night who sent a clear message to the government of Israel, who sent a clear message to all of those involved in a horrifying war at this moment: The war has to stop. The war has to stop, and we need peace.

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

MITCHELL CLAPPERTON

Ms. Donna Skelly: Good morning. It's my pleasure to rise today to recognize the achievements of a young student from my riding. Mitchell Clapperton from Waterdown is the winner of the Schulich Leader Scholarship. This \$120,000 scholarship is awarded to high school graduates who demonstrate academic excellence, leadership, charisma and creativity. Recipients have enrolled in a science, technology, engineering or math program at one of 20 partner universities across Canada.

Mitchell is beginning his first year studying electrical engineering at the Lassonde School of Engineering at York University. Mitchell is a four-time gold medal winner at the Bay Area Science and Engineering Fair. Three of his projects went on to win medals in Canada-wide competitions, and one qualified for an international competition.

He is always looking for innovative ways to solve problems. His first invention, in grade 7, was inspired by speaking with a family friend who worked at a pharmacy and developed carpal tunnel syndrome from opening pill bottles. To help the situation, he created an automated pill bottle opener.

Scholarships such as the Schulich Leader Scholarship allow students to enhance their knowledge and provide them with tools for after graduation.

Mr. Speaker, I look forward to seeing the positive impact that Mitchell will bring to our society.

SOUTH COAST SPECIAL NEEDS KIDS INC. SLEDGE HOCKEY MATCH

Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady: Mr. Speaker, this morning I want to give a huge shout-out to South Coast Special Needs Kids and the Norfolk county OPP on yet another successful sledge hockey matchup last weekend in Waterford.

South Coast kids is a non-profit organization providing recreational sports programming for children with special needs. Activities include baseball, basketball, golf and, of course, sledge hockey.

Mr. Speaker, I was honoured to play in the game—my first sledge hockey game ever—and I couldn't wipe a smile off my face. Sledge hockey is fast-paced, and it takes a great deal of skill. I was on the Norfolk county OPP side, and, well, we were severely out-played by some very fierce competitors on South Coast kids. The final score: 5-1.

The game helps raise awareness for the organization and also collects donations for local food banks.

Ron Guthrie is the president of South Coast Special Needs Kids. At the end of the game, he told the crowd how important this event is for the athletes. "It's like their Stanley Cup," he said.

More than a dozen athletes between the ages of seven and 33 were part of the South Coast kids team.

Thank you to the Norfolk county OPP officers who participated. I'd like to specifically mention Constable Jeremy Renton, who organized the game. Renton said, "It's all about giving back to the community. It's giving a showcase to amazing athletes that are there every Sunday practising their skills. It shows the community focus of Norfolk county OPP, engaging with their community. It's a great day."

Speaker, it was more than a great day; it was a terrific day. I can't wait until next year's puck drop.

LUNAR NEW YEAR

Mr. Aris Babikian: Mr. Speaker, last month was the best month of the year, not because it was the Super Bowl but because it was lunar new year. Asian communities across my riding of Scarborough—Agincourt had the opportunity to celebrate the Year of the Dragon together with their families.

1030

Mr. Speaker, lunar new year is a time when we remove the bad and the old and welcome the new and the good. It is an opportunity for quality family time, and to show gratitude and love towards those who are close to you. It is a time when families and cultural organizations come together to show unique and beautiful cultural performances and have feasts together.

I have to say that, this year, the celebrations were fantastic and marvellous. I had the opportunity to attend over 35 different lunar new year celebrations. I would like to thank the various cultural, seniors and business associations for organizing these jaw-dropping celebrations full

of food, performances and games. It is events like these that make Ontario a truly multicultural and vibrant province.

I also had the opportunity to organize my first lunar new year celebration in my riding, where over 400 people attended. It was truly heartwarming for me to see the community come together and people from different cultures come to celebrate the lunar new year together as one big family.

LAMBTON COLLEGE LIONS WOMEN'S BASKETBALL TEAM

Mr. Robert Bailey: I'm pleased to rise today and update the members of this House on the historic success of the Lambton College women's basketball team who, this past weekend, captured the silver medal at the Canadian College Athletic Association's national championship in Lloydminster, Alberta. Described by their coach, Janine Day, as a team of firsts, this year's team delivered a season for the ages for Lambton College, including finishing on top of the Ontario west division standings for the first time; securing home court advantage for the provincial championship for the first time; defeating the number-two-ranked team in the country and winning the provincial championship for the very first time; earning a berth in the national championship for the first time; and playing in a national championship game for the first time.

Mr. Speaker, on many occasions, I've stood in the House and spoke about the best-in-class education and experience that students receive at Lambton College. In turn, those students are using that education and experience to do amazing things right across the country. Lambton College is truly a centre of innovation and excellence within our province. Congratulations to everyone at Lambton College on such a fantastic season. Let's go, Lions.

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

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: I'm proud to welcome my son Aleksandar Rakocevic who's here in support of his father today for his Orthodox Christian week bill.

Mr. Robert Bailey: It's my pleasure today to introduce in the gallery members of the Ontario Duty Free Association, who will host at noon hour for a reception. In the presence there are Tania Lee, president of the Ontario Duty Free Association, Chris Foster, Jim Pearce, Jeff Butler and Mike Maskery. Please come out at 228, 2:30, and have a chance to say hello to them all.

Hon. Andrea Khanjin: It gives me great pleasure to introduce Nicole Bowman from the great riding of Barrie-Innisfil. She's also the mother of the fabulous page Anne Bowman. Welcome to your House.

Hon. Doug Downey: Although not an introduction of visitor, I just wanted to share and send condolences to the passing of Roy McMurtry, the former Attorney General, High Commissioner and then Chief Justice of Ontario.

Hon. Todd J. McCarthy: I'd like to introduce and welcome to the House today Ms. Karey Anne Large, the executive director of the Scugog Chamber of Commerce, and her son Nolan. Welcome to the House.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I'd like to introduce some incredibly young, talented leaders who are with us from the Shevet Hermon-Friends of Israel Scouts. These are young volunteers making a difference in our community and country. We welcome you. We thank you for your courage. Welcome to the peoples' House.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Introduction of visitors?

I'll recognize the member for Ottawa South on a point of order.

Mr. John Fraser: Point of order, Mr. Speaker: I seek unanimous consent that, notwithstanding standing order 67, the time for debate on Bill 174, Supply Act, be allocated as follows: 56 minutes to each of the recognized parties and eight minutes to the independent members as a group.

It would be great for the 15 members of the independents to be able to discuss how the government is spending the people's money.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Ottawa South is seeking unanimous consent that, notwithstanding standing order 67, the time for debate on Bill 174, Supply Act, be allocated as follows: 56 minutes to each of the recognized parties and eight minutes to the independent members as a group. Agreed? I heard a no.

LEGISLATIVE PAGES

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Next, I'm going to ask our pages to assemble for their introductions.

It is my great pleasure to introduce this group of legislative pages: from the riding of Sarnia-Lambton, Ahmed Arif; from the riding of Etobicoke North, Krishna Bhargava; from the riding of Essex, Parker Booth; from Barrie-Innisfil, Anne Bowman; from Etobicoke-Lakeshore, Julian Chapin-Ker; from Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke, Emily Charbonneau; from Markham-Unionville, Tyler Chow; from Ottawa Centre, Christopher Falkner; from Chatham-Kent-Leamington, Alyssa Geene; from Simcoe-Grey, Korel Gogceloglu; from Guelph, Chase Hipel; from Parkdale-High Park, Olivia Jeens; from London West, Bhavneet Kaur; from Mississauga-Lakeshore, Noah Lakhani; from Eglinton-Lawrence, Ella Lau; from Ottawa-Vanier, Emma Taylor Lee; from Brampton North, Reyan Naseem; from the riding of Windsor-Tecumseh, Sarah Penner; from the riding of Humber River-Black Creek, Bhavna Prashar; from the riding of Scarborough-Guildwood, Farah Sharmin; from Windsor West, Jack Xu; and from the riding of Oakville, Owen Zeng.

Please join me in welcoming this group of Legislative pages.

Applause.

1040

VISITORS' GALLERIES

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Before I ask for oral questions, I want to inform the members that they have an important memo on their desks with respect to the lower galleries and the upper galleries, as to how we'll accommodate guests in the future. I'll ask you to take a look at it. If you have any questions, get back to our office. Thank you very much.

QUESTION PERIOD

HEALTH CARE

Ms. Marit Stiles: Good morning, Speaker. My question is for the Premier.

Yesterday, this government had a chance to show their commitment to ensuring that primary care for everyone is a priority, by supporting our motion to put patients first. They voted against it. Instead of working with health care professionals, they are making weaker funding announcements that amount to a drop in the bucket, and it is a leaky bucket. Doctors and health care workers say it shows the government doesn't understand the scale or urgency of the problem.

So my question is to the Premier: Why are you refusing to listen to the clear demands of patients and doctors?

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

To reply, the Deputy Premier and Minister of Health.

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Yesterday, we had an opportunity to choose primary care multidisciplinary clinicians and health care professionals. You chose administrative staff. We are going to stand with our clinicians, with our primary care providers, to ensure that across Ontario, we continue to expand primary care in the province of Ontario.

While the NDP cut by 10% the number of physicians who were able to train in the province of Ontario, while the Liberal government of the day cut physician services and seats by 50 per year, we are making the expansions necessary to get it done.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: Speaker, you don't have to take our word for it; the government should just listen to family doctors themselves. They are saying that the government's funding announcements are "a feeble attempt to address the crisis in family medicine." They called the government's announcement "as useful as an umbrella in a hurricane." There are 30,000 people in Kingston, 60,000 people in Hamilton and half a million people in Toronto without a family doctor, and that is just a fraction of the over two

million Ontarians who need access to primary care right now.

Back to the Premier: We gave you the solution. So to the Premier: Why did you vote against the solution that everyone else supports?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Members will please take their seats, and I'll remind members to make their comments through the Chair.

Minister of Health.

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Speaker, I am proud to stand with the Ontario Medical Association, who stood with us when we made that announcement of 78 primary care expansions in the province of Ontario. They absolutely understand the value and importance of multidisciplinary teams. I think of primary care in Peterborough, where we made the announcement: "I am very pleased that the government is making this investment in primary care. The funding of a community health centre will bring huge gains to our community and the significant provincial investment will deliver positive returns benefiting the entire health care system."

That was the day that I stood with the member from Peterborough and made the announcement of 78 primary care announcements, and since that day, we have had community health care, family health teams and CHCs standing with us and saying, "Thank you for making a commitment to primary care. Thank you on behalf of the patients in Ontario, the clinicians in Ontario and, ultimately, the health care system in Ontario."

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: Speaker, the OMA's leadership have called this government's decisions clueless. Public health care staffing has completely deteriorated under this government. There is ongoing neglect. There is disrespect from this government that has pushed thousands and thousands of health care workers out of the sector. Hospitals and long-term-care homes are forced to hire agency nurses; that's costing them two to three times what a staff nurse would cost to maintain those service levels. This is hemorrhaging health care dollars from our health care system. And let's not forget, Speaker, that under this government's watch, there were 868 emergency room closures and 316 urgent care centre closures.

Back to the Premier: How many more emergency rooms and urgent care clinics need to close before this government takes this health care staffing crisis seriously?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: I'm going to quote from Kim Moran, who is, of course, the Ontario Medical Association's CEO: "The OMA has been advocating for increased investments in teams to improve access to care and ensure doctors and health" care professionals "are able to do what they do best, care for patients. There are benefits to team-based care for both patients and providers so our goal is to get every Ontarian access. This announcement to triple the original funding plan is a significant move in the right direction."

The OMA, the OHA, the family doctors of Ontario understand what significant investment this means to the people of Ontario. It is sorely disappointing that the NDP and the Liberals don't seem to get it.

HEALTH CARE

Ms. Marit Stiles: My next question is also for the Premier. Speaker, after repeatedly being ignored by this government, front-line health care workers are taking matters into their own hands. Registered nurses at Brantford Community Healthcare have called an independent assessment committee to investigate chronic understaffing in their emergency department. Nurses are worried about being able to maintain service and safety standards that patients desperately deserve. Access to safe and timely care is being delayed because of these unsafe staffing levels.

So, to the Premier: When will this government implement safe staffing ratios in Ontario, like the NDP government in BC has done?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Minister of Health.

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Speaker, as I hear the member opposite raise these issues, I think, where were you? Where were you as an NDP staffer under an NDP government when they were making cuts of 10% to their health care family physician budget, when the NDP, and the Liberals propped up by the NDP, were cutting primary care physicians in the province of Ontario by 50? Now, 50 doesn't sound like a lot unless you start comparing that with the expanded population that is happening in Ontario, the growing seniors population that needs to be served.

We have absolutely made those investments, whether it is in colleges and universities, with the Minister of Colleges and Universities expanding the number of health care physicians available; whether it is for nurse practitioners, for family physicians, for primary care paramedics in northern Ontario. These are significant investments that are going to make an impact in the decades to come—

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

The supplementary question.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Speaker, I would ask the Minister of Health where she has been while our health care system has been falling into desperate disrepair under this government for the last six years. Take some responsibility.

In BC, they're taking action and they're getting results. They've seen improvement in recruitment and retention among health care workers. They are only the second jurisdiction in North America that has implemented these same staffing ratios, but here in Ontario, it's pretty clear that this government is not taking this staffing crisis seriously at all. That is not only having an impact on those overworked health care workers, but it's having an impact on the patients that they serve.

I want to go back to the Premier again: Will Ontario join BC and become a leader in health care by imple-

menting staffing ratios, or is he content with the status quo?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: I have no intention of joining any jurisdiction that has less wait times and poorer outcomes than the province of Ontario. Ontario leads the Canadian jurisdiction, and that is not Ministry of Health data; that is CIHI data that has been aggregated over all Canadian jurisdictions.

Ontario is leading Canada in our wait times. Now, can we do better? Absolutely, which is why I am happy to put our record of increasing access to training to internationally educated primary care practitioners and clinicians against any other jurisdiction, because we are leading Canada.

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We now have 1,235 more nurses reporting for employment and registered with the CNO than we did previously. Why? Because we are making the changes necessary to make sure that people have access to good employment, good jobs in the province of Ontario, in our health care system, and we've made those changes—

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

Supplementary question?

Ms. Marit Stiles: Speaker, the minister needs to get out of the backrooms and start listening to Ontarians. If she thinks that we're doing well in the province of Ontario, boy—2.2 million Ontarians without access to primary care; operating rooms collecting dust. We have some of the best health care workers in the world, but we can't retain them. They're leaving faster than we can recruit them.

This government has no strategy to recruit and retain and return nurses to our hospitals and our long-term-care homes. Our long-term-care homes, our hospitals are relying increasingly on staffing, on private agency nurses that are bleeding the system dry.

I want to go back to the Premier again. How many more emergency rooms, how many more urgent care centres have to close before this government implements solutions that actually work in the province of Ontario?

Interjections.

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

I'm going to ask the independent members and the government front bench to stop pointing fingers at each other and heckling while the Leader of the Opposition has the floor.

Please start the clock. Minister of Health.

Hon. Sylvia Jones: The member opposite can throw around all the insults she wants, but the facts actually paint a very different story. Last year, we had a record-breaking 17,000 new nurses registered in Ontario. Nearly half of those are in fact internationally educated. Some 30,000-plus nurses are studying in Ontario colleges and universities, and 24,000 new physicians.

Even the expansions that we've made to ensure that we have more physicians training in the province of Ontario—we have set aside 60% of those to be primary care practitioners. Why? Because we see the value in primary care, because we see the value in those multi-disciplinary

teams. We will continue to do that work. It sounds like the member opposite and her party will continue to oppose those changes, but we're getting the job done to make sure that people have access to multidisciplinary teams and primary care physicians in the province of Ontario.

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Ms. Marit Stiles: I remind the minister that all the studies show that if we stay on this track, a quarter of Ontarians won't have access to health care by 2026, so we'll see what she's saying then.

Speaker, my question is for the Premier. The Information and Privacy Commissioner's office has ordered the Ministry of the Solicitor General to turn over records of which OPP officers worked at the Premier's family stag-and-doe event. We know these are the records that the government has refused to share with journalists through freedom-of-information requests. We know the RCMP is also investigating this matter. The Premier has denied there were extra officers on the site, but he's going to great lengths to withhold the details.

So to the Premier: Can he confirm how many OPP officers were assigned to work at his family's stag and doe event?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Government House leader.

Hon. Paul Calandra: As I said in previous questions, we'll allow the authorities to continue their work, and I have every faith that they can do it on their own.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: That was a bit hard to hear, Speaker, but what was basically said was nothing.

I want to remind the Premier that he's not above the law, that the police don't work for him and that they work for the people of Ontario.

We've already seen two explosive reports about this Premier's family's stag and doe. The reports revealed a deeply troubling pattern of a government that continues to help a select few of their friends at the expense of everybody else, and now we're waiting for the results of an RCMP criminal investigation into this government's conduct.

So my question is to the Premier: Did the RCMP have to step in because of concerns about the Premier's close relationship with the OPP?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Well, I would certainly hope that the Premier of the province of Ontario has a close relationship with the Ontario Provincial Police, Mr. Speaker.

I am keenly aware that the opposition consistently advocate for policies that would defund the police. They consistently advocate for positions that would make it easier for people who commit violent crimes to get on the street. They support the Liberals who have done that.

Look, Progressive Conservatives will always stand with our front-line officers, who do extraordinary work each and every day. I will leave it up to the opposition leader and her friends in the Liberal Party to explain to the

people of the province of Ontario why they support catch-and-release policies, why they have reduced bail, why they don't support us when we want to build more jails. When we want to ensure that our communities are safe, they want to defund police, and they're helped in that by the Liberals, Mr. Speaker. We'll go in a different direction.

TAXATION

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: My question is for the Minister of Energy.

The carbon tax is making life more expensive for everyone. Last week, as I was knocking on doors in my great riding of Newmarket–Aurora, every single door, every person I spoke to spoke to me about their concerns and their frustrations about the impact of the federal carbon tax, that it's having on their daily lives, specifically their essential needs. They want the federal government to address their concerns and make life more affordable for them and for all Ontarians. But the federal Liberals and opposition parties only want to hike this regressive tax. After next month's increase, Ontarians will be paying 17.6 cents extra on every litre of gas, costing them hundreds of dollars each year.

Speaker, can the minister please explain how the federal carbon tax negatively impacts the people of Ontario and what our government is doing to provide financial support?

Hon. Todd Smith: Mr. Speaker, it's contemptible, actually, what the federal government is doing in introducing an increase to the carbon tax in 13 days' time, at a time when people are in the midst of an affordability crisis. As the member rightly points out, she's talked to members in her community. All of us, I know, have talked to members in our community about how difficult it is to pay for the grocery bill. It's more and more difficult to fill up your gasoline tank for your vehicle. Mr. Speaker, we need vehicles to drive.

It's outrageous that the federal government is increasing the carbon tax by 23% on April 1. Do you know what's even more reprehensible? The fact that we couldn't get an answer, again, out of the queen of the carbon tax, Bonnie Crombie, this morning when she was having a press conference about whether or not she supports the federal carbon tax that's about to increase in 13 days. The Ontario Liberal leader needs to come clear to the people of Ontario: Is she supportive of the federal carbon tax increase on April 1?

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

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: It's not only our government that is calling for the end of this federal carbon tax. Over the past few weeks, we have seen Premiers from across the country, including the Liberal Premier of Newfoundland and Labrador, call on the federal government to pause that April 1 carbon tax increase. And last fall, the NDP Premier of Manitoba said natural gas home heating should be exempt from the tax. That is why it is so astonishing that the Liberal and NDP members in this Legislature continue to work against any efforts to make life more

affordable for Ontarians and not call for the end of this carbon tax.

Speaker, can the minister please explain more about the negative impact that the carbon tax is having on so many Ontarians?

