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Mardi
27 février 2024

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Standing Committee on Procedure and House**Affairs**

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ORDERS OF THE DAY / ORDRE DU JOUR

**Keeping Energy Costs Down Act, 2024, Bill 165,
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 27 February 2024

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 27 février 2024

The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

KEEPING ENERGY COSTS DOWN
ACT, 2024

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

Resuming the debate adjourned on February 26, 2024, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

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

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

Mr. Mike Schreiner: It's always an honour to rise and speak in the House, and today I'm speaking on second reading of Bill 165, a bill that should really be called "keeping energy costs down for Enbridge," because it's certainly not keeping energy costs down for gas customers in this province.

What this bill is doing is forcing existing ratepayers, people who currently use methane fossil gas in their homes, to subsidize the hookup of new fossil gas infrastructure in our province, in order to support a company that had profits of \$16.5 billion last year and whose CEO earns a nice salary of \$19 million a year. I don't think Enbridge needs a subsidy. I think the people of Ontario could use a bit of a break, but certainly not Enbridge.

What are the implications of taking the unprecedented step, for the first time in Ontario history, to overturn an OEB decision? What are implications for the people of the province? Well, Enbridge is going to save \$250 million a year just up front. But what does that mean for existing gas customers in Ontario? Well, if you take this complete decision, according to Environmental Defence, Enbridge is going to save around \$2 billion over the five years of this decision, which equals \$600 per fossil gas customer in Ontario.

I just want the people of this province to understand what is happening here. Enbridge is getting a subsidy and

it's going to cost you—if you use fossil gas in this province—on average \$600 a person. I think that's a bad deal, at least for the people of Ontario. It's a pretty good deal for the 19-million-dollar man and his company, Enbridge, but certainly not a good deal for the people of Ontario.

If there was no other alternative or no other option for people, or if developers had no other way of heating and cooling people's homes, then maybe you could make an argument that such a subsidy for Enbridge costing ratepayers so much money would be justified. But it's not. Because as the OEB decision—and I'll remind you that the OEB decision was based on input from hundreds and hundreds of stakeholders, producing thousands and thousands of pages of documentation to justify this decision that it would actually be cheaper for people to heat and cool their homes with heat pumps. Not only is the government taking the unprecedented step of overturning this OEB decision, they're actually doing it to disincentivize developers putting in technology that will be cheaper.

As a matter of fact, over the average life-cycle cost of a heat pump versus a gas furnace, those new home owners will have 13% lower costs. So we're asking ratepayers to subsidize Enbridge for new home owners to have more expensive heating and cooling in their homes.

According to the OEB decision—if you actually take the time to read the decision—there will be no incremental cost increases for developers if they put in heat pumps and don't do the initial gas hookups in the first place. So not only do we risk forcing new home owners to have a more expensive heating system, this bill will also force them to have a stranded asset.

Even this government, with its weakened climate targets, says we should be net zero by 2050. So my calculation is, it's 2024, so 2050 is less than 30 years from now, and if we have any hope of being net zero, we cannot be heating our homes with fossil gas. So why is the government imposing a 40-year amortization schedule, which means they're making calculations for gas furnaces way beyond 2050? By definition, they're going to be forcing existing homeowners to have a stranded asset that will then cost them even more money to replace so we can meet our net zero targets.

This is also going to have implications for our economy. In 2022, the green energy transition, according to Bloomberg, resulted in investments around the world of \$1.3 trillion, over half of that in low-cost renewable energy, primarily wind and solar because the prices have come down so much. That investment in 2023 rose to \$1.8 trillion. That kind of growth is going to continue each and every year, moving forward.

I want Ontario to be a global leader in what is now a \$1.8 trillion economic opportunity. According to Bloomberg still, about half of that investment is wind and solar. A growing amount of that investment is in electric vehicles—and I'll say that finally Ontario is starting to catch up and make investments in electric vehicles—but a growing percentage of that investment is in alternative heating sources, like heat pumps. As a matter of fact, according to the International Energy Agency, heat pump installations are growing at double-digit rates around the world, no more so than in Europe, where we saw a 40% increase in heat pump installations last year.

As a matter of fact, the EU's target is that 60 million additional heat pumps will be installed by 2030. So Ontario has an amazing opportunity to not only be a leader in electric vehicles, but to be a leader in manufacturing heat pumps. But in order to do that, we actually need a government that believes in a technology that's going to save us money.