Hon. Todd Smith: Mr. Speaker, I've got to give some credit to the Ontario NDP caucus. At least they've joined us in a couple of votes asking for the federal government to remove the carbon tax from home heating fuels, so they understand the difficulty that it is having on the people of Ontario.

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What I can't understand is, given the track record of the previous Ontario Liberal government when it comes to the energy file, a record that increased hydro rates by tripling them during their period in power, and now seeing the impact that the carbon tax is having on the people of Ontario and the people of Canada, why they can't have that conversion. It's not that difficult to understand that this is negatively impacting the people of Ontario.

You know what? They should be standing with us and advocating to the Prime Minister to stop the tax increase on April 1. But instead, the queen of the carbon tax, Bonnie Crombie, said this morning to the media in her interview, "The PM doesn't need my advice." It's her job, it's our job in the Ontario Legislature to represent the people of Ontario. They want the tax gone.

NORTHERN HEALTH SERVICES

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: *Remarks in Anishiniimowin.* Northern Ontario hospitals have been struggling to keep their emergency room doors open for years now. The program that allows them to hire locum doctors from southern Ontario as a temporary fix is coming to an end. What is this government going to do to make sure our ERs in the north stay open?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Minister of Health.

Hon. Sylvia Jones: The member opposite raises an important issue. There is no doubt that our temporary locum programs have been a very effective tool that we have been able to use, working with Ontario Health, to make sure that emergency departments in northern Ontario, but frankly across many communities in Ontario, have emergency department coverage physicians. I will say, as a result of that program, we have seen no closures in northern Ontario EDs in the last year. Without a doubt, it has been a program that has had value.

We are in active conversations with the Ontario Hospital Association and the Ontario Medical Association to see how we can come forward with a more permanent solution. But I will keep the member updated because it is an important issue.

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

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Speaker, one of the things that's happening in the north is that there is continuous, unnecessary suffering. There are needless deaths. It's a health care crisis. The temporary locum program was a

short-term fix to make sure the ERs in the north didn't have to close. The people of northern Ontario need permanent solutions so our ERs stay open, so our people are safe.

Speaker, March 31 is 12 days from now. What is the status of this program?

Interjections.

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

Minister of Health.

Hon. Sylvia Jones: What I heard from the member opposite was the locum program has been a valuable addition. But we also, I heard, need a more permanent solution. I agree on both points.

When we made additions and expansions in the Northern Ontario School of Medicine, when we ensured that we had 60% of those seats set aside for family medicine, that's 100 additional seats where people are training in northern Ontario. The statistics show that where you train, where you ultimately practise and where you continue to practise are close to where you learn. We know that making those investments in primary care health care teams in northern Ontario at the Northern Ontario School of Medicine is going to make an impact in your communities in northern Ontario and indeed across Ontario.

TAXATION

Mr. Steve Clark: My question is for the Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade. When it comes to attracting investments, the competition from across the globe is very fierce. Governments are pulling every lever at their disposal to secure investments that create good-paying jobs and strengthen their economies. We know that fostering the conditions for a robust, low-cost business environment is crucial to landing important investments. But unfortunately, we're playing a bit of tug-of-war with the federal Liberals when it comes to taxes and costs. We're lowering taxes and cutting costs while the Liberals continue to hike taxes and continue to drive up costs every chance that they get. Their upcoming carbon tax increase on April 1 is just another example of this.

Speaker, can the minister explain to the House how, by lowering costs and cutting taxes, we're able to secure important investments?

Hon. Victor Fedeli: When it comes to the economy, we have shown the Liberals that lowering taxes is how you create those conditions.

Now, here are some new facts this year, Speaker: In 2023, Ontario attracted 137 foreign direct investments. That brought in \$11 billion from outside of the country into Ontario. That has created 12,000 new good-paying jobs right across our province. In fact, a new statistic today: Ontario has the largest number of FDI projects in Canada, and from 2018 to 2023, more jobs were created from foreign direct investment into Ontario than every US state and every Canadian province. That's what happens when you cut taxes, lower taxes. Scrap the carbon tax.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary?

Mr. Steve Clark: Thanks to the minister for his answer. It's unfortunate that the Liberals see all the progress that our government has made and yet they still want to jeopardize it with the ever-increasing carbon tax. But what's even more disappointing is even when prominent NDP and Liberal politicians, including the Liberal Premier from Newfoundland and Labrador, have all come out against the carbon tax, we can't even get Liberals and NDP in this House to call on their federal counterparts to oppose this tax.

I've heard from plenty of businesses, plenty of households in my riding, who are concerned about the increase in the carbon tax, and I'm positive that Liberal and NDP members were hearing the same thing when they were in their ridings last week.

Speaker, can the minister please share with us what he's hearing about the federal carbon tax?

Hon. Victor Fedeli: We were in Texas last week, meeting with tech firms, and they couldn't understand the Liberal carbon tax. They asked us, "Well, doesn't this punish your businesses? Doesn't this hurt your households in Ontario?" But we assured them, business to business, that we're doing our part to keep their costs lower. We've cut 500 pieces of red tape, saving businesses a billion dollars annually. We told them that they can write off their new equipment in-year, saving them a billion dollars a year, that we're cutting the price of gas and fuel taxes by 11 cents a litre. We told them that all of these fundamentals are in place to lower the costs except for this carbon tax. That's why we urge the feds to scrap the carbon tax.

HEALTH CARE

Mr. Jeff Burch: Speaker, through you to the Minister of Health: Yesterday morning, I was at a rally in Niagara for EMS workers who are members of CUPE 911. They were sounding the alarm about ambulance wait times and code zeros that are happening far too often. They're telling us that, in Niagara, there are not enough ambulances due to off-load delays and inadequate staffing to the point it is putting the public in danger.

What does the minister have to say to the workers in Niagara EMS who are asking for help and support because they're working in dangerous situations every day and don't have the resources or staffing to answer calls on time or do their jobs safely?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: I say to paramedics across Ontario, our government has always been there as a 50-50 partner with municipalities. Whenever there is an expansion of either primary care paramedics or the actual rolling stock of the ambulance, the provincial government is a 50-50 partner, and we will continue to do that.

In terms of wait times and ensuring that ambulances and paramedics can very quickly and effectively get back out onto the road into our communities, we have a number of programs that the member opposite, I hope, is aware of, which of course is the Dedicated Offload Nurses Program, a program that is funded 100% by our government and that ensures that we have a dedicated staff member, whether it

is a nurse, a respiratory technologist or a paramedic, who stays with that patient until they can get service in their ED department. That program alone has made significant increases in decreasing the number of wait times.

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

Mr. Jeff Burch: Speaker, I can tell you that those workers don't feel that this government has been there for them. Joey Durocher reached out to my office in Welland. In January, his knee pain became so unbearable that he had to go on modified duties at work. X-rays showed he had severe arthritis. When he was referred to a clinic, he was told the process would take well over a year. He said, "I don't understand how people can be expected to suffer through something like this."

Yesterday, this government had a chance to free up thousands of doctors to see more patients and chose not to. What specifically will this minister do to ensure people like Joey can get timely access to a doctor and the care they desperately need?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: At the risk of stating the obvious, expanding primary care multidisciplinary teams by 78 teams in the province of Ontario—three times the amount that we initially committed, because we know that there is need.

We now have, because of investments that our government has made with the Minister of Colleges and Universities, 300 new student paramedics training in the province of Ontario, including in northern Ontario where there is a Learn and Stay program available for them to get their training for free in exchange for staying in communities that are underserved.

We will continue to make these investments while the member opposite, their party, continue to oppose them every time we vote on these investments. But we're getting the job done, Speaker.

HEALTH CARE

Mr. Adil Shamji: For the Minister of Health, Mr. Speaker: I'm tired of the people of Ontario getting ripped off by this government's health care privatization agenda. When the Minister of Health welcomes private for-profit clinics with open arms, that's not actually a surprise anymore. But when the Minister chooses to ignore blatant violations of the Canada Health Act, that is another thing entirely.

In October of 2023, it came to light that a nurse practitioner walk-in clinic in Ottawa was charging a \$400 annual subscription fee to access fee-for-service care. And at the time, the minister told us that she would investigate. That was almost half a year ago, and in that time, many more clinics have popped up across Ontario, like the one in Ancaster that was announced just last month.

Mr. Speaker, her inaction is literally creating a market for health care profiteering in Canada and in Ontario. We must make good on the promise of primary care. How can anyone trust this government to manage our health care

system, if it cannot even enforce the basic tenets of the Canada Health Act?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Speaker, to be clear: Twice the member opposite referenced the Canada Health Act. This is clearly a loophole that the federal government needs to shut down.

We have had conversations with the federal Minister of Health saying if there is an opportunity, if there is a wedge that is allowing these clinics to happen, then perhaps the member opposite could pick up the phone and call their federal counterparts, because that's what I've been doing. And I'm making the case that if the Canada Health Act allows these for-profits, then we will be shutting them down with the changes to the Canada Health Act and federal government involvement.

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

Mr. Adil Shamji: Mr. Speaker, it must already be lunchtime on the government's side, because that was baloney. I would like to remind the minister about the Commitment to the Future of Medicare Act, which is Ontario legislation that forbids that practice as well, so she can take control of that herself.

Even if we overlook the fact that it took six months for her to come up with that response, the fact of the matter is that closing the loophole, either through provincial or federal legislation, should be easy. Instead of taking the many measures at her disposal to make family medicine more attractive and accessible, to credential more foreign doctors, all the minister can do is brag about the conversations that she is supposedly having with the OMA and CPSO, with literally nothing to show for it. This government is more than happy to make patients pay while they appease private interest.

Mr. Speaker, will the minister stop placing the financial burden of primary care on patients and commit to funding it for everyone so that no one ever faces a fee, regardless of whether they're seen by a family doctor or a nurse practitioner?

Interjections.

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

I'm going to caution the member on his use of language. "Baloney" is pretty close to the line—especially before lunch.

Start the clock.

The Minister of Health.

Hon. Sylvia Jones: You know, Speaker, I've been in this chamber a long time, and I have to say that the insults, the threats really are below you.

When I sent a directive to the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario in August of 2022, less than two months after starting my role as Minister of Health, the CPSO was able to assess, review and ultimately license—when appropriate—the historic highest number of internationally educated primary care physicians in the province of Ontario. So actions do make a difference. We did the same thing with the minister's directive for the College of Nurses of Ontario. Again, two years running, Speaker, we have had historic high numbers of inter-

nationally educated nurses wanting to live, practise in the province of Ontario. Those are concrete changes that we are making to impact people's lives and increase access to publicly funded health care.

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

The next question.

TAXATION

Mr. Matthew Rae: Just for the record, I'm a roast beef guy, so I'll thank you for that.

My question is to the Minister of Energy. Speaker, the federal carbon tax—

Interjections.

Mr. Matthew Rae: They're already heckling me, Speaker.

The federal carbon tax makes life more expensive for the people of Ontario. After years of punishing energy costs that are sky high, the Prime Minister announced that he was pausing the carbon tax but only on home heating oil and only for three years.

Families and businesses in my riding of Perth—Wellington that grow the food, that build our province every single month are being punished by this carbon tax. They can't afford the high taxes of the opposition and the NDP members. Our government understands this, that the carbon tax only takes money out of hard-working people's pockets. That's why we fought this ludicrous tax all the way to the Supreme Court, and we will continue to fight it, keep going forward.

Speaker, can the minister please tell this House why the federal government's selective carbon tax exemption hurts Ontarians?

Hon. Todd Smith: Sadly, Speaker, I can't; I can't answer the question. It's mind-boggling that the federal government hasn't realized that they're hurting the people of Ontario and they're hurting the people of Canada with this failed policy, the carbon tax.

Sadly as well, we can't get an answer out of the Ontario Liberal leader as to whether or not she supports the increase to the federal carbon tax in 13 days' time by a whopping 23%.

Or hold on, Mr. Speaker; maybe I can answer the question as to why Bonnie Crombie, the queen of the carbon tax, is still supporting a federal carbon tax. Every member of her climate change panel is on the record supporting the federal carbon tax, every member—

Interjection.

Hon. Todd Smith: —including the chair, the member from Beaches, who is heckling me right now, Mr. Speaker. When she was a member of Toronto council, she pushed city council to ask the federal Liberals to hike the carbon tax every year—every year.

I know I'm running out of time here, Mr. Speaker, but wait for my—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Yes, you are out of time on this one.

Supplementary?

Mr. Matthew Rae: Thank you to the minister for his response. It is unfair that the federal government is ignoring the overwhelming majority of Ontarians who heat with natural gas or propane and leaving them literally out in the cold this winter, Speaker.

As families across Ontario continue to struggle with the rising cost of living, our government continues to do everything we can to make life more affordable. But the queen of the carbon tax, Bonnie Crombie, and the independent Liberals don't seem to care about the harmful impacts the carbon tax has on the lives of our constituents. We need members on the opposite to work with us. In fact, the member from Kanata–Carleton is the caucus liaison to the Liberal Party of Canada and the federal Liberal caucus, but she refuses to call her federal Liberal colleagues to halt the carbon tax.

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Thankfully, our government will continue to act to keep costs down for families in Ontario. Can the minister please share with this House what we are doing?

Hon. Todd Smith: Mr. Speaker, it's clear we would scrap the carbon tax, and we fought it all the way to the Supreme Court of Canada. What we're really unclear on is where the queen of the carbon tax, the Ontario Liberal leader, Bonnie Crombie, stands. But it's pretty clear when you look at the people she has appointed to her advisory panel on climate change.

We talked about the member from the Beaches; how about Kathleen Wynne's failed environment minister Chris Ballard? He helped design the Liberals' multi-billion-dollar cap-and-trade program that drove up the cost of groceries and drove up the cost of gasoline.

Cherise Burda: She was excited to be one of the first supporters of the Liberals' disastrous cap-and-trade program before being voted out by rural voters.

Former McGuinty agriculture minister Carol Mitchell wanted to impose a carbon tax on farmers, and she was the agriculture minister.

Vince Gasparro not only backed the Liberals' cap-and-trade carbon tax; he pushed to expand it to every province in Canada.

And Kathryn Bakos is on the record saying she believes that you have to tax people as part of a climate change plan. Doug Ford and the PC government do not believe that.

HEALTH CARE

Ms. Chandra Pasma: The Premier promised the people of Ontario that they would never need to use their credit card to access health care in Ontario, yet Eileen Murphy was charged \$110 to get a routine Pap test done by an Appletree clinic in Ottawa. Then, the clinic told Eileen that if she wanted test results, she would have to pay another \$110.

Why is the Premier allowing health practitioners in Ontario to hold people's test results hostage for money?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Minister of Health.

Hon. Sylvia Jones: As I've said many times, if individuals believe that they have been inappropriately charged for an OHIP-covered service, they should be accessing protectpublichealthcare.ca. We have a process within the ministry to ensure that OHIP-covered services are insured and that patients cannot be charged for that.

Again, I will remind the member opposite that there is a Canada Health Act issue that needs to be resolved with the federal government, and we are in conversations with them to ensure that that practice does not and cannot continue.

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

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Well, Eileen is far from the only Ottawa resident being gouged on Mr. Never-Pay-with-Your-Credit-Card's watch, Speaker. Patients desperate for primary care are being told they can register with the South Keys Health Centre for \$400 a year, plus \$75 for every half-hour visit. ReVive in Kanata is promising primary care for a mere \$600 a year in enrolment fees.

How can the Premier justify this exploitation when we have the solutions we need to provide primary care for everyone within the public health care system?

Interjections.

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

Minister of Health.

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Well, I'm glad the member opposite and her party understand that OHIP-funded services should be covered and need to be covered. We have a process called protectpublichealth.ca people can go on to ensure that if they believe they have been unfairly charged for an OHIP-covered service, they get that work done.

But I'm also going to ask the member opposite, as we expand primary care multidisciplinary teams: Is the member opposite going to support those changes? We have a number of Ottawa-specific organizations that have received primary care expansion announcements: in Ottawa, a nurse practitioner-led clinic people can access, and we are going to have further expansion in Cornwall, in Kingston, in Perth. We have a number of these primary care expansion multidisciplinary teams that will allow people to be connected with primary care multidisciplinary teams, which is what patients and clinicians want.

TENANT PROTECTION

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: My question is for the Premier. Recently, a large group of seniors came to my office—they're from my riding—and they were upset and worried. Their rents keep going up while the living conditions in their building keep getting worse. Their corporate landlord continues to put off regular maintenance until major repairs are unavoidable, allowing them to apply for above-guideline increases every single time. These tenants were one increase away from losing their homes.

Mr. Speaker, the number of LTB applications for above-guideline increases went up 50% between 2020 and 2021 alone. My bill, the Keeping People Housed Act, would

create a task force to investigate this predatory practice. Will the Premier vote yes to stopping these bad actors who are costing seniors their homes?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): And to respond, the Attorney General.

Hon. Doug Downey: I appreciate the opportunity to speak to the AGIs, the above-guideline increases. There have been a number of applications. There is a process for that. The landlord-tenant tribunal, as an independent tribunal, processes those. We have doubled the number of full-time adjudicators so that people can have their hearings. If they have issues with their residents, if they have maintenance issues and that sort of thing, there is a process. There's the Rental Housing Enforcement Unit. There are avenues where they can have some of their issues addressed, Mr. Speaker. I'll have more to say in the supplementary.

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

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: Well, frankly, it's not working. LTB wait times are at all-time highs because they get what they want.

Mr. Speaker, we can't kick this issue further down the road. Last year, our province saw an unprecedented exodus of young people, people between the ages of 25 and 35. Fifty thousand people left the province last year. This is our skilled labour. Our children, our siblings, our friends are leaving the province in search of something better. The harm isn't just to communities and families; the harm is to our economy. We are hemorrhaging skilled labour as quickly as we are hemorrhaging affordable units.

Speaker, this government's failure to protect renters is hurting every single one of us. Again, will the Premier say yes to keeping people housed and no to tenants being gouged by supporting my bill?

Hon. Doug Downey: We are working very hard so that we are actually getting the numbers down at the Landlord and Tenant Board. And, in fact, complaints are down over 30% because we're working through the backlog that was created through COVID, partly due to the fact that we stopped any evictions during that period. We were keeping people housed and safe during that entire time, Mr. Speaker.

Now, what is causing grief for tenants is the cost of everything, and the cost of everything is tied to the carbon tax. In 13 days, it's going up 23%. If they're worried about people being housed and fed, they need to look at the costs and the things that go into those costs. We would ask that they stand with us to ask the federal government to axe the tax.

TAXATION

Mr. Dave Smith: My question is for the Minister of Finance. The carbon tax is making life more difficult for Ontarians. The Bank of Canada's governor has said that the impact of the carbon tax is actually four times greater than his previous estimates. People in my riding of Peterborough-Kawartha tell me that this regressive tax is causing

unnecessary harm to their household budgets. It's raising the price of everything, from filling up their cars to heating their homes.

Speaker, the people of Ontario have had enough of this carbon tax. Our government must continue to stand with them and call on the federal Liberals to eliminate the tax. Can the minister please speak to the damage this carbon tax has and why the federal government must end this regressive measure?

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Thank you to the member for that question. Now is not the time for a punitive, costly tax that is making life more unaffordable for the people here and across the country. We saw provincial Liberal members refuse to support a motion to eliminate the carbon tax and make goods more affordable across the province. We heard the Liberal member for Kanata-Carleton say that the vast majority of Ontario households are better off with a carbon price, in spite of all the evidence shown to the contrary.

In fact, the queen of the carbon tax, Bonnie Crombie, was just interviewed again on CTV; eight times she couldn't deny the federal carbon tax. She couldn't deny whether she would support it or not and she doubled down again in her press conference, propping up the federal Liberal government, Mr. Speaker.

The queen of the carbon tax and her members need to pick a side. It's time for all parties to join us and agree that this federal carbon tax needs to be eliminated.

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

1130

Mr. Dave Smith: Thank you to the minister for that answer. The carbon tax is hurting the economy and driving up prices in Ontario and across the entire country. Not only is it hiking our energy and gas bills, but also the cost of food, housing and more. Speaker, in my riding, in Apsley, they haven't had a grocery store for almost two years because it burnt. They have to travel 40 kilometres just to get groceries. That's not optional. The carbon tax makes life harder for them.

Unlike the NDP and the independent Liberals, our government will continue to stand up for Ontarians and ensure they can keep more money in their pockets where it belongs. The federal government needs to step up and do the right thing. It's time to eliminate the carbon tax. Speaker, can the Minister of Finance please explain what our government is doing to keep costs low for the people of Ontario?

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Thank you again to the hard-working member for that question. We know that now is not the time to sit back and wait, and that's why our government has taken real action. For the millions of Ontario drivers, we have extended the gas tax cut to June 2024. In fact, Mr. Speaker, since we have put the gas tax cut in place, we have saved Ontario taxpayers \$2.1 billion. Mr. Speaker, that's the largest tax cut Ontarians have seen this century. Let that sink in: the largest tax cut this century in Ontario.

So while the opposition huddles over there, they can continue to vote against making life affordable. Our government will not stop the work to put more money back into the hard-working people of this province.

BEVERAGE ALCOHOL SALES

MPP Jamie West: The question is to the Premier. Speaker, last week the Premier said that the LCBO would distribute alcohol, but it's the more than 7,000 Beer Store workers that distribute beer in the province. These workers are in the middle of deciding whether or not to accept the latest collective agreement, and they're voting with the understanding from the Conservative government that beer will continue to be distributed by UFCW members. Before they vote, these workers should know if there's something the Premier isn't saying.

My question, Speaker: Will the Premier commit today to include these workers in any future discussion on alcohol distribution and sales in the province?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): To respond, once again, the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Thank you, through you, Mr. Speaker, to the member opposite for the question. It's important to note that this alcohol framework has been in place for 97 years—almost 100 years. It is this government that's moving forward to modernize alcohol in this province to provide more convenience and choice and competition—97 years; we're taking action.

And of course, that means that the hard-working people at the Beer Store, the hard-working people at the LCBO, people right across this province, the workers who produce the beer, the people who distribute the beer, the people who retail the beer, are going to have a role in the modernization of the alcohol system in Ontario, because we're going to get it done.

But let me also remind the member opposite, it was this government that froze the beer tax again for the sixth year in a row. And may I remind the member opposite that it was the federal government that increased the beer tax again this year.

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

Ms. Catherine Fife: In the words of OPSEU president JP Hornick, "LCBO workers are organized like never before, and they're ready to fight for the future of the LCBO." On March 12, the workers delivered petitions signed by nearly 7,000 LCBO employees demanding "a stop to the sell-off of the LCBO by the" Conservative "government and to protect good jobs across the province." Colleen MacLeod, also of OPSEU, says, "We're proud that LCBO" workers deliver revenues and "contribute \$2.5 billion every year into the public services we all rely on.... We're not going to stand by while" the Conservative government "puts that money into the pockets of big box grocery store CEOs. We're going to fight him every step of the way."

My question now to the finance minister: Will he affirm here today in this House that the alcohol that the LCBO

will continue to be sold by Ontario public sector workers?

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Thank you again to the member opposite.

Mr. Speaker, it's this government that is moving forward, along with the hard-working people at the LCBO and the hard-working workers at the Beer Store, to provide convenience and choice for Ontarians right across this province.

On December 14, the Premier and I made a big announcement on behalf of all Ontarians that we were going to open up beer and wine and ready-to-drink distribution to convenience stores right across this province—the hard-working convenience store operators who've been asking for decades for this opportunity—so that people can have more convenience, so that people can have more choice, so that we can introduce some competition.

Does the member opposite really want to live in 1929, or does she want to live in 2024 and modernize the alcohol system?

TAXATION

Mr. Ross Romano: My question is for the Minister of Northern Development and Indigenous Affairs.

It's no secret: The carbon tax is making everything more expensive for everyone, especially for the people who live in the communities throughout northern Ontario. These communities are already feeling the pressure at the gas pumps, where fuel costs are significantly higher, in comparison, than they are anywhere else in the entire province.

But the opposition NDP members and the independent Liberals continue to support the carbon tax. They continue to support carbon tax hikes. They actually agree with the federal Liberals' plan to increase the carbon tax on gasoline seven more times before 2030.

The people of the north deserve better.

Can the minister please explain how the carbon tax negatively impacts individuals and families in northern Ontario, as well as Indigenous communities?

Hon. Greg Rickford: Mr. Speaker, it is why I put stickers on those gas pumps a couple of years ago, to remind folks where this was headed.

I want to thank the member from Sault Ste. Marie for his advocacy in his community. He's an outstanding MPP.

What he heard and what I heard during constituency week last week was not just about the cost of everything to our ordinary, hard-working families, but integrated supply chains like steel. Thank goodness we're coming along with electric car technology to save on some of those costs.

In production to manufacturing, you've got significant rises in costs. In the integrated supply chain in forestry, we have woodland operators—logging trucks, pulp mills—cutting board feet at increased costs, which drives up the cost of housing.

In food, all this talk about baloney got me to thinking about how much it costs, from the farmer to the abattoir to

the counter—for that cost of baloney. It has all gone up for this tax.

Scrap the tax. It's a bunch of baloney.

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

Mr. Ross Romano: Again, to the minister: I want to thank him for the response and for his advocacy in the area.

Speaker, it is absolutely shocking that the federal government continues to force this terrible tax on northern communities that are already paying more for fuel. It's even more shocking that the members opposite who represent these northern communities continue to support the carbon tax.

Northern Ontario faces unique barriers when it comes to fuel costs, and these have to be considered before we impose these further taxes on them.

Clearly, the federal Liberals don't care about the adverse effects of carbon tax on northern communities. They clearly don't care about the northern communities at all.

I'm wondering if the minister could please elaborate a little bit more for us on how the carbon tax is negatively impacting not only the residents in all of the communities, but the businesses as well, throughout the region, in northern Ontario.

Hon. Greg Rickford: Mr. Speaker, it's not just the current members of the federal Liberal Party; it's previous ones—the member from Markham–Stouffville and I saw witness to that in the House of Commons. Oh, that's right; it's the queen of the carbon tax who was in the House of Commons with us then, who now leads the Liberal affiliates across the way.

This is no laughing matter. The Dryden Eagles and the Fort Frances Muskies live 200 kilometres away from each other. Think of how much that costs, Mr. Speaker, when they go to have a sports tournament. Think of Sachigo First Nation today, where milk is \$9 a jug, a box of Pampers is \$30 for half a package. Do you know what's driving up the cost of bread, which has now eclipsed \$6 in those isolated northern communities? The carbon tax. Flour: \$25 for 10 kilograms in those isolated communities.

This is serious. We appreciate the support of the NDP. This tax needs to be scrapped, and the Liberals need to get on board with that.

HEALTH CARE

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Speaker, to the Premier: Nell Toussaint died roughly a year ago. She was a constituent of mine whose life was cut short by a lack of timely medical care. Ms. Toussaint was a migrant working in Ontario who did not qualify for medical care, even though she was employed and paying taxes. She was struck down by an operable disease, lost a leg, and then had a heart attack and stroke. She died early.

Why are she and others, even when they pay taxes, still left without medical care?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): To respond, the Minister of Health.

Hon. Sylvia Jones: As the member opposite knows, there are a number of programs available for—whether they are refugees or individuals who are waiting for permanent residency. Where we have programs—in fact, our agricultural temporary foreign workers is one such example where we ensured that OHIP coverage is available for those individuals.

Of course, our community health centres are another example of where we provide primary care access through multidisciplinary teams, specifically related for some populations, including, of course, individuals who are awaiting permanent residency or here for other reasons.

This speaks to the expansion of primary care and why it is so critical in our province.

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

There being no further business this morning, this House stands in recess until 3 p.m.

The House recessed from 1142 to 1500.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

BUILDING UNIVERSAL AND INCLUSIVE LAND DEVELOPMENT IN ONTARIO ACT, 2024

LOI DE 2024 VISANT UN AMÉNAGEMENT FONCIER UNIVERSEL ET INCLUSIF EN ONTARIO

Mr. Shamji moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 175, An Act to amend the Planning Act with respect to official plans and by-laws / Projet de loi 175, Loi visant à modifier la Loi sur l'aménagement du territoire à l'égard des plans officiels et des règlements municipaux.

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

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'd like to invite the member for Don Valley East to briefly explain his bill, if he wishes to do so.

Mr. Adil Shamji: This bill amends the Planning Act with respect to official plans and bylaws.

The amendments state that official plans and zoning bylaws may not have the effect of prohibiting the use of four or fewer residential units on specified parcels of urban residential land. They also may not impose a floor-to-area ratio on residential buildings or residential structures that contain three to six residential units, may not prohibit residential buildings or residential structures from being four or fewer storeys in height, and may not require parking spaces to be provided in connection with residential buildings or residential structures that contain at least four residential units.

PETITIONS

ENERGY POLICIES

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank Cathy Orlando from Sudbury for this petition.

“Transform Ontario’s Energy Sector.

“Whereas residents are struggling with energy bill increases and need relief; and

“Whereas natural gas is no longer the cheapest way to heat homes because electric heat pumps are now much more efficient, can provide all heating needs even in the cold climates, and result in far lower energy bills compared to gas heating; and

“Whereas natural gas is methane gas, which is a fossil fuel that causes approximately one third of Ontario’s GHG emissions and must be phased out”—

Hon. Paul Calandra: Point of order.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): There’s a point of order. I recognize the government House leader.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Speaker, the member is in breach of standing order 42(b), which only permits a member to make a brief statement summarizing the contents of a petition and indicate the number of signatures. As you know, Speaker, reading the full text of the petition is not permitted under any standing order, despite it having happened from time to time. I would ask you to call the member to order.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I want to thank the government House leader for his intervention. Is there anybody else who wants to speak to the point of order?

The official opposition House leader, the member for Timiskaming–Cochrane.

Mr. John Vanthof: Thank you, Speaker. I was somewhat caught by surprise by this point of order, but in cases where the petition isn’t overly lengthy, isn’t meant to waste the time of the Legislature, I think it would be beneficial to allow the petition to be fully read on behalf of the people who actually went to all the work of putting it together and getting the signatures. Thank you, Speaker.

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

It has been a long-standing practice of this House to allow members to summarize their petitions or read them in full, but not both. My predecessors in this chair have affirmed this on many occasions. For example, on December 7, 2010, at page 4024 of the debates, the Speaker stated as follows:

“When presenting petitions, it is in order to either read the petition or give a brief synopsis of the content. Members may want to give the latter option some consideration if their petition is particularly lengthy or if it contains language that might otherwise not be permitted in debate.”

I return to the member for Nickel Belt to read her petition—or summarize it, if she wishes to do so.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Thank you, Speaker.

“Whereas natural gas is methane gas, which is a fossil fuel that causes approximately one third of Ontario’s GHG

emissions and must be phased out because it is inconsistent with all climate targets, while heat pumps result in the lowest GHG emissions and are consistent with a zero-carbon future;”

They petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

“(1) Amend the natural gas expansion program to allow municipalities to redirect funds toward heat pumps, including for ongoing phase 2 projects; and

“(2) Ask the Ontario Energy Board to determine in gas expansion leave-to-construct applications which option would result in the lowest energy bills—directing the subsidy to gas expansion or to heat pump subsidies.”

I am happy to sign, and I will ask Emily to bring it to the Clerk.

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

HEALTH CARE

Mr. Guy Bourgouin: I have a petition entitled “Health Care: Not for Sale.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

“Whereas Premier Doug Ford and Health Minister Sylvia Jones say they’re planning to privatize parts of health”—

Hon. Paul Calandra: Point of order.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I recognize the government House leader on a point of order.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Thank you, Speaker. Standing order 42(c) requires that a member previously submit a petition to the Clerk for certification before seeking to present it. I wonder, has the member opposite had the petition certified? If not, I would urge you to call the member opposite to order.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): It’s a valid point to raise, I think. I would ask the member for Mushkegowuk–James Bay if indeed he has had his petition certified by the table.

In respect of the matter of certification, members are indeed required by standing order 42(c) to have their petitions certified prior to presenting them in the House, and I would remind all members to please submit their petitions to the table in advance of their preparation.

Has the member certified his petition or not?

Mr. Guy Bourgouin: Well, I read it before in the House, Speaker. It was approved, I guess, before, because this is not the first time I’ve read this petition.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): You would still be required to certify it before presenting it in the House by bringing it to the table and ensuring that it conforms to the mandatory format of petitions for the purposes of the House.

Mr. Guy Bourgouin: So prior to—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Prior to presenting it in the House.

Petitions? I recognize the member for Nickel Belt.

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank—

Hon. Paul Calandra: Point of order.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Point of order, the government House leader.

Hon. Paul Calandra: On the same point of order, Speaker, 42(c) requires that a petition be previously submitted to the Clerk for certification. I'm wondering if the member has certified this petition. If not, I would ask that you call the member to order.

1510

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I will ask the member for Nickel Belt: Has she taken the petition to the table and had it certified prior to its presentation?

M^{me} France Gélinas: Speaker, I used to do this—as you know, I present a lot of petitions. Once I have presented a petition and it does not conform, the Clerk lets me know.

Those are petitions that I've presented many times—and the table never let me know that it was not, so I took it for granted that I was able to read it again because I have handed it to them, they have signed off on it—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I appreciate it, but you'll need to get it certified by the table again before you can present it.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Okay. Will do.

LABOUR LEGISLATION

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Petitions?

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I have a petition entitled "Pass Anti-Scab Labour Legislation.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the use of replacement workers undermines workers"—

Hon. Paul Calandra: Point of order.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Point of order, the government House leader.

Hon. Paul Calandra: The same point of order: 42(c) requires that the petition be certified. I'm wondering if the member has done that, and, if not, if you could call the member to order.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I would ask the member for Hamilton West–Ancaster–Dundas whether or not she has had her petition certified by the table prior to—

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I'm not 100% certain, Speaker, but we will be doing that right now.

HEALTH CARE

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Petitions? The member from Mushkegowuk–James Bay.

Interjection.

Mr. Guy Bourgouin: Merci, monsieur le Président. This one is certified.

"Health Care: Not for Sale.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario"—I'll make sure I read it very clearly so that all my colleagues have a chance. Anyway, I will read it—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'm going to have to ask the member just to read the petition and not add any extraneous commentary.

Mr. Guy Bourgouin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Every second counts.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

"Whereas privatization always ends with patients getting a bill;

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

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

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

—"10 employer-paid sick days;

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

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

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

I fully support this petition. I will give it to Olivia to bring to the Clerks' table.

HEALTH CARE

Ms. Jessica Bell: This petition is called "Urgent Family Doctor Shortage in Chinatown in Ontario.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas there is a looming primary care provider shortage in Toronto's Chinatown area, impacting many Chinese Canadian residents;

"Whereas a significant number of doctors in downtown Toronto who provide service in Cantonese or Mandarin are nearing retirement or have retired, leaving thousands of residents without a family doctor;

"Whereas the lack of primary care is forcing residents to rely on emergency rooms for basic medical needs, contributing to the overburdening of our hospitals; and

"Whereas over 2.2 million Ontarians do not have a family doctor, and that number is expected to increase to 4.4 million by 2026;

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

—"guarantee everyone in Ontario has access to a primary care provider;

—"increase investment in primary care in the next provincial budget;

“—expand primary care options in Chinatown and other areas with service gaps by investing in primary care, as well as non-profit and public health clinics;

“—make it easier for internationally trained doctors and nurses to work in Ontario’s health care sector;

“—cut the administrative burden on family doctors to make the profession more attractive;

“—ensure the government will cover translation fees for minority-language-speaking groups.”

I support this petition, and I am affixing my signature to it.

ÉDUCATION EN FRANÇAIS

M^{me} France Gélinas: I am so glad to present this petition with a sticker from the Clerk on it. They look really good.

J’aimerais remercier Diane Lemay de Garson dans mon comté pour ces pétitions.

« Soutenez le système d’éducation francophone en Ontario ...

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

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

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

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

Ils et elles demandent à l’Assemblée législative de l’Ontario « de fournir immédiatement le financement demandé par le rapport du groupe de travail sur la pénurie des enseignantes et des enseignants dans le système d’éducation en langue française de l’Ontario et de travailler avec des partenaires pour mettre pleinement en oeuvre les recommandations. »

J’appuie cette pétition, monsieur le Président. Je vais la signer et je demande à Anne de l’amener à la table des greffiers.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I have a petition duly certified by the Clerks that I would like to read today.

“Stand Up for Local Conservation Authorities.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Ford government’s devastating changes to the Conservation Authorities Act and Bill 23 create substantial risks to people, properties and the environment; and

“Whereas these changes allow developers to dig, build, and excavate without oversight from conservation authorities; and

“Whereas Ford’s government would allow the sale of conservation lands—including endangered or threatened species habitat, wetlands, and areas of natural and scientific interest; and

“Whereas these changes will increase risks of flood, fires, and droughts in our province;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to reverse the reckless and harmful changes so conservation authorities can properly protect Ontario’s watersheds and wetlands.”

This is a very significant, important certified petition. I’m going to add my name to those of my constituents and give it to page Krishna to take to the table.

CANCER TREATMENT

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank the many cancer patients in my riding that have signed this petition. It reads as follows:

“Coverage for Take-Home Cancer Drugs.

“Whereas cancer drugs administered in a hospital or similar setting are covered for all eligible Ontario residents; and

“Whereas coverage for cancer drugs taken at home are a mix of private insurance, out-of-pocket costs, or provincial programs; and

“Whereas British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Quebec all cover” the cost of “cancer drugs taken at home; and

“Whereas the Canadian Cancer Society has called on the government to cover take-home cancer drugs, as their data supports that access saves lives;”

They petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

“To prioritize access to cancer treatment by developing a provincial program that provides full coverage for eligible cancer drugs taken at home.”

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

ORDERS OF THE DAY

SUPPLY ACT, 2024

LOI DE CRÉDITS DE 2024

Mr. Thanigasalam, on behalf of Ms. Mulroney, moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 174, An Act to authorize the expenditure of certain amounts for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2024 / Projet de loi 174, Loi autorisant l’utilisation de certaines sommes pour l’exercice se terminant le 31 mars 2024.

1520

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

Hon. Vijay Thanigasalam: It's always a pleasure to stand in this House to represent the good people of Scarborough–Rouge Park.

I look forward to hearing the remarks from the parliamentary assistant to the President of the Treasury Board, the member for Mississauga–Lakeshore, and from the official opposition.

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

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: It is an honour to rise in the House this afternoon, in my role as parliamentary assistant to the President of the Treasury Board and as a member of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, to speak in support of Bill 174, the Supply Act for the 2023-24 fiscal year, introduced by my friend the government House leader.

Speaker, this is the fifth year that I have had the privilege to rise in the House to speak in support of the annual Supply Act. As you know, this discussion and the vote that will follow are critical steps towards the final approval for all spending for the fiscal year, which ends in less than two weeks, on March 31, 2024.

It is important for me to note that the government is not proposing any new spending today. Those debates and those votes have already taken place. This House is required to pass the Supply Act in every fiscal year to approve all spending by the government of Ontario and the offices of the Legislature that has already happened through the year which was outlined in the estimates. Members will recall that this House gave its concurrence to the 2023-24 estimates two weeks ago, on March 6. This allows us to move on the Supply Act, where we are today. This is a very important part of the fiscal process because it gives the government an opportunity to outline the provincial fiscal position for the record and because, if passed, it represents the final agreement of the House with the estimates proposed by the government, including the supplementary estimates tabled last month.