And I know some people have said, "These heat pumps, do they work in cold weather?" Absolutely they do, to minus 30 degrees. As a matter of fact, the countries in Europe that have installed the most heat pumps are the Scandinavian countries, which have a cold climate very similar to Canada.

Speaker, I want to close by saying: What are the implications of this decision? The government has spent the last few months opposing carbon pricing, a price on pollution, because they say there are other ways to address the climate crisis. Well, those other ways are through regulations and through investments in technology that result decarbonization. But the government is opposed to that too, because that's exactly what this bill, Bill 165, does. It says that we are, as a province—even though the independent energy regulator says that the way to go is not in expensive gas but in lower-cost alternatives like heat pumps, instead of actually putting in place a regulatory regime that would encourage that, the government is opposed to that.

So I don't know what the government's for. They're going to ramp up gas plants for electricity, increasing carbon pollution by 400%, even though we are at a time where the costs of the climate crisis are escalating. We see it each and every day, and the government seems to be opposed to any and all solutions.

0910

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

Mr. Graham McGregor: I want to thank my colleague for his presentation this morning. I appreciate his clarity on his position on the carbon tax. I think it's clear that the Green Party leader supports carbon taxes and an increased carbon tax. Of course, on the PC side, we're the only party that's actually fighting to scrap the carbon tax.

I also have his position on nuclear power. On a recent decision we made around refurbishing Pickering nuclear, not only ensuring saving our grid but also saving jobs, he says, "It makes no sense for the government to pour billions into keeping it operational when lower-cost, cleaner solutions are available...."

"The Ford government is making Ontario's grid dirtier and more expensive by prioritizing ... the costly, poor-performing Pickering plant."

In the member's mind, we should all be on heat pumps to heat our homes. I'm just wondering: How would this member—if he won't stand up for nuclear, how are we going to power the grid to make this happen?

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I appreciate the member's question. I believe in investing in the lowest-cost, cleanest solutions to our energy needs. I've been very clear: I support the rebuilding of Darlington and Bruce. We know that nuclear power is going to be part of Ontario's energy mix for decades to come. Pickering, I believe, is a huge mistake. Of the 65 operating nuclear plants in North America, Pickering is consistently rated as the 64th poorest-performing plant. I don't know who pours money into such a poor-performing asset, especially when the cost of wind and solar has come down so much that if we invested in low-cost renewables, it would cost us less for cleaner power.

That's exactly why, of the \$1.8 trillion being invested in the clean energy transition right now, over half—

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

Mr. Chris Glover: I want to thank the member from Guelph for his comments today on Bill 165, raising costs for gas customers across the province. I just want to go through some of the figures and make sure I got the figures right. I do appreciate them.

You said that right now, with this bill, the government's actually proposing that anybody who's buying Enbridge gas, who's an Enbridge Gas customer, is going to be subsidizing the expansion of their lines by \$600. That's the cost to each individual customer. Then you said that the people who are the new customers for Enbridge are going to be paying 13% more over the life of a gas furnace than they would have if they had a heat pump. Those are the numbers.

Is this the only example that you know of where this government is squandering our tax dollars in order to support a private, for-profit corporation? I'll give just one example from my own riding: Ontario Place. This government is giving Therme 650 million tax dollars. Do you have other examples?

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I appreciate the member's question. I would add agency nursing to that and just the increasing privatization of our health care system, where people are being forced to pay more for less.

But let's stick to this particular bill. It's just outrageous to think that existing gas customers are going to pay \$600 more to subsidize a \$16-billion company with a \$19-million CEO. I remember when the government used to complain about the six-million-dollar man at Hydro One. Well, let's talk about the 19-million-dollar man at Enbridge that they're subsidizing.

On top of that, these new home owners are going to have a heating system that costs them 13% more. That's what it says in the OEB decision.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): We have time for one last question.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Just a quick question: I know that in the north, we do our heating with wood stoves, and sometimes I see people selling their wood in sled loads. A sled load is like—it's \$150, \$200 for a sled load. Depending on the weather, that lasts probably three days to maybe a week at most, at best. How will this bill help those people?

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Yes, well, let's help those people first of all. High-efficiency wood furnaces: Let's make them available to everyone. Better yet, let's make heat pumps free of charge. PEI is doing it for every household under \$100,000. Why don't we make heat pumps free to people in the north?