Speaker, as I said here two weeks ago, this process will not be the subject of water-cooler discussion tomorrow; it won't trend on Twitter, and it won't be covered on the nightly news. But as we approach the end point of the fiscal cycle, I believe it is important for the general public and, especially, for all members in this House to understand how this Legislature approves all government spending.

As I've said before, the previous Liberal government and the previous Liberal Minister of Finance did not follow public sector accounting rules. Some members will remember the Auditor General saying that the previous Liberal Minister of Finance and the previous member for Mississauga South was making up his own rules, treating billions of dollars of losses as assets to avoid recording it as a deficit.

This government was elected to restore fiscal accountability and transparency to the provincial government.

I know this has been said many times, but I want to reiterate that every dollar spent by the province comes out of the pockets of hard-working Ontario taxpayers. This is the lens through which we should look at all government

spending here at Queen's Park and, for that matter, every level of government.

Speaker, Ontario families and small businesses are dealing with high inflation, high interest rates and global geopolitical uncertainty. The federal tax increase on April 1 is also adding to their challenges—including a 23% increase in the federal carbon tax.

I want to take a moment to thank the members for their support for my motion 81, calling on the federal government to stop its alcohol tax increase on April 1. With many of our local breweries and restaurants still struggling to recover from the pandemic, now is not the time for another tax increase.

But there are economic pressures right across the province, in almost every sector. These challenges have touched all areas of our lives. So it has never been more important to remind everyone who is paying the bills and to review how the government handles the public purse with even greater scrutiny.

At the same time, as we look to the future, the most important factor is the resilience of Ontario's workers, businesses and families. The people of Ontario are our best asset. That is why the government must account for every dollar that we spend. That is what the people of Ontario expect from their elected representatives, and that's what they deserve. The fiscal decisions that we make today will affect generations of Ontarians to come. This is a heavy responsibility, but I'm confident that we are on the right track.

At this point, I would like to provide a quick overview of our government's fiscal cycle. I know that some members have been through this process many times—for them, this will be a review—but some members may be going through this process for the very first time.

The former President of the Treasury Board tabled volume 1 of the 2023-24 estimates on April 20, 2023. This volume of the estimates provided a detailed public record of government ministry and office budgets, based on the spending plans outlined in the 2023 Ontario budget.

Of course, the government may also table supplementary estimates to ensure that the government has the resources it needs throughout the fiscal year. And in 2023-24, supplementary estimates were tabled twice: first, on November 29, 2023, and again just last month, on February 29, 2024. Combined, they provide additional funding for the contingency fund, to add flexibility to the fiscal plan, and for new education and transportation initiatives.

The President of the Treasury Board also tabled volume 2 of the 2023-24 estimates on November 29, 2023. This second volume of the estimates outlines the spending plans of the independent legislative offices, including the Office of the Assembly, the Office of the Auditor General, the Office of the Chief Electoral Officer, and the Ontario Ombudsman.

Together, the estimates provide details of the operating and capital spending needs of ministries and the legislative offices for the 2023-24 fiscal year. They represent the government's formal request to the Legislature to approve its spending requirements. Every Ontario government

must complete this annual process to provide each ministry with the legal authority to spend their capital and operating budgets. Basically, this allows us to proceed with the essential business of the government. It's how we fund the programs and services that Ontarians rely on every day.

And for anyone curious about the estimates or the public accounts, they are all available to the public. I urge everyone to visit ontario.ca/estimates. This is an excellent resource, because the estimates are available going back more than 20 years. The public accounts are available online going back 30 years, to 1994.

Once the estimates are introduced, they are referred to the standing committees for review. These committees then select ministries to appear, to answer questions about the estimates. The committees review specific allocations, referred to as "votes" because the committee votes on each allocation. It is also important to note that almost all the ministries have their estimates reviewed by all-party standing committees, so the spending we are being asked to approve today has already been discussed over the last several months.

1530

I want to reiterate that the government is not proposing any new spending today. The government is only asking us to approve the spending outlined in the 2023-24 estimates, based on the 2023 budget and the fall economic statement, for the current fiscal year.

Combined with the public accounts process, the Supply Act can be seen as crossing the finish line for the fiscal year. If any member should vote against this bill, they would be voting against the programs and services that the people of Ontario depend on.

Speaker, again, I appreciate the opportunity to address this House this afternoon to outline the important process in the provincial fiscal cycle.

At this point, I would like to outline some of the top-line numbers to provide an update on the overall picture of Ontario's economic and fiscal outlook. These are the most up-to-date numbers reported by the Ministry of Finance in the third-quarter finances just over a month ago, and I believe they give us a clear picture of exactly where the province is right now.

The provincial deficit is a key measure of Ontario's financial health—because it is not fair to the next generation to leave them with an unsustainable debt.

With that being said, the 2023-24 third-quarter finances project the province's deficit to be at \$4.5 billion this year. There is no denying that this is a significant amount of money, but it is also important to note that this is an improvement of \$1.1 billion compared to the outlook in the 2023 fall economic statement. This is a significant improvement, and it deserves to be recognized here because it is a great sign that the province is moving in the right direction. The reduction in the deficit was mainly due to increased revenue and lower interest on the provincial debt. This is great news for all Ontarians.

Of course, to see the overall fiscal picture, we need to look at the provincial revenue. Government revenues in

2023-24 are projected to be \$202.7 billion. That's \$942 billion more than the forecast in the 2023 fall economic statement. It is reasonable to ask why revenues were almost \$1 billion higher than what was predicted, and the answer is actually quite simple. There were stronger and expected tax revenues and slightly higher tax revenues as a result of new information received from the federal government since the fall economic statement.

In 2023-24, overall program expenses are now projected to be \$193.4 billion. That is \$424 million higher than the previous forecast in the 2023 fall economic statement, and it is also \$2.8 billion higher than the 2023 budget plan. Again, the question that seems obvious is "Why?" Well, there are a few reasons for this increase.

Firstly, there was an additional \$1.7-billion investment in health care, mainly for compensation costs, cancer treatment services and other health initiatives. There was also a new \$704-million investment through the New Deal for Toronto, including \$504 million for transit and transportation funding and \$200 million in operating supports for shelters. And lastly, there was a \$583-million increase in the college sector, offset by third-party revenue. These three examples where program expenses have increased represent three of the top priorities for the government: health, education and infrastructure.

Speaker, in a perfect world, our initial projections would be 100% correct 100% of the time. But one of the strengths of this government is fiscal flexibility and making adjustments to meet the changing needs of the province. That's the reason for our quarterly spending updates.

The bottom line is that Ontario's economy is expected to see continued growth in 2024. In the context of the global economic situation, this is a win. In large part, this is because of the resilience of the people of the province of Ontario, but also the targeted investments and the prudent fiscal management of this government, under this Premier and this Minister of Finance.

Speaker, as I said, the Supply Act supports the spending plans outlined in the 2023 Ontario budget, Building a Strong Ontario.

As a member of the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs last year, I also had the opportunity to travel across the province for pre-budget consultations, in Kenora, Thunder Bay and Sault Ste. Marie in the north; in Ottawa and Kingston in the east; in Windsor and Essex in the southwest; and of course, right here in Toronto. As I've said before, the 2023 budget reflects the priorities of the people we heard from right across Ontario during this process. It was a long-term, prudent and realistic path forward for Ontario, designed to make life easier and more affordable for families, workers and businesses across the province.

As the parliamentary assistant at the Treasury Board, I had the opportunity to work with the Minister of Finance and with our colleagues on some important measures for small businesses and manufacturers in the 2023 Ontario budget. And I'd like to give just a few examples.

Firstly, we are expanding access to the small business corporate income tax rate by increasing the phase-out

range. This provides Ontario's small businesses with income tax relief of \$265 million from 2022-23 to 2025-26.

Secondly, the new Ontario Made Manufacturing Investment Tax Credit provides a 10% refundable corporate tax credit to help local manufacturers lower their costs, invest in their workers and become more competitive. Manufacturers will receive a tax credit of up to \$2 million each year, because we recognize that it is critical that we rebuild our manufacturing sector in this province.

As the Minister of Economic Development said earlier this month, before we were elected in 2018, companies were leaving Ontario. Ontario had lost over 300,000 manufacturing jobs, including many in the auto sector. Sergio Marchionne at Fiat Chrysler told former Premier Wynne that she had made Ontario the most expensive place to do business in North America. And at the Ford assembly plant in Oakville, where I worked for 31 years, we watched as Ontario lost auto sector jobs, while the former Liberal Minister of Finance from Mississauga South, at the time, told us that assembly line manufacturing was a thing of the past. Well, he was incorrect, because today we've been able to attract \$28 billion of automotive investment in this province, under this Premier.

Speaker, our government has a very different approach. The Premier, the Minister of Finance and our team have made Ontario open for business again. This government is focused on driving growth by lowering costs, cutting taxes, red tape and energy costs, and attracting more jobs and more investment to Ontario. These policies have produced an economic recovery that leads the country.

Since 2018, Ontario has added over 715,000 new jobs. In fact, in 2023, Ontario created more manufacturing jobs than all 50 US states combined. Can we just imagine that? All 50 US states—we are creating more jobs here in the province of Ontario.

There is no better example than the auto sector, where we have attracted over \$28 billion in new investment from global auto manufacturers in the last three years alone. They see the enormous potential in Ontario's Critical Minerals Strategy. They're excited about all the work we're doing to build new, made-in-Ontario supply chains, connecting critical minerals from the north, including the Ring of Fire, to manufacturing in the south.

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Instead of worrying about their jobs, my friends at the Ford assembly complex in Oakville are now working to transform the facility into a global hub for manufacturing electric vehicles.

Again, I want to thank the Minister of Economic Development and the Minister of Mines for all the work they're doing on this. I was proud to join them both at the PDAC convention this month. My son Joey, a student at the Queen's University department of mining, attended as well. I know that he is excited about the province's \$3-million investment through the Ontario Junior Exploration Program. This is a program designed to help companies search for mineral deposits and attract even more investment in this growing sector.

Growth has given us the revenue we need to invest in our hospitals, schools, transit, highways, and other key infrastructure. I would like to speak about some of these investments now in greater detail.

The 2023 budget includes over \$81 billion for the health care sector this year; that is up by 40%, from \$59 billion in 2017-18.

I would like to give the members an example of what this means for us in Mississauga. Provincial funding for Trillium Health Partners has increased by over \$356 million over the last five years, from \$281 million in 2018 to \$1.2 billion now. That is an increase of almost 50% for Trillium Health Partners over the last five years. As I mentioned earlier, the estimates and the public accounts are available online, going back over 20 years. That means we can also look at the five-year period before 2018, and I would really encourage all members to do this. Under the previous Liberal government, provincial funding for Trillium Health Partners increased from \$768 million in 2013 to \$821 million in 2018. That is an increase of under 7% over five years, or only about 1% each year.

As former Liberal Deputy Premier and Minister of Health George Smitherman said, "Ontario Liberals really starved health care for five years, and that is not spoken enough." I want to reiterate that: Minister of Health George Smitherman said, "Ontario Liberals really starved health care for five years, and that is not spoken enough." And I agree.

They left us with overcrowded hospitals and badly outdated facilities that simply were not up to the challenges we faced during the pandemic.

As well, we know that the new leader, Bonnie Crombie, told TVO that she would have spent even less on health care. Can you imagine that? She would have spent even less on health care.

Under the leadership of this Premier, in the 2023 budget, the government committed over \$54 billion over 10 years in the largest hospital and long-term-care building programs in Canadian history. Speaker, \$32 billion in capital grants are getting shovels in the ground to build the health care infrastructure Ontario needs, including over 50 hospital projects, with 3,000 new beds.

In Mississauga-Lakeshore, this includes a historic multi-billion dollar investment to build the largest and most advanced hospital in Canadian history, with 22 storeys, three million square feet and almost 1,000 beds. This will include a 200,000-square-foot women's and children's hospital, which will be the first of its kind in Canada. In total, it will be triple the size of the current hospital, which first opened in 1958. I was born at that hospital, and both of my sons were born there—and not only that; my mother worked in the kitchen, as a first-generation immigrant, and my niece was a candy stripper at that same hospital.

The truth is, we needed a new hospital 20 years ago, and the former Liberal government kept saying no. Now the RFP process for the new hospital has closed, and construction is expected to begin next year, in 2025.

To the east, by Etobicoke Creek—for my friend from Etobicoke–Lakeshore—we’re expanding the Queensway Health Centre, with a new nine-storey patient tower, with 600,000 square feet, and over 350 new hospital beds in a modern centre for complex care.

To the north, in Brampton, we are working with the William Osler Health System to transform the Peel Memorial hospital into a 24/7 patient hospital.

And I could go on with examples from every corner of this province that will provide better health care for patients and their families.

Of course, any new facility that is being built is going to require staff—more trained doctors, nurses, PSWs and other health care professionals. That’s why we are building a stronger health care workforce. Ontario has added over 10,000 new doctors and over 80,000 new nurses to the health care system over the last five years.

And as the Deputy Premier announced last month, the government is investing \$110 million to connect up to 328,000 people to primary care teams. Combined with historic investments to expand medical education and the work that we are doing to allow internationally trained doctors to care for patients, the Ministry of Health expects that up to 98% of Ontarians will be connected to a regular health care provider within the next few years.

In the 2023 budget, the province announced significant investments to reduce hospital wait times by offering more surgeries at community surgical and diagnostic centres. This allows hospitals to turn their attention towards more complex and high-risk surgeries, reduce surgery wait times, and ease emergency department pressures. I’m pleased to be able to say that we have already seen the results of this approach. As of June 2023, the wait-list for surgeries has been reduced by more than 25,000 people from the peak in March 2022. I know that we are all committed to learn from this and to reduce wait times even further, by expanding funding to existing community surgical and diagnostic centres, and funding new centres for MRIs and CT imaging, and other surgeries and procedures.

Of course, reducing hospital wait times is just one part of our vision for the health care system in this great province of Ontario.

We’re also making great progress on our plan to build modern, safe and comfortable long-term-care homes for seniors and residents. The 2023 budget included a historic investment of \$6.4 billion to build over 30,000 new beds and to upgrade 28,000 long-term-care beds across the province by 2028. In my community of Mississauga–Lakeshore, this includes the largest long-term-care home in Ontario, which we just opened in November.

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Speaker, it is important for me to pause here to note that from 2011 to 2018 the former Liberal government was only able to build 611 beds across the entire province. Speaker, can you imagine that? From 2011 to 2018, they only built 611 beds across the province. In one location in my riding of Mississauga–Lakeshore, we have 632 beds—more than what the previous Liberal government built throughout the whole province.

As the number of Ontarians over 75 grew by 75%, the number of long-term-care beds increased by less than 1%. There were over 4,500 people on the wait-list for long-term care in Mississauga alone, when I was elected five years ago. We had 20% fewer long-term-care beds than the provincial average—and, again, many were badly out of date.

That’s why, during the pandemic, I joined the Premier to announce the Accelerated Build Program, in Mississauga–Lakeshore, to build modern, comfortable and safe new homes that follow the latest standards for design and safety. As I said, 632 new residents have just moved into Wellbrook Place, the largest long-term-care home in Ontario—even larger than the Credit Valley Hospital when it first opened 38 years ago. Mr. Speaker, can you imagine that a long-term-care facility that has 632 beds is larger than the Credit Valley Hospital when it first opened 38 years ago? This is an incredible achievement from our Minister of Long-Term Care and our Premier, who committed to build long-term care throughout the province of Ontario.

It is part of a new campus of care for seniors, including a new health services building and the first residential hospice in the city of Mississauga.

Another thing: You can’t imagine that in Mississauga, being a city as large as it is, we do not have a hospice there yet, but we will under this Premier.

Again, I want to thank Karli Farrow at Trillium Health Partners and Tess Romain at Partners Community Health and their teams for all their great work.

It is important to note that there are projects like this under way right across the province of Ontario.

And since the 2023 budget, a number of new long-term-care homes have been completed and opened to new residents, including the Humber Meadows Long-Term Care Home with 320 beds, which opened last June in North York.

We all recognize that Ontario’s population is growing rapidly. In fact, Ontario grew by over half a million people last year alone, and we’re on track for at least another half a million people this year. That’s more growth than any US state, including the fastest-growing states, like Florida and Texas—our population is growing faster than all the US states combined. This represents a tremendous opportunity, but it also demands action.

It’s one of the reasons this government has the most ambitious capital plan in Ontario’s history. Ontario’s plan to build includes investments of \$185 billion in infrastructure over the next 10 years, including \$20.4 billion this year alone and almost \$26 billion next year, in 2024-25. That is the largest capital plan in the 156-year history of Ontario. I’m going to repeat that, Mr. Speaker: It’s the largest capital plan in the 156-year history of this province.

I want to thank the Premier, the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Infrastructure for building Ontario, which was neglected for so many years.

It includes \$71 billion for transit infrastructure, including \$7.5 billion this year—the largest investment in transit in Ontario’s history. This will continue to transform the

GO Transit rail network into a modern and reliable rapid transit system.

It also includes the largest subway expansion in Canadian history, including the Ontario Line, the Scarborough subway extension, the Yonge North subway extension and the Eglinton Crosstown West extension. These are game-changing new projects, like the Ontario Line here in Toronto, which will connect to over 40 other transit routes including GO Transit lines, TTC subway and streetcar lines, and the Eglinton Crosstown LRT line. In my community of Mississauga–Lakeshore, it includes the new 18-kilometre Hazel McCallion LRT line on Hurontario, connecting with a new BRT on Lakeshore, which will connect the Lakeview development that is going to have over 16,000 new residents over the next 30 years.

The government's plan also includes \$28 billion over 10 years to support highway expansion, maintenance and repair projects right across the province, to improve our highway network, because we know that highways and roads are critical to the economic well-being of Ontario. This includes Highway 413, a new 400-series highway and transport corridor, which will connect Peel, Halton and York regions to support the movement of people and goods across the western GTA. Hundreds of thousands of new residents are moving to the area every year. We don't have the highway capacity we need to support this growth. All of our major highways in the western GTA will be over capacity within the next 10 years. Highway 413 will finally bring relief to an area that needs it the most, saving drivers up to 30 minutes each way.

The Bradford Bypass, a new, four-lane, 16-kilometre freeway connecting Highway 400 in Simcoe county and Highway 404 in York region, will save commuters even more time, up to 35 minutes per trip.

Highway 7, a new, four-lane, 18-kilometre highway between Kitchener and Guelph, would save commuters more time.

Again, I could go on with many more examples.

In my own community, the first phase of the QEW/Dixie interchange improvements is now complete in Mississauga–Lakeshore. And the \$314-million QEW/Credit River Improvement project is well under way, with traffic now open on the new twin bridge over the Credit River. We're rehabilitating the existing heritage bridge. So we will have two bridges going back and forth to move commuters back and forth.

Speaker, I also want to take a few moments to speak about some of the measures in the 2023 budget that were designed to keep costs down for individuals and families across the province.

Firstly, we have extended the province's gas tax and fuel tax rate cuts until the end of June 2024. This simple move means savings for the people of Ontario every time they go to the gas pumps. It means putting money back in your pocket to help put food on the table or to help buy other essentials to support your family. As Jay Goldberg, Ontario director of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, said, "This will ensure that critical tax relief continues into 2024."

At the same time, we continue to call on the federal government to stop their 23% carbon tax increase, which would add 17.6 cents per litre to the price of gas on April 1.

My first job was at the Pioneer gas station in Port Credit. At the time, a litre of gas was 33 cents. By 2030, the carbon tax will be 37 cents more than a litre of gas was when I first started my job there.

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I also want to take a moment to highlight the One Fare initiative, which eliminates double or triple fares for most local transit services across the GTA, when commuters also take GO Transit, saving an average of \$1,600 each year. Soon, commuters will be able to travel on the GO Transit Lakeshore West line, the new Hazel McCallion Hurontario LRT, the new Lakeshore BRT corridor, the TTC, and on other municipal transit systems right across the GTA on only one single fare. I want to congratulate my friends the Minister of Transportation and the Associate Minister of Transportation on this excellent initiative.

The 2023 budget also provided support to more seniors with an expansion of the Guaranteed Annual Income System. Starting this July, it will allow for 100,000 more seniors to be eligible for this program, including payments of up to \$166 per month for single seniors or \$332 per month for senior couples. It is important for me to note that this benefit is now adjusted each year based on inflation.

Our government is also committed to support the province's most vulnerable people, with an additional \$202 million each year for the Homelessness Prevention Program and the Indigenous Supportive Housing Program—a 40% increase over 2022-23. Both of these programs were designed to help those who need it most. As I've said before, in my community of Mississauga–Lakeshore, this investment is helping to double the capacity of Armagh House, the only transitional housing facility in the region of Peel for victims of domestic violence. Again, I want to thank the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing for all his great work on this program.

These are just a few examples of the actions that this government is taking to keep costs down for some of this province's families, businesses and people right across Ontario.

In every budget, the government has to make some difficult choices. It's always a balancing act, but I'm happy that our targeted tax cuts and assistance programs have been able to help those who need it most.

I would also take some time today to highlight some important initiatives from my ministry, the Treasury Board Secretariat. I think members will agree that these are great examples of the approach this government is taking with the public purse.

Firstly, I'm very proud to remind the House that a new regulation under the Building Ontario Businesses Initiative Act, or BOBI, was approved and will come into effect in just a few weeks, on April 1. This will help to level the playing field for Ontario businesses, providing greater access to procurement opportunities across the entire public sector, including ministries and agencies, hospitals

and schools. This will promote economic growth and help Ontario businesses to sell more goods and services and create more jobs right across Ontario. We expect that by 2026, contracts worth at least \$3 billion will go to Ontario businesses every year. That's \$3 billion back into our own economy.

And when you think about it, it's obvious that Ontario businesses should benefit from the spending of their own government. We will do this by changing the way we evaluate bids and by taking into account all the extra costs Ontario companies pay to comply with our high standards to protect worker health and safety and the environment.

I am so pleased with all the hard work that went into preparing this new regulation. It demonstrates the kind of common-sense approach that our government is taking with the public purse. And I know we will continue to look for new ways to protect and promote our small businesses.

To take another example, the government is now using innovative procurement strategies and a variety of delivery models to make it easier to work with builders on project requirements, design and pricing. This is helping to ensure that Ontario gets strong and competitive bids on our infrastructure projects. We are now separating large, complex projects like the Ontario Line into smaller contracts to generate more market interest, to build more transit, highways and other infrastructure better and faster.

The government is also using modular builds and promoting design standardization, and working with municipalities to get shovels in the ground faster and approvals faster. These initiatives are helping us to get shovels in the ground, creating new jobs, and helping to build much-needed new infrastructure. That is why we introduced the Building Transit Faster Act to streamline progress on priority transit projects. As well, the Supporting Broadband and Infrastructure Expansion Act and the Getting Ontario Connected Act have made it easier for Internet service providers to deploy infrastructure, to provide faster access to reliable, high-speed Internet.

Speaker, it is absolutely essential that the government addresses these infrastructure needs. Ontario's taxpayers cannot fund the infrastructure that the province needs alone.

That is why we set up the Ontario Infrastructure Bank, a new, arm's-length, board-governed agency. As the government moves forward with our plan to build, we are always searching for new ways to attract trusted investors, like Canadian public sector pension plans, to help build the essential infrastructure that we all need. Many of these plans already make investments in infrastructure around the world. For example, the Ontario Teachers' Pension Plan has over \$200 billion in investments around the world. Can you imagine that, Mr. Speaker? The Ontario Infrastructure Bank will give pension funds like this new options to put their members' investments to work right here in Ontario, to help the government deliver large-scale infrastructure projects right across Ontario. The province did not reinvent the wheel here. We are following in the steps of our own federal government, the UK government, and many US states, including California and Connecticut.

We're working to deliver more infrastructure faster, with new capital from investors, and the new Ontario Infrastructure Bank will help the government deliver it.

Speaker, thank you again for the time to speak on the Supply Act this afternoon. I would like to close my remarks by thanking all the members who are here today listening to this Supply Act debate, as I have outlined some of the key spending initiatives of the government's 2023-24 budget. I think I've touched on several critical areas where each dollar spent supports the families, workers and businesses of this province.

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Mr. Speaker, I just want to reiterate some of the things just in my riding of Mississauga-Lakeshore alone.

We are building the largest hospital in Canadian history. This hospital will be 22 storeys tall—24 surgical rooms, almost a thousand beds. Mr. Speaker, when I say 22 storeys, that's 22 storeys—not home storeys. That's a building, so that works out to 35 storeys. Can you imagine seeing a hospital that is 35 storeys tall and having more surgical rooms than any other hospital in Canadian history?

As well, 632 long-term-care beds in Mississauga-Lakeshore—more than the previous Liberal government built from 2011 to 2018, in one location.

I can continue with the new Credit River bridge—\$314 million to build a new bridge over the Credit River to get our commuters back and forth from Toronto to Burlington to Hamilton to Niagara Falls, to get our products to market much quicker; with \$28 billion of investment coming into this province in automotive investment. We need the highways so that we can transport our parts into plants much quicker due to the fact that the plants nowadays work on a just-in-time system. If the part is not there on time, the line goes down in production. We need these plants so we can compete with the world.

And we're attracting automotive investments, from the Minister of Economic Development—the largest VW plant in history. It will be the fourth-largest building—1.6 kilometres long and one kilometre wide. Can you imagine a building of this magnitude being built right here in Ontario?

Mr. Speaker, I want to reiterate that every dollar spent by the government comes out of the pockets of the hard-working Ontario taxpayers. I also said earlier, it is a heavy responsibility to be trusted with the hard-earned tax dollars of the people of this province, and it's not to be taken lightly. The government made a promise to be responsible and transparent with the economic and fiscal situation of this province, and I believe that during this fiscal cycle, this is exactly what we have done.

Finally, I want to reiterate that the government is not requesting approval for any new spending here today. All of these important investments have already been made.

I'm looking forward to voting for the Supply Act, and I hope that all members will join me here today to support the spending here from the 2023-24 fiscal year.

I just want to thank all members here for listening to me. Like I said, this will not be talk at the water cooler tomorrow, and it won't be on the news this evening. The

Supply Act is what we have already spent this year in our province of Ontario—and these are historic investments that we have made in Ontario.

I always look at the 2017-18 budget, and I look at the previous Minister of Finance, and the previous government spent \$152 billion.

Today, under this Premier, this Minister of Finance and this government, we're spending \$202.7 billion without raising a tax for the regular families here in Ontario. And I think that's the most important thing—that we are not raising taxes, and we're giving money back to our people here in Ontario.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for giving me this opportunity today to speak on this.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Lorne Coe): Further debate?

MPP Jamie West: Thank you to my colleague for his debate. One of the things he said near the end was that every dollar spent comes out of the pockets of hard-working taxpayers, and it's something I've been thinking about recently because—I'm sure we're all hearing this in our communities, about the money that was spent on Super Bowl ads or, if you're listening to podcasts, the money that's spent on podcasting ads talking about the amazing work that is being done or, more recently, the \$2.2 million that was spent on a Metrolinx ad basically really disdainfully talking down to people riding the TTC about how long it has taken, more than a decade, for some of the projects to be finished. I don't think that's an effective use of our taxpayer dollars. It's not specific to this bill, but it was just something I thought of recently.

The money that we're spending—I don't know what it costs to get a Super Bowl ad, but I'm sure it's millions of dollars. A billion dollars? I'm not sure what it is for a Super Bowl ad. But I do know it's one of the most expensive ad spaces you can buy.

I don't know what it costs to be in podcasts—you've got to compete with the mattress factories and everything else. Every single podcast has one or two of these ads, as well. That Metrolinx ad I do know, because I read the article yesterday—\$2.2 million.

If we could have taken that money, those millions of dollars, and put it into actually getting work done, put it into investing in people, put it into getting Metrolinx finished, put it into retaining our nurses, put it toward—instead of having Bill 124; not having Bill 124 and allocating that money so that nurses, for example, as public sector workers, wouldn't be exiting the province and going to other provinces where they're treated fairly and treated respectfully.

Yesterday, when this was first announced—normally, when we table a bill, and you'd know this, Speaker, you'll read the name, there's a bit of formality, and the Speaker will say, "Would you like to explain the bill?" The member said, "It's pretty self-explanatory," and I thought, "Not really." The bill is titled An Act to authorize the expenditure of certain amounts for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2024—point being, it's not hard to tell what it's about, but it's not really, really straightforward.

When I looked at the bill, this number caught my eye: \$6,079,277,000. The full quote says, "For the period from April 1, 2023, to March 31, 2024, amounts not exceeding a total of" over \$6 billion "may be paid out of the Consolidated Revenue Fund or recognized as non-cash investments to be applied to the investments of the public service...." The reason that caught my eye, that six-billion-plus dollars, is because that's what we know Bill 124 is costing this province to date.

Bill 124 was a bill put forward that was unconstitutional. It said that, for anyone in the public sector, you could not bargain your wages more than 1%, and it would stay in place for three years. In debate, we said it was unconstitutional. As labour critic, I said, "This is unconstitutional, and you're going to lose this in court." In fact, they did lose it in court. The Conservative government decided they would appeal it, and I said, "You're going to lose the appeal," because what the Chief Justice had ruled in it—I don't read a lot of legal text, but I do read a lot of arbitration rulings; it was a pretty embarrassing outcome for the Conservative government. Everyone they put up as a witness contradicted the reasons for having the bill. It was probably a very frustrating day.

Interjection.

MPP Jamie West: My colleague is reminding me that the Liberals did the same thing—Bill 115. They did this in 2016, so it's not that long ago. Bill 124 was at the beginning of 2018, maybe—I think the beginning of 2018, not the beginning of 2019. In 2016, the Liberals had Bill 115, almost a carbon copy of this. They basically told education workers—instead of all public sector workers, the Liberals just said, "Education workers, we particularly do not like you, and we're going to limit your compensation." That was unconstitutional. In fact, the Conservatives, when they were on the opposition side, said, "That's unconstitutional. You can't do that. That's ridiculous. That's an outrage." In fact, it was unconstitutional. It ended up costing—I couldn't find all the numbers; I was trying to do a quick search earlier—\$103 million to ETFO, \$50 million to OSSTF. And I'm sure that if you go to the other unions, the compensation costs would be in that range as well.

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So what we know is that when you do something that's unconstitutional, it basically means it's illegal. We know from the Liberals that when you do this it's going to cost you a fortune—not you, because, as the member said earlier, every dollar spent comes out of the pockets of hard-working taxpayers. So you're writing cheques with taxpayers' dollars. You're writing cheques to fight court battles that you're going to lose because the Liberals proved you're going to lose. The Liberals did the same thing and wrote cheques with taxpayers' money to fight these court challenges, and then the penalties and the payouts afterwards for the Liberal Party were hundreds of millions of dollars. But in this case, \$6 billion plus and counting—\$6 billion plus.

I want to be clear about this. This isn't a surcharge. This isn't a penalty. This isn't like when you watch Matlock or

something and there's victim fees and stuff. What you did—the Conservative government did—is basically equal to wage theft. You took money out of people's pockets that they deserved, they fairly could have got the money for, and they never got the interest on.

I'm allowed to say you broke the law. It was unconstitutional, so it was a violation of law. It was ruled that way.

It was wage theft. For the last six years as the labour critic, I have been wondering, why isn't the Conservative government, if they care so much for workers, going after the \$10 million they know that unscrupulous employers have stolen from workers—actual wage theft that's been reported, proven? They've been found guilty, but the Conservative government has refused to collect it. I can't wrap my head around it, because it seems like an easy win. I would like to think that some of these businesses, if they're unscrupulous and not taking care of their employees, perhaps they didn't survive, so you couldn't get some of that money. But why not go after even a dime of that money?

It hit me, when I saw this announcement about the \$6 billion of wage theft, that the Conservative government is the biggest wage-theft employer in the entire province—\$6 billion at this point. It could be more than \$13 billion, according to the Financial Accountability Officer. It's wage theft. You took money out of workers' pockets.

And the Premier—the gall the Premier had is that, “I had to do this to save jobs—to save jobs.” That's a ridiculous statement. Number one, we have lost more nursing jobs than probably any other time of our lifetimes—nurses walking out the door.

Hon. Todd Smith: No.

MPP Jamie West: Well, the member opposite said no. You probably could conclude the time when Mike Harris laid off a whole bunch of nurses, but I'm talking about nurses just exiting, nurses who don't want to be here anymore.

I went to a graduation ceremony at Laurentian University. I met a wonderful young woman who was studying nursing. I was on the stage, got to shake her hand and everything, as many of us get invited to. I saw her at the reception afterwards. I said, “Congratulations. We really need nurses.” And she said, “I'm never working in this field. I had my placements. It is a terrible working condition. Nursing today is not like it was when I started the course. I'll never work in this field ever. I just paid my tuition, so I thought I should graduate my final year.” That's the reality for people. The reason the Conservative government counts the number of people signing up to be nurses is because they don't want to pay attention to the number who are exiting, who are taking their pensions early, who are graduating and saying, “No, not for me, man.”

We have to address this. I'm here to help you. It sounds like I'm insulting you, but I'm here to help you, because this is a crisis that is affecting all of us. We cannot have a health care system where people don't want to be there and working. I don't want to work in health care. That's a specialized job where you care about people and you take

care of people in vulnerable moments. It's critical. I've been in the hospital. I had vertigo a couple of years ago and had no idea what was wrong with me. I just felt nauseous. I was concerned about all kinds of stuff. The people who work in health care—amazing, amazing. When you're at your most vulnerable, that's who you put your faith in.

But with Bill 124, for 53 months, we treated these workers—not just in health care but all public sector—like dirt. I'm going to take that back. Not “we”—the Conservative government chose to treat them like dirt. You've got to wear that. And there was a pandemic and in the worst conditions of time, you treated them terribly.

The outcome of this: When Bill 124 was ruled unconstitutional, I started getting phone calls from hospitals, from school boards, asking, “Is there going to be additional funding? Because now we have these payouts.” All these unions that have these clauses allowing them to renegotiate—when they renegotiate what's happening is, when they go to arbitration, the arbitrator says, “Yes. You were entitled to this. You should have got this.” They're getting these payouts, and it creates this additional crunch on hospitals that are already underfunded. They're feeling this crunch and saying, “Now we've got this giant price tag, courtesy of the Conservative government, but there is no extra funding to date or announcements or promise of funding to date from the Conservative government.” So I look forward on Tuesday in the budget for the relief that the school boards, the schools, the hospitals and other organizations like that are desperately looking for when it comes to that sort of money.

The other thing, when I was thinking about cost of living and expenses, was the minimum wage, because Bill 124 was one of the first things the Conservative government did, but freezing minimum wage was probably the first thing. There was an expectation that minimum wage was going to climb, but before it could, the Conservative government passed a law to freeze it at \$14 an hour, and they froze it for two years at \$14 an hour.

Deena Ladd said, “What he did”—talking about the Premier—“was basically take away a dollar increase, then take away the adjustments for two years, and then start to adjust it again in 2021.” So 2018, nothing; 2019 nothing; 2020, nothing; 2021, it started to readjust. So, if you cost that out, each minimum wage worker would since have earned between \$3,000 and \$6,000 more between 2018 and 2021.

I'm starting to think that the reason they don't want to go after the wage theft is because they are helping people with wage theft. Between \$3,000 and \$6,000 from minimum wage workers was stolen from their pockets that they were entitled to.

The authors of the estimate write, “Many minimum wage workers put their own health at risk to keep working on the front lines of our economy throughout the pandemic. The three-year delay in raising the minimum wage to \$15 cost them dearly.” That's a sad thing.

Minimum wage used to be a whole different thing. Whenever I hear minimum wage, I always think of Chris

Rock saying minimum wage means if they could pay you less, they would. And do you know what? The Conservative government is allowing multi-billion-dollar companies to pay workers less. They're finding a loophole in the digital worker rights protections act, which is a fantastically fictional name because it doesn't offer any protections for these workers. What it does is protect these large gig companies—Uber, the food delivery companies, the driver services—to pay workers less than minimum wage.

What it does is it says that you have to pay at least minimum wage, but only for the amount of time you're actually doing work, only while you're doing work. So if you work it out per hour, while the person is working, they make less than seven bucks. It's like \$6.36, but let's just say less than seven bucks—way below minimum wage. Then you take out the expenses, and it's less than three bucks.

You think, if you have insurance and a car, you're paying for your brakes, you're paying for your gas, you're paying for tires over time, and you're making less than seven bucks an hour—and so instead of rushing to the aid of these workers to ensure that, “Hey, the Employment Standards Act says, ‘You have to pay minimum wage. It's here; you're only way down here. PS, you're a multi-billion-dollar company. You're not a struggling mom-and-pop. You've got billions of dollars, so you can at least pay minimum wage.’” Instead of doing that, what they said is, “No, no, we'll write legislation. Did someone say billionaires? We're running over. We're right there for you because we're going to write legislation to ensure that you can continue to pay these workers less than minimum wage.”

And so they started off the last session freezing minimum wage so that the lowest-paid workers wouldn't get a raise, could barely make ends meet. They continued in this session by saying, “Is there a way we can pay workers even less? Oh, yes. Yes, there is a Conservative way to do that, absolutely. Let me tell you how I can help you out, Mr. Billionaire-Company-Owner and your shareholders.” Because there is nothing more important for the Conservative government than jumping for wealthy and well-connected friends over the top of just regular working-class people.

And the shortage of this—I was thinking—I was talking to my son, actually, who is going to graduate this year. When I was going to school, I had my own apartment. I had a job that paid just slightly over minimum wage, but I only worked on weekends. Any other day I worked was for other expenses, if I wanted to get new clothes or treat myself or something, but my core expenses—food, rent, hydro and all that—was by working on the weekend.

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And when I wanted to find an apartment, it was based on where I wanted to live. Do I want to be near the beach—because Sudbury is fortunate to have a couple of beaches that are right downtown—or in the core city? Do I want to be near my school? Do I want to be downtown where the nightlife is? And all of that was a range of about 50 bucks. All of that was affordable. All of those places were places

that you would bring your parents to and not feel embarrassed of the conditions.

Do you know what I see lately? I see people renting out their garages as if it's an apartment, and for a rent that seems unbelievably high. A garage where you use the local restaurant's bathroom is being rented as an apartment. That's shameful. When you look at rents in Toronto where people are making minimum wage, because many people here represent downtown Toronto, I don't know how you'd make ends meet. And in even my riding, looking for an apartment, it starts at about a grand. You're not going to be able to afford that with minimum wage—not even close.

Here's the reality of what's going on with the investments, and I listened to the last hour about the investments and how great this is for the economy, but I have to tell you, I live in a reality in Ontario that seems different than the Conservative government's. I live in a reality where more and more people come to me and tell me it has never been this bad. Affluent people tell me this, people struggling to make ends meet. Middle-class people tell me this. Definitely not-for-profit industries tell me this on a regular basis. They have never seen it this bad, this critical, this need for help.

The stats from Feed Ontario reflect this. This is from Feed Ontario, “Ontario's food banks were visited more than 4,353,000 times throughout the year”—this is their last stat—“an increase of 42% over the last three years.” This is the startling one that hits me, especially as labour critic: There has been “a 47% increase in people with employment accessing food banks since 2018.” I think the stat is up to 2022, but every year, that number increases—47% increase in people working, going to food banks.

I shared stories about Charity, back when Bill 28 was attacking education workers, and Charity allowed me to share her story so many times. I really thank her, because there is a position where you wouldn't want people to know this about you when you are working full-time at a government job, working for the province, being paid by the province and making so little money that you go to the food bank with your children. You don't even have enough money to leave your children with somebody else to go to the food bank so they don't have to know. You have to bring your kids with you. You have to tell them, “As a mom, I work full-time, but I don't make enough from the government of Ontario, my employer, to make ends meet. I have to go to the food bank to feed you.” That's disgraceful. And this trend keeps getting worse.