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

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: I'm pleased to rise today and speak to this important piece of legislation, the Keeping Energy Costs Down Act, 2024. The proposed bill, if enacted, would amend the Ontario Energy Board Act, 1998, to put in place mechanisms that facilitate broader stakeholder input as well as the manner in which a generic hearing process may be directed by the minister. The proposed bill would also set out a mechanism to address aspects of a specific natural gas order of the Ontario Energy Board related to revenue horizons. The proposed bill would also address certain other matters relating to the granting of leave-to-construct approvals, including the exemption from the requirement to obtain leave to construct for certain energy projects.

The bill might seem very technical, and it does sound technical. There's a lot of things in here that our government is working on to fix, but ultimately, all of these technical phrases, adjustments and terms lead to one thing: the fact that our government is working hard to keep energy costs down by amending the Ontario Energy Board Act. As we all know, one of the reasons we got elected in 2018 is because of the skyrocketing cost of hydro, especially after the fire sale of those hydro shares by the previous Liberal government. So we are coming here to fix a mess that was left by the previous government, supported by the current official opposition, in fact. Ontarians have put their faith and trust in us to fix this mess and to get Ontario back on track, and that is exactly what this piece of legislation is doing.

We have received numerous supportive quotes for this work that we are doing. The Eastern Ontario Wardens' Caucus has said, "Modernizing these outdated regulations would reduce delays and costs for economic development initiatives including new industries seeking to locate in Ontario and create jobs (or existing companies seeking to expand), transit projects, community expansion projects, housing developments, connections for low-carbon fuel blending (e.g., renewable natural gas, hydrogen) as well as residential and business customer connections."

The Western Ontario Wardens' Caucus has said, "Western Ontario has seen significant growth in the past decade with pressures to build out the gas pipeline network. Many municipalities in our region have lost major investment opportunities because of the delays in getting natural gas to development sites. Any person or company planning to construct hydrocarbon transmission facilities

within Ontario, must apply to the OEB for authorization, if the projected cost to build the pipeline is over \$2 million, a threshold that was set in 1998....

"Increasing the cost threshold to \$10M would closer align Ontario with other Canadian jurisdictions (e.g., in BC, these thresholds are \$15M for electricity and \$20M for natural gas)....

"Due to increased regulatory and cost pressures, as well as inflation, virtually all gas pipeline projects are now greater than \$2M rendering the threshold meaningless. Roughly 0.5 km pipe in urban settings now often exceed the \$2M threshold."

They've also said, "Modernizing these outdated regulations would reduce delays and costs for economic development initiatives including new industries seeking to locate in Ontario and create jobs ... transit projects, community expansion projects, housing developments, connections for low-carbon fuel blending ... as well as residential and business customer connections.

0920

The South Central Ontario Region Economic Development Corp. has said, "As Ontario continues to face a shortage of industrial land, the south-central Ontario region, made up of Brant, Elgin-Middlesex, Norfolk and Oxford counties"—and I just want to mention that the member for Brantford—Brant is sitting right in front of me, so this applies to his region. They have said, "As Ontario continues to face a shortage of industrial land, the south-central Ontario region ... is challenged with balancing competing pressures for prioritization of agricultural land, industrial land and residential land. Attracting new business investment continues to be an economic development priority, as municipalities in SCOR aim to further develop industry sectors, expand the municipal tax base and increase job opportunities in the region."

They are asking the Ministry of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade to work alongside the Ministry of Energy, the Ministry of Infrastructure and the Ontario Energy Board to modify current regulations that delay the expansion of utility services.

For example, section 90(1) of the Ontario Energy Board Act, 1998, states the need for a leave-to-construct application if the project is projected to cost more than the amount prescribed by the regulations, which is currently set at \$2 million. Thus, any project that surpasses this threshold is required to undergo a lengthy regulatory process of 15 to 18 months before even starting construction. With inflation, many planned business investments require natural gas expansions that exceed this threshold, acting as a barrier to investment in the province and, more specifically, rural Ontario.

Madam Speaker, the list of supportive quotes goes on and on and on. We have supportive quotes from the township of East Hawkesbury. We have supportive quotes from the Sarnia-Lambton Economic Partnership. We have supportive quotes from the city of Welland. We have supportive quotes from the Niagara Industrial Association. We have supportive quotes from Invest WindsorEssex.