This isn't me. I know sometimes people think in opposition we just say stuff, because we want to hurt your feelings. This is Feed Ontario's stats. I'm just amplifying it so you're aware of it. You can't look the other way. This data is not working for you. If more and more people every year are using food banks, well: (1) it's the wrong direction; but (2) fewer and fewer people can afford to donate to food banks. I think if we're going to do an oath or something we want to do substantially, that if you're sitting on the government's side, then you don't get to stand outside of food banks and do photo ops, because

they're an earmark of the failure of the government. I don't care if the government is Liberal or Conservative, Green Party or NDP, that you no longer get to stand around and brag about how much money was collected under your watch as government, when you can do something about it.

"The proportion of food bank clients with full-time employment doubled in the past year to 33% in 2022." The following year up to 47%. This doesn't make sense. This isn't a success story.

Let me go on to other issues. Ontario Works—this also comes from Daily Bread Food Bank. A lot of people on Ontario Works, who are receiving it, are going to food banks. So Ontario Works is the money you would get if you can't find employment or are unable to work—it used to be called welfare in the old days. It is below the poverty line. It is \$733 a month. That's the same amount it was in 2018. Since the Conservative government was elected, they didn't increase Ontario Works at all. As inflation goes up every year, typically 2% to 3%—last year, I think it was between 6% and 7%—this has never gone up. You can't find housing for \$733 a month.

The slap in the face is there's a portion of that that they say is for housing. I can't remember off the top of my head what it is. But imagine them saying—let's say 400 bucks is housing—"Don't spend anything else because that's for housing." That's a joke. You can't get housing for \$733. Basically, what you've done to these people is you've said, "Look, we know the poverty line is up here. We're going to hold your head under the water here."

They did the same thing for people who are disabled on ODSP, Ontario disability support. "Despite inflation having risen by 16.68%"—this is from Daily Bread—"a single individual on disability is receiving \$1,229 per month to survive on," which is, "\$900 below the poverty line." So you're living with a disability; somehow, to make ends meet, you've got to come up with \$900 a month.

For many of these people, it is their parents, typically seniors, who are helping to compensate for this. Many of these seniors I end up talking with are worried that they're coming to the end of their lives and don't know what's going to happen to their children and are terrified for what's going to happen to their children. I'm talking about adult children.

This is a broken system. Feed Ontario points out that, "Two out of three people who access food banks are social assistance recipients"—32.5% from ODSP, 26% from OW—"as their primary source of income." We have a broken system that we all know is broken. No one is naive here. None of my colleagues from the other parties are naive. We just, as New Democrats, say it as loud as we can because we care about people who are starving to death. We care about people who can't pay their bills. We think it's important.

I know very often the Conservative government will say things like, "The best solution is a job." It's hard to get a job if you cannot find food, if you can't buy clothing to go for job interviews, if you cannot get on your feet. There's that old expression: "It's hard to pull yourself up by your bootstraps if you don't own boots." It's hard to get

a job if you don't have clean clothes or new clothes or if you can't afford to take the bus somewhere to apply for a job.

Poverty creates horrible conditions. Poverty is one of those systems that creates the social determinants of health, that creates people with lower immune systems who are more sick and a larger burden on our health care system. Solving poverty would save us money in so many other ways, but we're not interested in solving poverty. What we are interested in—not us. What the Conservative government is interested in is investing in \$2.2-million ads for Metrolinx saying that the people of Toronto who are complaining that the project has taken more than 12 years to get finished are kind of whiny and don't really understand what's going really on.

If you haven't seen this ad, you can't find it because Metrolinx has pulled it, so you've got to go and look up a CBC article. But you've got to watch this ad. It is unbelievable. I can only imagine Phil Verster wrote this ad while riding in his limousine, and this is how he imagines the people who ride the TTC look like and speak like. It is absolutely insulting and out of touch, and I think it's a reflection of how the Conservative government feels about the working-class people of Ontario.

Speaking of ODSP, WSIB is somewhere we can invest money into. I talked the other day—yesterday, in fact—about how just raising it 5%, restoring that original 5% cut that was taken, I think, by Mike Harris back in the old days—it was promised prior to the election. Like a lot of election promises, it has kind of fallen apart because it has been almost two years since the last election. But people who are on WSIB are desperate for this 5% increase. If you restored that, it would make all the difference in the world.

I was surprised when I heard that. I thought they would be asking for a 10% or 20% increase. But they said, "Just restore the 5%." Obviously, they would like anything, but that 5% would make a world of difference.

The thing with the WSIB is, if you're never hurt, you think it works. If you work with people who are on WSIB, you realize how terrible it is, how broken it is. Recent government studies show that only around 170 of the approximately 3,000 annual fatal occupational cancer cases in Ontario are compensated. Imagine that: 3,000 people die from occupational cancers; about 170 of them are compensated, and I'm going to guess that those 170 are probably unionized workers who have full-time workers' compensation officers—WSIB officers, I guess, now they would be called—and they have to fight.

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I come out of a union, Local 6500. The Steelworkers have three full-time compensation officers, and I have met—because I was in health and safety, and our office that we would meet in regularly was across the hall from theirs. I have met so many retirees or people who had to retire early or people who have gone off on sick because of occupational disease. I have met so many of them who are desperate—desperate that they will hear that they had a reward before they die, so they know that their life meant

something, so they know that their spouse and their kids will have something when they leave, their lives stolen from them. Speaker, 170 of the 3,000 every year get that phone call. They get into financial ruin when they're on WSIB, and most of them end up on ODSP.

We have a limited amount of time because my colleague from Nickel Belt is going to be speaking soon.

I want to talk about supervised consumption sites.

Friday was a dark day in Sudbury. Friday, Heidi from Réseau Access—which was taking care of our supervised consumption site, The Spot—had to go and meet with her employees at The Spot. There is only one full-time employee left. She gave them their notice that they would have to close their doors. The supervised consumption site in Sudbury has been waiting just over three years for a response from the Conservative government. That cheque has never showed up. The city of Sudbury, recognizing the need, recognizing the costs to our EMS services, the cost to the people, the financial and also the emotional costs for people when their family members are dying and suffering from opioid overdose, invested for an entire year, waiting for the Premier to get off his wallet and cut a cheque for a provincial responsibility for health care—a cheque that never showed up. They saved lives for over a year. At Christmas, their funding ran out. People tried to stick around, but you're not going to stick around very long in health care, so there's only one employee left. The rest of the people are shuffling around from other organizations in Réseau to keep it going. On Friday, they heard it was closing.

The Conservative government arbitrarily said that 21 supervised consumption sites would be funded in the province. They took everybody who had their applications and said, "Jump through the hoops again and rewrite your applications." Sudbury jumped through those hoops and rewrote them. To date, out of those 21, only 17 have been opened; the only one in northern Ontario is in Thunder Bay.

I want you to picture northern Ontario—the size of France. Sudbury would be at one corner, at the south end of France, and Thunder Bay would be up in the northwest corner. It would take you between 12 and 14 hours to drive there. It's probably not going to work out too well for a supervised consumption site. It's probably not going to be effective there—and it's probably why Sudbury is the leader by proportion of the number of people who die by opioid overdose.

I called for help for this many, many times. I asked for a private member's motion to declare a medical emergency. The Conservative government never answered those calls. The Conservative government voted against my motion.

We're floating, in Ontario, around 20,000 deaths from opioid overdose. The Premier has his fingers in his ears—doesn't care about those people; doesn't care about their families; doesn't care about their friends; doesn't care about the deaths. They're having a magical, wraparound service—that 20,000 people continue to die, and many more will continue to die.

I don't know what this bill is, but it's nothing to brag about. I only had a little bit of time to talk about the things that were wrong with it—but there was a lot wrong in Sudbury. And I'll echo what I've been hearing time and time again from people across the province: It has never been this bad.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Further debate?

M^{me} France Gélinas: It is my pleasure to put a few words on the record about the Supply Act, which basically looks at how the government spent the money that they had. I will focus on the \$82 billion that the government had to spend on our health care system.

The first thing I want to talk to you about is primary care. Primary care is basically the key that opens the door to the rest of the health care system. You need to have a primary care provider to be referred to a specialist. You need a primary care provider to be referred to a surgeon, to be referred to other parts of the health care system. But for 2.3 million Ontarians now, they do not have access.

And yet, we have here in Ontario interdisciplinary primary health care organizations that are willing to help, that are ready to help, that would love nothing more than to take the thousands and thousands of Ontarians on their wait-list and give them access to primary care so that those people get the health promotion they need to stay healthy, get the disease prevention they need to control their disease, get the chronic disease management that they need, get the mental health services that they need right here, right now, in Ontario.

We have 111 members of the Alliance for Healthier Communities. Those members are community health centres. They are nurse practitioner-led clinics. They are Indigenous primary health care organizations. They are community-governed family health teams. They all have something in common: Their family physicians work with a team of other people. Usually the team will have nurse practitioners, nurses and RPNs. They would have somebody dealing with mental health, either a social worker or a psychologist. They would have people dealing with health issues, usually a nutritionist or dietitian. They would have a health promoter. They would have a team—a medical secretary etc.—that works to provide primary care.

Right now in Ontario, the Ontario College of Family Physicians has gone all over the province to sound the alarm bells. We cannot continue the way we are going. We were at 2.2 million when they came—we're now at 2.3 million Ontarians without access, and by the end of next year, we will double those amounts, with close to five million Ontarians. A million Ontarians right here in Toronto won't have access to primary care, and yet you have sitting on the desk of the Minister of Health a list of nurse practitioner-led clinics that want—all they need is a little bit more money to hire one more nurse practitioner, to hire one more nurse, to hire a dietitian, and they would be able to take on more patients.

I can speak for the nurse practitioner-led clinic in Capreol. Capreol is part of my riding in Nickel Belt, where

40,000 people do not have access to primary care. I live in northern rural Ontario, and do you know what, Speaker? We have underemployed nurse practitioners who would love nothing more than to get a job at a nurse practitioner-led clinic in a community health centre and take on hundreds of people who need their help. It is so bad that—the specific nurse practitioner-led clinic I'm talking about in Capreol had a maternity leave. During the maternity leave, a nurse practitioner came and did the maternity leave. They were able to keep her a little bit longer because they used money that was left over from COVID to keep her, and they were hoping that—they've been asking for more funding for nurse practitioners for years and years. I should have counted how many letters and how many requests for funding I have hand-delivered to the Minister of Health for this one particular nurse practitioner-led clinic. And yet, it is radio silence. We have solutions right there.

Do you know what's happening now, Speaker? Lise has opened a private clinic for nurse practitioners. She bills people who come to see her. She doesn't want to do this; she wants her job. She was excellent, actually. She worked at the nurse practitioner-led clinic in Capreol until they did not have enough money to keep her. Now there are hundreds of patients who are paying to see her, because this is the only way that they can gain access. This is wrong. It doesn't have to be like this. We're not talking about billions of dollars—we're talking about hundreds of thousands of dollars more to nurse practitioner-led clinics, to community health centres, to Indigenous primary health care teams, and thousands and thousands of people would gain access to primary care.

1650

We know what happens when people don't have access to primary care. None of us wants to sit in an emergency room for hours and hours on end. So we wait, so we wait, so we wait, until we are so sick that we haven't got a choice anymore.

And then, rather than being diagnosed with stage 1 cancer, you're diagnosed with stage 3 or 4, which—for a lot of cancers, we have the treatment for you, we will treat you, we will try to gain you your life back, but it will cost the health care system hundreds of thousands of dollars for that treatment. All of this could have been avoided—and we're talking for one person. The treatment for stage 4 cancer, the treatments for stage 3 and stage 4 breast cancers are in the hundreds of thousands—you're talking half a million dollars per client. Are they worth it? Yes, absolutely. We have the technology. We have the knowledge. We know how to help people. But all of this could have been prevented had people had access to primary care. All of this could have been prevented if the hundreds of requests for funding that sit on the Minister of Health's desk would have been answered. For the money we spend on treating people once they're sick, we could have saved money and given access to all of those people. But they did not do this.

The Supply Act made it clear that the minister had announced that there would be \$30 million to improve

interdisciplinary care. Once they finally signed the \$3.1-billion agreement with the federal government, they took the federal money and invested up to \$100 million in 78 projects. But there are hundreds of other projects sitting on that desk that will open the door to people who need primary care. What are we waiting for? Why are we letting people suffer, gambling with their health and with their lives when we have the knowledge, we have the skills, we have the money? We have a government that chooses not to do that. They choose to—what is it—increase by four times the amount of money that we spend to the few private hospitals that we have. They chose to increase it by 230%, I think—I'm going by memory—the amount of money that we give to the 10 private surgical suites that exist in Ontario right now.

They have no problem increasing the funding for the private, for-profit delivery of our health care system, but when it comes to funding primary care—let me read some of the requests that the Alliance for Healthier Communities put forward. They are the ones who represent the 111 community health centres, nurse practitioner-led clinics, Indigenous primary health care teams, community-based family health teams.

They said that health human resources at comprehensive primary care organizations across Ontario has been underfunded for over 11 years. For years, health care providers and administrative staff in community-based non-profit primary, community, mental health and addiction, and long-term care have faced lower pay grades than other parts of the health care sector, including newly created government health care agencies. Funding is inadequate and does not keep up with inflation or cost of living, which makes recruiting and retaining staff a challenge. Primary health care staff have been paid at or under 2017 salary rates. Community health organizations provide care for populations that are 68% more complex, on average, compared to the average Ontarian. Despite this complexity, clients served go to emergency departments less, resulting in \$27 million saved every year. On average, patients with access to team-based care have improved health outcomes, fewer emergency visits, better discharge experiences, and cost savings ranging from \$10 to \$90 per patient, per month.

They went on and on. And yet, they did not get a pay increase. They did not get the funding they need to hire more staff so that we don't look at 2.2 million Ontarians without primary care—making 2.3 million.

I also want to put on the record a letter that the township of St. Joseph put forward. This one has to do with the closure of the public health lab in Sault Ste. Marie. The corporation basically went on to ask—“At their March 6, 2024, council meeting, the township of St. Joseph passed resolution 2024-61 regarding the planned closure of six Public Health Ontario (PHO) labs, including the laboratory in Sault Ste. Marie.” They attached a resolution outlining their objection. And they wished to advise the Ontario Minister of Health that it is opposed to the closure of the Sault Ste. Marie Public Health Ontario lab and requested that Public Health Ontario be directed to review

past decisions to remove the Sault Ste. Marie public health lab's ability to test samples.

Their recommendation is in writing. It has been sent to the Minister of Health. They basically made it clear that the public health lab in Sault Ste. Marie is an important part of their health care capacity. Plus, many people they serve do not have water from the city, so they need to rely on the free water testing at public health to make sure that the water that comes from different wells and also water in the pools etc. is safe. None of this will be available.

They went on to say:

"Whereas the closure of the Sault Ste. Marie" public health "lab would mean longer wait times in getting results from beach water, hotel and recreation centre spas/pools and provincial park water sampling for the region, or even the cessation of sampling altogether due to time sensitivity, and

"Whereas Sault Ste. Marie and area is currently faced" with "an acute shortage of doctors and the availability of clinical/diagnostic testing supports the attraction and retention of more doctors, and

"Whereas a strong local health care system requires a critical mass of skilled health care professionals and health care services, which include reliable and timely lab testing...."

I hope the minister will answer to the township of St. Joseph, who do not want the lab to close in Sault Ste. Marie.

I have something very similar coming from the Timmins area, where, again, we're looking at closure.

In this Supply Act, we don't see anywhere in there that we will bolster the public health lab in areas of the north to make sure that it continues to be available. We all know what happened in Walkerton. We all know what happens when people don't have \$135 to pay a private lab to see if their well water is safe: People get sick; people get hurt; people die. All of this is prevented right now because we have public health labs throughout the north. If those are not available anymore, many people won't drive all the way from Hearst to Sudbury to have their water tested for free. They will either have to pay 135 bucks or go without. We all know that many will choose to go without.

1700

The next thing I wanted to talk to you about is the supervised consumption services site. There was a letter that was written to the Minister of Health as well as the minister of mental health, about the supervised consumption sites. It was signed by 51 health care executives; 51 health care executives signed the letter to the Minister of Health and the minister for mental health, asking them to keep the sites open. Some of the letter says:

"Unregulated drugs of unknown contents and potencies are driving increased deaths, hospitalizations, injuries and trauma across Ontario, with an estimated 3,644 drug-related deaths in 2023. Several communities in Ontario have declared a state of emergency due to drug toxicity deaths. Supervised consumption sites, and particularly low-barrier overdose-prevention sites, are a necessary emergency response to this crisis and must be immediately scaled up. In 2018," this government "arbitrarily capped

funding to only 21" consumption sites. "Six years later, the government still has not delivered on funding 21.... Despite overwhelming need and local support, the Ontario government has approved and funded only 17 consumption site locations across the province. Only one of these is located in northern Ontario," located in Thunder Bay, which is way too far for the people of Timmins, Sudbury or elsewhere. "Meanwhile, the toxic unregulated drug crisis has taken far too many lives since 2018."

We're talking 20,000 people who have died, many more family and friends left grieving.

"In the context of this preventable public health emergency, urgent action is required. There are at least five submitted applications for" consumption sites "that have been ... delayed by the Ontario government." That includes in Sudbury, who sent their application 30 months ago; Barrie, 28 months ago; Windsor, 19 months ago; Timmins, 13 months ago; and Hamilton, where they had to withdraw their application in October after two years of waiting.

"The tragedy of an isolated instance of gun violence in Toronto must not prevent people in diverse locations across the province from accessing vital health services any longer. The Ontario government's decision to stop processing applications altogether for more than seven months is punitive and irresponsible."

They go on to talk about what is happening in Timmins, Windsor and Sudbury, with the very high opioid mortality rate, which is on average three times the provincial average. They come with a clear ask. We're not talking, again, billions of dollars; the site in Sudbury needs \$1.2 million. For \$1.2 million, you will save on average two to three lives in Sudbury every single week. Every single week, two to three people's lives could be saved with an investment of \$1.2 million in the supervised consumption site. Why is this so hard to fund? But you're not going to find this funding in the Supply Act of 2023; they did not spend a penny on this.

Another one that is rather interesting is Birth Mark. Birth Mark is a charity dedicated to providing essential reproductive health care support in southern Ontario. They are a charity that has been providing these services for free for the last six years. Their programs "offer preventive care and early intervention, leading to significant cost savings by addressing health and social issues before they escalate into more severe and costly problems. By providing adequate support, we effectively reduce emergency room visits related to mental health crises, childbirth complications and postpartum issues, thereby alleviating strain on our health care system and reducing associated costs."

They basically work with mainly pregnant homeless women and help them through their pregnancy, help them through their delivery and help them, post-partum, to look after their newborn. They have been doing this for free through donations. They've been having a tough time with the pandemic and everything else to raise money through donations and are asking the ministry for a very small amount of money so that they can continue to do this.

We all know what happens to homeless pregnant women once they give birth, if they are homeless, the CAS comes in, take their baby away and nothing good comes of that. Through the program, through Birth Mark, all of this changes. They support these women. They support them through their pregnancy, through their delivery, through their post-partum, through how to care for a child so that even when CAS comes and does their assessment, they are deemed to be fit mothers and get to keep their babies. It's good for the baby; it's good for the mother; it's good for our health care system, for our social system. It's very low money, but you won't see a penny that has been spent so far by this government for this very worthy program. This is a cost-saving program. This is the right thing to do for newborns, for mothers, yet this government leaves them high and dry.

The next one I wanted to talk to you about is home care. Our home care system is broken. It fails more people than it helps every single day, and this has dire consequences on so many people. One of my constituents came to see me. Her husband has been discharged from the hospital. He was alternate level of care, so he was admitted into the hospital, had a stroke and had multiple problems. He's waiting for a long-term-care bed. She has agreed to take him home and keep him at home until a bed becomes available in one of the long-term-care homes in Sudbury.

The home care system fails her pretty much every single day. She needs help early in the morning to care for her husband, to help transfer, to help bathe, go to the bathroom, feed etc., but the worker is never there. They gave her a call and said, "Oh, we will be there soon. We should be there by 3 o'clock in the afternoon." Nobody gets out of bed at 3 o'clock in the afternoon. Nobody can wait till 3 o'clock in the afternoon to have breakfast. She needs help to get him out of bed, to get him fed, to get him to go to the bathroom and all of this, but home care never came. I had a little meeting. Bayshore, that has most of the contracts in my riding, came. Her daughter was there and her daughter mentioned that as soon as she's finished work, she comes and helps her mom. So around 3:30, 4 o'clock in the afternoon, she's with her mom. They don't need a PSW anymore; all is good.

You know what, Speaker? Since Bayshore found out that at 3 o'clock in the afternoon they don't want a PSW anymore, every day the PSW is only available after 3. Then, when she says, "Well, I don't need you at 3; I needed you at 9 o'clock this morning," they say, "Oh, you're refusing care." We all know what that means. That means Bayshore takes the 56 bucks for that visit, the PSW never gets to come and hundreds of millions of dollars in profit just keep growing and growing for Bayshore while an 84-year-old woman who is trying to look after her 87-year-old spouse while he waits for a spot in long-term care has to go at it on her own. This is wrong.

We had the same thing with a lady from Azilda who has a kidney issue and has qualified for home care that is supposed to come to her house every day. They know that on Monday, Wednesday and Friday, she goes to dialysis at the hospital and she's not there. Those are the only times

where Bayshore will say, "Oh, we have a PSW that can come for you at 12:30 on Wednesday." They already know that on Monday, Wednesday and Friday, she goes for dialysis in the afternoon. You figure that they would send the PSW on Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday and Sunday to help her—no, no, no. They know that she will turn it down on Monday, Wednesday and Friday because she's at the hospital receiving dialysis, so that's when they make it available.

1710

I want to talk to you about Tina Senior, who has a very disabled child, a beautiful little boy, big blue eyes—anyway, a beautiful, beautiful child, six years old, goes to school, and he needs to be fed through a G-tube. So a nurse is assigned an hour and a half every day that he's at school to feed him through a G-tube tube. So he connects it, puts in the food, and often the machine goes "beep, beep, beep" and the nurse handles it and goes. That's not what happens at all.

Bayshore gets paid for an hour and a half for that call, but they only assign the nurse to go for 15 minutes. So the nurse goes in, connects the G-tube, gets the food, and then takes off. But at least twice, sometimes three times a week, the machine will go "beep, beep, beep," and then they don't know what to do. They call the mom.

The mom is an intensive care nurse at Health Sciences North. She has had to leave the hospital to go care for her son so many times that she has now quit her job as an intensive care nurse at Health Sciences North in order to be there every time the nurse, who is supposed to be there to look after her son for an hour and a half, is not there. Again, we sit with Bayshore, we try to straighten that out, and it never works. Bayshore gets paid for an hour and a half to look after this kid, sends the nurse for 15 minutes, and then depends on the mother to back this up.

This is causing a ton of stress. Think about it: You've lost your income as a nurse. You've lost your opportunity to continue to provide care to your community, a profession that she loves doing, because the home care system is failing her.

She also received direct funding for respite. Trying to recruit, train, book all of that on her own, submit the receipt in time at the right place, at the right time is a full-time job. It shouldn't be like this.

This is not what home care is about. Home care is supposed to be there when you need it. Home care is supposed to be there. If you qualify for an hour and a half, they're supposed to be there for an hour and a half. But given that you don't get paid in between clients, they will come in 10 minutes late and then leave 10 minutes early because they have to drive.

In my riding, they showed me 750 kilometres. How long do you figure it takes, Speaker, to drive 750 kilometres in the middle of the winter in rural northern Ontario? And they don't get paid for that time. It shouldn't be like this. We know better than that.

I also want to put on the record a little request from Gilles Proulx, who is a constituent in my riding who basically said, "I am writing to express my concerns

regarding the financial challenges faced by parents participating in the Model Parliament program. My son, Yanick Proulx, is a dedicated participant in this valuable program, and while I'm immensely proud of his involvement, the associated costs pose a significant burden on our family, particularly due to our residence in northern Ontario, specifically the Sudbury region."

I'm just putting it out there that this is something that the government could look at. We want all the kids to participate in the Model Parliament. It is a beautiful, beautiful program that helps a lot of kids experience things that they would have never been able to experience before. Helping with transportation, helping with accommodation for those kids that come from more than 50 kilometres away would really help. There are very few kids from my riding who have participated, mainly due to the fact that their parents did not have the money to do so.

I had the list of other things to talk about, certainly the private, for-profit long-term-care homes and the way that they pay their staff. We have the Elizabeth Centre in Sudbury right now that refuses to negotiate. It has been two years now where PSWs and RPNs have not seen an increase. None of that is in the Supply Act.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Further debate?

Hon. Todd Smith: It's a pleasure to stand in the Legislature and pick up where the members from the NDP finished off and also thank my colleague the member from Mississauga—Lakeshore, the parliamentary assistant, who spoke for almost an hour this afternoon about the Supply Act motion and all of the investments that our government is making—\$82 billion in health care.

And I thank the two members from the Sudbury area, as well, from the NDP, who talked for an hour and talked about what they saw or didn't see in the Supply Act. They weren't very well coordinated in their remarks today though, I've got to say. The member from Sudbury talked about the fact that no nurses want to work in the province, and the member from Nickel Belt talked about the fact that nurses want to work but they can't get jobs. So they were not coordinated in their messaging, which is pretty typical for the NDP these days. They kind of spin around all over the place. But anyway, I digress.

And I do want to welcome the folks who are here for the Orthodox Christian private member's bill that Mr. Rakocevic is going to be debating along with some of my colleagues. Stay tuned; the main event is about five minutes away. That's it. We'll get to that.

I do want to just take issue with a couple of things that were mentioned. I know the labour critic for the NDP was talking about Bill 124, and that horse has left the barn. We're not debating that anymore. But what I can tell you: In some of the remarks that he made, he forgets the fact—and I moved to Ontario in the 1990s; in 1992, as a matter of fact. That was about 30-some years ago now. I was a new resident to Ontario, and Premier Bob Rae introduced the social contract. It was the only time the NDP have ever been the government of Ontario, and those in the labour movement call that legacy that Bob Rae and the NDP left

a legacy of betrayal. That is what that was, and it was one of the largest wage rollbacks in Ontario's history. But I digress.

I'm going to move to what we're doing to make sure we have the funding that we need to invest in important participants in our province's economy and our health care system. We have more nurses working in Ontario now than at any time in our history, and we have more nurses being trained in our province than at any time in our history—30,000 nurses are being trained, hundreds of new doctors are being trained in our province. When the Liberals and the NDP were teaming up, for a long period of time, they had a cap on the number of doctor spaces available. That's why we're in the position that we're in today.

I just want to go back to one more thing: When the NDP were the government of Ontario, the budget for the province was \$53 billion or so, in that area. Since we have formed government, since Doug Ford and the PCs have formed government in Ontario, we have increased revenues in the province by \$52 billion. And how did we do that, Madam Speaker? Well, we didn't do it by raising taxes. As a matter of fact, we have lowered taxes in the province: lowered income taxes, cut carbon taxes, cut the gasoline tax. The gasoline tax cut is one of the largest tax cuts in our province's history. We have cut red tape, saving businesses \$8 billion to \$9 billion a year in the cost of doing business. As a result of cutting taxes and cutting fees, we have seen revenues jump from about \$152 billion a year to \$204 billion, which has allowed us to ensure that we have the services that we need in our province going forward.

Now, what did the Liberals and NDP do? Well, they took a different route. They raised taxes every opportunity that they had.

Mr. John Fraser: Oh, my gosh.

Hon. Todd Smith: Well, it's just a fact. I mean, your predecessor—you fill his seat now. Dalton McGuinty was our Premier here. He brought in the largest income tax increase in our province's history: the health premium. He didn't call it a tax, but it was a tax. It was the largest income tax—do you know what else he did? He brought in the Green Energy Act, and Kathleen Wynne perpetuated that Green Energy Act, driving up electricity prices in our province, tripling them and running jobs out of our province and to jurisdictions around the world.

1720

Madam Speaker, we have brought stability to our energy sector after 15 dark years under the previous Liberal government, supported by the NDP. As a result, we now have—now, keep in mind, when these guys were in charge, 300,000 jobs left our province—800,000 manufacturing jobs in our province today that weren't here when we formed government six years ago.

Interjection.

Hon. Todd Smith: Now, the member scoffs, he laughs, but those are the facts, Madam Speaker.

Long-term-care beds—the member from Mississauga—Lakeshore was talking about more long-term-care beds

being built in his riding alone than in 11 years under the previous Liberal government. I can say the same thing in my riding and many of my colleagues on both sides of the House can say the same thing.

We have lowered taxes. We've eliminated fees. We're seeing revenues grow and we're investing in Ontario, and it's working.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Pursuant to standing order 67, I am now required to put the question.

Mr. Thanigasalam has moved second reading of Bill 174, An Act to authorize the expenditure of certain amounts for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2024. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

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

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

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Interjection: On division.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Carried on division.

Second reading agreed to.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Pursuant to standing order 67, the bill is therefore ordered for third reading.

SUPPLY ACT, 2024

LOI DE CRÉDITS DE 2024

Ms. Dunlop, on behalf of Ms. Mulroney, moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill 174, An Act to authorize the expenditure of certain amounts for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2024 / Projet de loi 174, Loi autorisant l'utilisation de certaines sommes pour l'exercice se terminant le 31 mars 2024.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Pursuant to standing order 67, I am now required to put the question.

Ms. Dunlop has moved third reading of Bill 174, An Act to authorize the expenditure of certain amounts for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2024. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

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

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

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Interjection: On division.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Carried on division.

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

Third reading agreed to.

NOTICE OF DISSATISFACTION

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): I beg to inform the House that the adjournment debate standing in the name of the member for Orléans scheduled for today has been withdrawn. Consequently, the adjournment debate will not be held today.

NOWRUZ

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): The Minister of Children, Community and Social Services has a point of order.

Hon. Michael Parsa: I really appreciate this opportunity.

At 11:06 p.m. tonight, Madam Speaker, Persians here in Ontario, in Canada and around the world will be celebrating Nowruz, which is the Persian new year. On behalf of all my colleagues—certainly everybody in the Legislature—I would like to wish them all a happy Nowruz. Nowruzetan Pirouz.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Orders of the day?

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

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): The member from Chatham-Kent-Leamington is seeking unanimous consent to see the clock at 6. Agreed? Agreed.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN WEEK ACT, 2024

LOI DE 2024 SUR LA SEMAINE DES CHRÉTIENS ORTHODOXES

Mr. Rakocevic moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 167, An Act to proclaim Orthodox Christian Week / Projet de loi 167, Loi proclamant la Semaine des chrétiens orthodoxes.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Pursuant to standing order 100, the member has 12 minutes for their presentation.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: I am proud and honoured to table my bill to recognize Orthodox Christian Week in Ontario each year, commencing with Orthodox Christian Easter as observed on the Julian calendar. Passing this bill would recognize the long-standing history, presence and contributions of Orthodox Christians in our great province.

I am humbled by the many who have joined us today to support this important recognition, including Orthodox Christian clergy and community members. I thank you. As well, Speaker, countless more have helped spread the word, signed petitions and advocated for the passing of this bill. I thank you all very much. Your help has been instrumental in reaching this important moment.

Speaker, there is a rich and diverse tapestry of people who make up our great province of Ontario. They come from many backgrounds, cultures and nations. They practise different faiths. They have many different histories and tell their own unique stories. And they were all drawn here to make Ontario their home, to live in our multicultural and multi-faith society where diversity is

celebrated and welcomed. Here, they can remain true to their different faiths, cultures and ancestries while being proud Canadians.

Within this diverse mosaic here in Ontario are many cultures within the Orthodox Christian faith. Although a minority faith here in Ontario, Orthodox Christianity is, collectively, the second-largest body of Christians in the world, with a history that goes back nearly 2,000 years and whose faith is shared by people of many different nations and languages. Often, when people think about Christianity in Canada, it is not uncommon for them to consider only the Roman Catholic church and various Protestant denominations, but for more than a century, Orthodox Christians have been arriving on these shores, not only bringing distinctive forms of Christian faith and practice but also making a tremendous contribution here and adding to our cultural mosaic.

Orthodox Christianity emerged in the Middle East, where Christianity has its roots. Armenia was the first nation to adopt Christianity, in AD 301, 12 years before the Roman Empire adopted Christianity through Emperor Constantine's edict of Milan in AD 313. Traditionally, there are two distinct families of Orthodox Christians: those belonging to the Eastern Orthodox family and those belonging to the Oriental Orthodox family. These two families of Orthodox Christians share many close similarities in faith, rituals and life, though they took different paths in the fifth century over certain dogmatic interpretation.

The Eastern Orthodox churches include four ancient patriarchates of early Christianity, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem, as well as a majority or significant populations of Orthodox believers in Bulgaria, Cyprus, Georgia, Greece, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Ukraine and others. The Oriental Orthodox family includes the Armenian, Coptic, Ethiopian, Eritrean, Syrian and Indian Malankara churches and others. There are also sizable Orthodox Christian communities in countries throughout the world.

Now, Speaker, I must take a moment to state that Orthodox Christians have faced persecution in different places and at different times in history, ranging from the repression and erasure of their faith to forced migration, ethnic cleansing and even genocide. Unfortunately, this is not just the history of long ago, as Orthodox Christians in certain part of the world still face threats and persecution to this very day. And so, over the years, many Orthodox Christians travelled to Canada and Ontario to seek safety and freedom, like so many other newcomers to our great country and province.

Of course, many Orthodox Christians came here simply in search of new beginnings and new opportunities, bringing their diverse cultures, traditions, languages and faith, which they cherished as their identity and as their links with their homeland hearths, families and ancestral heritage. They are an important part of our diverse multicultural mosaic and, over the generations, they have proudly contributed greatly here in our province and across our country.

1730

Speaker, it is believed that the earliest Orthodox Christians who set foot on this land were three Orthodox sailors who accompanied Champlain in early 17th century as he explored the St. Lawrence River valley. It would take until the late 1800s, however, for the Orthodox Christian faith to take root in this country with the arrival of missionaries, monks and priests to support Orthodox Christians emigrating here, particularly in western Canada, where they played a major role in developing farming and railroads across the prairies.

The conditions for spreading the faith were challenging. Clergy travelled on foot, by horse and carriage, and by rail to reach small pastoral communities and to establish places of worship. The first Orthodox Divine Liturgy was celebrated on Canadian soil in June 1897 on a farm in the village of Wostok, northeast of Edmonton.

At the turn of the 20th century, Canada was still a young country. Although the federal government had invited European immigrants to come to work the land, there was resistance to these foreign arrivals in many segments of society at the time. When the prominent Orthodox Bishop Tikhon from the US had made a proposal to the Canadian government in 1902 for federal support to have an Orthodox bishop in this country, some honourable members in Parliament resisted, possibly out of apprehension or unfamiliarity. The bill did not pass.

But Speaker, times began to change. By 1909, St. George's Greek Orthodox Church was established on Bond Street in Toronto. And by 1916, in the middle of World War I, there were more than 60 Orthodox churches across Canada. Often recognized by traditional domes and their distinctive multiple crosses, Orthodox church architecture varies in the Canadian setting. Today, there are approximately 700 or more Orthodox parishes across Canada and some 225 in Ontario, including several monasteries, and the number is growing. In fact, most Canadian Orthodox parishes are found in Ontario, Alberta and Saskatchewan.

It is difficult to state with precision the total number of Eastern and Oriental Orthodox Christians in Canada, but one can estimate that the total number of persons with an Orthodox Christian heritage, and those who actively practise the faith of their ancestors in Canada, exceeds a million. These people share a feeling of gratitude to Canada, where they have been able to practise their faith in freedom without fear of persecution, and to contribute to the development of our multicultural country and our provinces.

For believers, faith is central to one's identity and culture. To this day, Orthodox churches across Ontario and Canada not only serve as a place of faith and worship, but also as vibrant community centres where language and heritage are preserved and passed on to future generations of proud Canadians.

Over the years, the Ontario Legislature has rightfully honoured numerous faith groups, cultures and ethnic communities by acknowledging a heritage month, week, day or historical events of significance to those respective groups. These formal annual recognitions by our govern-

ment celebrate our diversity and commemorate our history. Speaker, the distinct faith and cultures of Orthodox Christians are an important part of our diverse cultural mosaic. Given that they have been here for more than 120 years, their collective contributions to our province and country are immense, and their recognition is long overdue. They are part of our history, our present and our future.

And so, the time is now. Let us all unanimously recognize the important presence of Orthodox Christians in Ontario and their contributions to our great province. Let us acknowledge and celebrate their distinct faith and cultures. Let us learn their histories and hear their stories. And with your collective support, each year, let us proclaim Orthodox Christian Week in Ontario, beginning every Orthodox Easter Sunday. The time is now.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutila Karpoche): Further debate?

Mr. Graham McGregor: I want to thank my colleague from Humber River–Black Creek for bringing this bill forward. I know my colleague has Serbian roots, so this bill is very dobra—and I hope I said that all right.

It's an honour and privilege to rise as one of the governing PC caucus members. Other members that will be speaking from our side, I believe, are the member for Mississauga–Erin Mills, the member for Scarborough–Agincourt and the member for Oakville North–Burlington.

Ontario is a place where it doesn't matter where you come from, who you love, how you choose to worship God—everybody belongs in Ontario, and it's the responsibility of members of this House to make sure that we are standing up for that right.

When we speak about a lot of the communities, many people who came to Ontario or to Canada for a better life, they come from places where practising their faith isn't something we can take for granted. We're used to the right to worship and the right to worship freely, and it's easy to forget sometimes that if we don't defend that right, if we don't fight for that right every single day as lawmakers, as citizens, that right may no longer exist. It does here in Canada, and bills like this brought forward by my colleague help to defend that right and ensure that right.

We know that in Ontario we're home to over half a million Orthodox Christians. I think my colleague said a million, we estimate, in Canada. The Orthodox Christian community is one that's been coming to Canada for over a hundred years. I'm very lucky in my own riding, in Brampton North, we have the Archangel Michael and St. Tekla church, a Coptic Orthodox church that the member for Mississauga–Erin Mills introduced me to once upon a time a few years ago, and I have the pleasure of going every Christmas and most of the Easters; I'll make sure I don't miss Easter this year. I did miss it last year, but I made it for Christmas. It's such a vibrant, wonderful community. Dare I say, just a gorgeous, beautiful church. If you guys ever have a chance to get out to Mayfield and Highway 10 in Brampton North, I'll bring you by Archangel Michael and St. Tekla. It's a gorgeous church.

We have a lot to be thankful for to our Orthodox Christian community. One member that I know the sponsoring member cares deeply about being Nikola Tesla, who is, of course, the man who brought electricity to the world. Many of us would have seen the statue at Niagara Falls. Nikola also left his mark on Canada with a strong contribution, developing the first hydroelectric power plant in the world, at Niagara Falls.

Now, we know Ontario is a diverse place, home to many. I think by voting in favour of this legislation, colleagues—I certainly intend to—we're sending a strong message to our Orthodox Christian community that we see them, they matter, they have friends here at Queen's Park. So let's all do it together.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutila Karpoche): Further debate?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: First, I want to thank my colleague the member for Humber River–Black Creek for bringing us together on this bill. You deserve a lot of credit, sir.

And I want to thank everyone who has come down today to support this bill. You've been generous with your time, with your support, and I think it's very clear, even from the opening remarks here, that your emotion, your commitment is going to carry the day. I think I can say comfortably there's a pretty good chance the government will vote in favour.

Interjection.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Yes. An MPP I know very well, with strong Greek heritage, is indicating strong assent, so I'm fairly confident about that.

It is timely. It's the right moment to recognize the contribution of the Orthodox Church to the culture of this country.

I will, of course, surprise no one when I say that my focus will be on the Greek Orthodox church. My riding, Toronto–Danforth, is home to Greektown, still a very large Greek population, and also home to a number of Orthodox churches, the largest Greek ones being St. Irene Chrysovalantou—

Interruption.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Yes, exactly—Metamorphosis, a very good church on Donlands. We have St. Anargyroi Old Calendar Orthodox church on Greenwood; and, not Greek but certainly Orthodox, Holy Trinity Macedono-Bulgarian Eastern Orthodox Church.

I want to say to those of you who have perhaps visited the Danforth from time to time, you've seen restaurants, but there's a whole culture that's anchored in the Greek Orthodox church that goes on behind the scenes. The actual Greek businesses reflect that, but there's a deeper root. And the rhythms of that community, of our community, are reflected in the baptisms and the weddings and the funerals that take place at those Greek Orthodox and other Orthodox churches.

1740

On Christmas, on Good Friday, on Orthodox Easter, you can see the impact of the church on the day-to-day life.

For those who have not had the experience, on the evening of Good Friday, of going for a procession through

the streets with the Epitaphios and the profound impact it has on those who are in the procession and those who are watching—very, very impressive and very, very moving.

As you are all aware—but I want to get it on the record—the Orthodox church traces its lineage back to the Apostolic community. Early followers embarked on a mission to spread the teachings of Christ across the world. Their efforts were tireless and led to the establishment of churches in the Balkans and the Middle East during the first century AD. These ancient churches formed the bedrock of the Orthodox tradition.

During the first eight centuries of Christian history, the Byzantine Empire played a pivotal role. The capital, Constantinople, emerged as a vital centre for Christianity. The Greek language flourished, becoming the medium for theological writings, liturgical practices and doctrinal development. The Byzantine legacy profoundly shaped the Greek Orthodox church, providing the foundational patterns that endure to this day.

The Greek Orthodox church is rooted in Greek culture, and it's fair to say that Greek culture is rooted in the church. The Greek Orthodox church, because of that interaction, played a pivotal role in the preservation of national identity, the development of Greek society and the resurgence of Greek nationalism.

For those who were here on the declaration of independence, the start of the war of independence for Greeks, people know that the Greeks lived under the very oppressive dark rule of the Ottomans for 400 years—heavy taxation, forced religious conversions, controlled movements and, heaviest of all, the seizure of children for the Ottoman military, the Janissary.

Saint Cosmas of Aetolia, while preaching throughout mainland Greece, comforted the Greek people and encouraged the opening of churches and schools because education was valued by the Orthodox faith, and because people knew if you were going to keep the spirit of the Hellenes alive, the Greek Orthodox church alive, you had to have those schools. Secret or open, they had to exist. The church was vital to keeping Hellenism alive through those four dark centuries, and then it was vital to ending that darkness.

On March 25, 1821, Bishop Paleon Patron Germanos raised the flag of the Greek revolution at the Monastery of Agia Lavra. The day of the Annunciation had been chosen as the day of the official start of the Greek revolution by the leader of the Filiki Eteria, Alexander Ypsilantis. The importance of the religious holiday and the blessing of Bishop Germanos emboldened the Greek people to fight for their freedom. The intertwining between Greek culture and the Greek Orthodox church was profound.

Greek Orthodoxy extends beyond religious practice. It is a guardian of Greek identity. The Greek Orthodox church stands as a testament to unwavering faith, cultural continuity and the enduring legacy of the Apostles.

Let us honour this rich heritage with the passage of this bill and appreciate the profound impact it has had on our world.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutila Karpoche): Further debate?

Mr. Aris Babikian: I would like to thank the member for Humber River–Black Creek for sponsoring Bill 167, and thank the member from Brampton North for leading our discussion on Bill 167, Orthodox Christian Week Act.

As a government, we take pride in demonstrating our commitment to celebrating these important initiatives by passing a number of bills similar to this one for the other communities that have also done so much for our province. As Ontario is home to Canada's largest Orthodox Christian community, it seems only fitting that we now move to designate a time to reflect and celebrate all the ways in which Orthodox Christians have helped shape our province.

It is my honour to stand up and support a bill which has a profound impact on a large number of Ontarians. I personally have a great affinity to the Orthodox Church. I am proud that my family roots are in two segments of the Orthodox Church: Armenian Orthodox as well as Greek Orthodox. My maternal grandmother is Greek Orthodox, and my grandfather is Armenian Orthodox. They are survivors of two genocides: the Armenian and the Greek genocides. My ancestors paid the ultimate price to preserve their Orthodox faith and then pass it to my generation.

My riding of Scarborough–Agincourt has the vibrant churches of St. Mark Coptic Orthodox Church and St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church. The two Armenian Orthodox churches are not far away from my riding. In addition, a large number of the congregation of the above-mentioned three churches reside in Scarborough–Agincourt. It is always spiritually fulfilling to attend Christmas, Easter and other masses in all three churches.

Madam Speaker, the Armenian Orthodox Church is part of the Oriental Orthodox Church. It is one of the most ancient Christian institutions. In 301 AD, the kingdom of Armenia was the first state to adopt Christianity as its official religion. According to tradition, the church originated in the missions of Apostles Bartholomew and Thaddeus of Edessa in the first century. St. Gregory the Illuminator is the patron saint of the church.

The Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem was established in the seventh century. The presence of Armenians in the Holy Land extends back to the earliest period of the church. According to historians, the Armenian Orthodox Church was the first Christian church to initiate the tradition of pilgrimage to Jerusalem.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutila Karpoche): Further debate?

Mr. John Fraser: It's a pleasure to speak to this bill creating Orthodox Christian Week. I want to congratulate the member from Humber River–Black Creek for putting this bill forward.

These bills are very important. They're very important because we need to recognize and acknowledge the diversity that's amongst us. I'm a Roman Catholic. I went to Catholic schools. I didn't really begin to understand Orthodox Christianity until I became a politician—that

shouldn't be. We live in communities. In my community, there are people from 125 different countries. They speak 90 languages, and there are dozens of faiths. And our children are together—they play together; they go to school together. We all live together. So understanding and knowing the rich traditions and beliefs of the other are really important.

I want to thank everyone who is here today for coming here to support the member from Humber River–Black Creek, but most importantly for giving your children the gift of faith. That's something that's really very important in this world. To uphold that, to celebrate that, and to be proud of your heritage and your faith is something very special, and I want to congratulate you for that.

I'm from Ottawa South, and I only have one Orthodox cathedral in my riding: St. Elias Antiochian Orthodox Cathedral. It's a place that I've been going to for years for a whole bunch of different reasons, but the one that really sticks out is—and it happens at many Orthodox communities and Orthodox churches—they have a festival every year, the Lebanese festival in Ottawa. It's a massive festival. Actually, I put forward a bill very similar to celebrate Lebanese heritage month, because I believed that was important. I always say, with these festivals, they combine the five Fs, and I hope I can remember them: Faith, food, friends, family, and fun—not necessarily in that order, but faith always comes first. I'd just like to give them a shout-out right now, because it's in my riding.

Father Nektarios and the Very Reverend Ghattas Hajal, thank you for the work that you've done in our community to support things like the children's hospital and the heart institute, and having a festival every year that brings people together.

1750

My mom passed away last year. She would go to every festival. She would go to the Ukrainian Orthodox festival. She would go to the Greek Orthodox festival. We'd have to take her out all the time, and then when she couldn't get out of the house, we had to get the food and then bring it back. It was something really central to her. She was a person of deep faith.

Again, we're Catholics; I was going to say we prefer bingo—but not as much anymore.

So here's the thing, and this is why it's important for us to celebrate and recognize Orthodox churches and all religions: We live in a country—and when I say 125 countries, 90 languages, dozens of faiths, we just accept that; we embrace it. We don't always know as much as we should know. But people can practise their faith. There are a lot of places in the world where people have to hide their faith because they fear for their lives. I think it's important that our children know and understand that, because they don't know anything different. Go into our schools, and everybody is there. That just doesn't happen everywhere.

So creating an Orthodox Christian Week, recognizing the rich traditions and the role that these faith communities play in our community, and the struggles that they have and had that made them come here, that made them immigrate here—I think that's why it's important, too. I

don't think we can forget the struggle that happened, or the struggles that are happening right now in too many places in the world.

I want to thank you for your time, Speaker.

Again, thank you so much for being here and for supporting the member from Humber River–Black Creek.

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

Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos: Speaker, I am pleased to speak to Bill 167, the Orthodox Christian Week Act, and I would like to recognize and thank the sponsoring member from Humber River–Black Creek for introducing it.

I also want to thank my colleagues from Brampton North and Scarborough–Agincourt for their great remarks.

As a member of the Greek Orthodox faith, this bill is important to me, as it means this Legislature is recognizing the important place of Orthodox Ontarians in our province and its history. Orthodox Christians have lived in our province since before Confederation, coming from countries such as Ukraine, Armenia, Serbia, Russia, Egypt and, of course, my own home country of Greece, along with many others.

Orthodoxy dates back to the earliest times of Christianity in the Roman Empire, clearly separating from the Roman Catholic Christianity of western Europe in the Great Schism of 1054. Who knows about the Great Schism of 1054? You would have to be a history buff. It was centred at that time in the Greek world, in Constantinople, but has spread throughout the Middle East, Africa and Eastern Europe. Four of the five great episcopal sees of the early church joined the Orthodox faith, including Alexandria, founded by St. Mark.

Today, the Orthodox Christian Church worldwide has 220 million followers. Many have immigrated to countries around the world. And the 2021 census reported about 623,000 members of Orthodox churches in Canada.

Here in Toronto, the oldest Greek Orthodox church is St. George's, known as the mother church of the Greek diaspora in Canada. The church stands today at 115 Bond Street. Founded in 1909, it remained the only Greek Orthodox church in the city until 1961, providing a place of faith and comfort for the many early Greek immigrants to Ontario, including my own family.

Throughout their history, Orthodox churches have provided their parishioners a place to share their faith, often in times of great threat, persecution and oppression. This was true for Greece under the Ottoman rule, for the people of eastern Europe under Nazi and Soviet rule, and it's true for Ukrainians under attack today.

We are truly blessed to live, work and raise a family in a province and country that safeguards our religious freedoms.

I am proud to support this bill and to recognize the struggles and accomplishments of Orthodox Christians to our communities, and how their contributions have made Ontario a stronger, safer and more prosperous place.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutila Karpoche): Further debate?

MPP Jamie West: Speaker, I want to begin by thanking my colleague the MPP for Humber River–Black Creek, as everyone else has, for bringing forth this bill to recognize Orthodox Christian Week in Ontario. This bill serves to recognize the meaningful contributions that the Orthodox Church and Orthodox Christians have made to the province of Ontario, and it's wonderful to look across and see so many members of the Orthodox Christian clergy and community joining us here this evening.

Both the member from Brampton North and the member from Ottawa South said that we're fortunate in this country to be able to practise our faith. It made an impression on me, because while they were saying that, I was looking at the members in the gallery and thinking about what it would be like in other countries to be able to know that not only could you practise your faith, but you could come to the assembly where politicians speak, and they'd speak about having Orthodox Christian Week in the province where you live, and what that means.

I want to thank, as well—unable to come here in person—the Orthodox Christians who come from my riding of Sudbury and call Sudbury home. I want to take the opportunity to thank Orthodox churches that strengthen, support and contribute meaningfully to my riding: St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church, St. Mary and St. Mark's Coptic Orthodox Church, and St. Volodymyr Orthodox Church, which is now 85 years young—that was a church I used to walk past on the way to school.

This bill is a wonderful opportunity to formally provide an annual recognition of the distinct faiths and cultures of Orthodox Christians. This bill means a time to learn about and recognize the history of Orthodox Christians, both around the world and here in Ontario; a time to acknowledge that Orthodox Christians in certain parts of the world still face threats and persecution today; a time to celebrate and recognize the contributions that have been made over the past century; a time to hear the stories, to share the stories. It's a time to engage with members of the Orthodox Christian community.

Here in Ontario, as well as all of Canada, our diversity is our strength, and our province rightfully honours many diverse cultures and faiths, ethnicities and languages. Orthodox Christians are an important part of this wonderful diversity. It's time to formally acknowledge the distinct faith and culture of Orthodox Christians, this year and every year.

I'd like, again, to thank the MPP for Humber River–Black Creek for his outreach and for his passion in bringing this bill forward. I think most of us saw his son running through the building. I think it's a proud moment for both the son and the father in this, in seeing it.

Most especially, I want to thank the many members here with us today in the chamber, and the thousands of Orthodox Christians across Ontario.

I spoke with the member earlier about the bill and why he brought it forward, and he was humble about it. He said, "It's not about me; it's about the people we represent, the people we see here." All of us on the floor are public servants, and I think that's a good reflection of who he is.

This bill isn't about him or any of us who are speaking today. The bill is about you—your history, your stories and your faith.

So we hope—or in a room like this, we have faith—that with the collective support of all of our members, Orthodox Christian Week can be proclaimed here in Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutila Karpoche): Further debate?

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: I would like to thank my colleague from Humber River for bringing forward this piece of legislation.

It is an honour to conclude the government's remarks on the second reading debate of Bill 167, the Orthodox Christian Week Act.

This bill is close to my heart. As many of you might know, I am a Coptic Orthodox Christian, and I'm proud to be a member of this community. I'm proud to be the first elected parliamentarian in Canadian history of Coptic origin.

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As the member of Mississauga–Erin Mills, I am proud to say that Mississauga is home to one of the largest Orthodox Christian communities anywhere in Ontario, from St. Mary and St. Athanasius Coptic church and the Canadian Coptic Centre and another six Coptic churches, Coptic Christians come as the largest Orthodox community of Mississauga. But that's not it; there are more: Prophet Elias Greek church, Armenian church, St. Ilija Macedonian church, St. Mary's Antiochian church, Ado-Remerea Romanian church, Mar Elias Syrian church, All Serbian Saints church, St. Peter's Syriac church, St. Gregorios Indian church—all Orthodox churches. They have not only kept their faith for thousands of years, but also preserved their culture and traditions, passing their teachings from generation to generation. The Coptic Church, as an example of that, preserved the Coptic language till our date today.

Whether it's Palm Sunday, Good Friday or attending the night of the Apocalypse in the church—each with distinguished traditions that I have kept to this day—and ends with the resurrection of Christ and greetings for one another: "Ekhrestos Anesti," "Alithos Anesti" or, in Coptic, "Be'khrestos Aftonf," "Khen O Methmi Aftonf," which means "Christ is risen—indeed He is Risen."

Mr. Speaker, this bill, which recognizes the long-standing history of the community and its rich cultural traditions, is an important step to show our support and appreciation for the over 550,000 Orthodox Christians who call our province home, and for all they have done and continue to do to build a stronger and more vibrant Ontario.

If passed, this bill will not only give the community the acknowledgment they deserve, but will ensure that Ontarians, for years and generations to come, will remember all the ways in which the Orthodox Christian community have helped shape our province into everything it is today.

I am proud to have had the opportunity to rise today and to show my support for this important bill alongside my colleagues and to reaffirm our commitment to celebrating

the diversity and inclusivity that is central to who we are as Ontarians.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Further debate?

Mr. John Vanthof: It's an incredible honour to be able to stand in the Legislature today and speak on the bill brought forward by the member for Humber River–Black Creek, Orthodox Christian Week Act.

Welcome to all the people in the galleries.

I'm not of the Orthodox faith, but two summers ago, one of the greatest experiences in my life happened in a Greek Orthodox church: My grandson was baptized in a Greek Orthodox church in Lebanon, and I was there. I often think about that day—how our family was welcomed, how my grandson was welcomed into your faith, and how it truly is a world faith. It's high time that it's recognized here in Ontario for the contributions you have made.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Further debate?

The member from Humber River–Black Creek has two minutes to reply.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: I want to thank all my MPP colleagues across both sides—all parties, everyone. Thank you so much for your kind words and your support today in support of Orthodox Christian Week in Ontario.

I want to recognize those who spoke today, members from Toronto–Danforth, Sudbury, Oakville North–Burlington, Mississauga–Erin Mills, Scarborough–Agincourt, and although she didn't speak—a new Orthodox Christian in this chamber—the member from Mississauga Centre.

I want to thank Father Geoffrey Ready, Deacon Daron Halajian and Diane Draga Dragesevic for your help in drafting my speech today, and the many who have helped to make this day possible with your strong support in spreading the word of this important recognition.

And finally, I thank all of you who are here today, including my son Aleksandar, and all of you who are watching from home, including my family. None of this could be possible without all of your strong support.

Representation is important. As an Orthodox Christian, I am proud to have spoken here today on behalf of my hundreds of thousands of Orthodox Christian brothers and sisters across our great province. We are here—here in the seats of the Legislature, here in the galleries today. We have been arriving here for over a hundred years. We are born here. We are a part of Ontario's history, present and future. We are an important part of our province's diversity.

Today, we have taken a large and important step in recognizing Orthodox Christians in Ontario. I invite you all to continue on this journey together so that Orthodox Christian Week will be formally recognized every year in Ontario. And God willing, if we all work together, this can happen soon—maybe even to celebrate this very year.

Thank you all for your support today.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): The time provided for private members' public business has expired.

Mr. Rakocevic has moved second reading of Bill 167, An Act to proclaim Orthodox Christian Week.

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

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): I declare the motion carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Pursuant to standing order 100(h), the bill is referred to the Committee of the Whole House.

Interjections: Tom. Tom.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Social policy.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Is the majority in favour of the bill being referred to the Standing Committee on Social Policy? Agreed.

The bill is referred to the Standing Committee on Social Policy.

All matters relating to private members' public business having been completed, the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 9 a.m., March 20, 2024.

The House adjourned at 1809.

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Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	
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Gretzky, Lisa (NDP)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	
Grewal, Hardeep Singh (PC)	Brampton East / Brampton-Est	
Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Oxford	
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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	
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Martin, Robin (PC)	Eglinton—Lawrence	
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Rae, Matthew (PC)	Perth—Wellington	
Rakocevic, Tom (NDP)	Humber River—Black Creek	
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Sandhu, Amarjot (PC)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Sarkaria, Hon. / L'hon. Prabmeet Singh (PC)	Brampton South / Brampton-Sud	Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports
Sarrazin, Stéphane (PC)	Glengarry—Prescott—Russell	
Sattler, Peggy (NDP)	London West / London-Ouest	
Saunderson, Brian (PC)	Simcoe—Grey	
Schreiner, Mike (GRN)	Guelph	
Scott, Laurie (PC)	Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock	
Shamji, Adil (LIB)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	
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Smith, David (PC)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	
Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Graydon (PC)	Parry Sound—Muskoka	Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry / Ministre des Richesses naturelles et des Forêts
Smith, Laura (PC)	Thornhill	
Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Todd (PC)	Bay of Quinte / Baie de Quinte	Minister of Energy / Ministre de l'Énergie
Stevens, Jennifer (Jennie) (NDP)	St. Catharines	
Stiles, Marit (NDP)	Davenport	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau Parti démocratique de l'Ontario
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Vanthof, John (NDP)	Timiskaming—Cochrane	Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle

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West, Jamie (NDP)	Sudbury	
Williams, Hon. / L'hon. Charmaine A. (PC)	Brampton Centre / Brampton-Centre	Associate Minister of Women's Social and Economic Opportunity / Ministre associée des Perspectives sociales et économiques pour les femmes
Wong-Tam, Kristyn (NDP)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	
Yakabuski, John (PC)	Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke	
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Vacant	Milton	