We also have stakeholder quotes. For example, the Ontario Greenhouse Vegetable Growers say, "The Ontario

Greenhouse Vegetable Growers commend the recent decision by the Ontario government to increase the leave-to-construct threshold from \$2 million to \$10 million. This will enable faster builds with quicker connections that will result in increased food production capacity and continue to fortify domestic food security imperatives. Natural gas is an essential crop input, as the heat and carbon dioxide are captured to optimize and enhance greenhouse vegetable production. Legislation such as this will continue to drive investment in Ontario's agricultural sector, growing food, jobs and economic prosperity."

Speaking of greenhouses, I cannot forget to mention SunTech Greenhouses, a large greenhouse in my riding of Carleton, close to the area of Manotick. I just want to say, people talk about the tomatoes in Leamington, but I want to brag about the tomatoes in Manotick, because SunTech tomatoes are the best. I am willing to do a food-tasting competition with Leamington tomatoes. I'll bring in tomatoes from SunTech Greenhouses. They can bring in—I think it's the member for Essex can bring in tomatoes from Leamington. We will do a tasting test, because I guarantee you that the tomatoes in Manotick will, hands down, beat the tomatoes in Leamington.

Mr. Will Bouma: Let's do some BLTs.

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: Oh, yes. Actually, the BLTs are really good. I will go to the greenhouse—their greenhouse is located 10 minutes from where I live, and I will go buy my tomatoes from there.

Interjection.

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: You want me to bring tomatoes? I will bring you tomatoes. If I brought tomatoes from SunTech Greenhouses, you would convert to the PC Party. I'm just saying they're that good. They would make a believer of anyone.

Mr. Ross Romano: I'll bring the pasta.

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: Yes, there we go. See, we have a whole Italian thing going on here—I love it now—with local food.

Getting back on topic, Madam Speaker, I did want to give a shout-out to SunTech Greenhouses, but there are other stakeholders as well who are very supportive of this legislation. We have the Residential Construction Council of Ontario, ResCon, who have said, "The OEB decision has left a void by inhibiting the delivery of new natural gas infrastructure to support new housing needs, not offering up alternative solutions. The OEB has assumed that power supply will be available to new subdivisions, which is not the case, ultimately limiting where and whether builders could construct new homes, hindering the delivery of new housing." That is said in support of this regulation.

We also have the Ontario Federation of Agriculture. Again, in my riding of Carleton, several, numerous farms—in fact, agriculture is one of the biggest industries in my riding of Carleton. It's so important, in fact, that this past Saturday, I actually hosted my annual farmers' appreciation breakfast, which I do every year. I had over 250 farmers show up to enjoy a breakfast and get together with friends. It was a fantastic and wonderful time. My only recommendation to everyone is that if you do a farmers'

appreciation breakfast, make sure you do it in the winter, because if you do it in the summer, they're going to be out in the fields and they won't be able to attend. That's why I do my farmers' appreciation breakfast in the wintertime, because they're not going to be out in the fields. It's always a fantastic event. I get to catch up with so many farmers. I get to catch up with people in the community, and they get to catch up with each other. It's just a great, great time. Many of them, Madam Speaker—in fact, I would say over 90% of them—are members of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, and they have the OFA sign on their front lawn.

Supportive quotes from organizations like the Ontario Federation of Agriculture are so important. I think that speaks to the legitimacy of this piece of legislation. It speaks to the fact that this government, under the leadership of Premier Ford, is a government that is listening to the people of Ontario, that is taking in feedback and that is getting it done for the people of Ontario, including our hard-working farmers.

Here is what the Ontario Federation of Agriculture has to say: "The Ontario Federation of Agriculture is supportive of the decisive action taken by the Minister of Energy, Todd Smith, to address the Ontario Energy Board's decision, which threatens to increase costs for new homes relying on natural gas for heating and jeopardizes housing affordability and future access to this energy source. The decision also challenges Ontario's efforts and current policy to bring reliable and affordable natural gas to Ontarians across the province, which has been an investment priority for agriculture and rural communities over the last decade.

"The OEB decision has the potential to stifle the growth of the industrial sector, leading to escalated costs for manufacturing, agriculture and consumer goods. The OFA acknowledges the concerns raised by the Ontario Energy Board regarding Enbridge Gas's long-term plan and recognizes the importance of balancing energy transition with practical solutions. However, priority needs to be set on flexible future infrastructure that supports a growing province, while minimizing unnecessary financial burdens on residents, businesses and the agricultural community."

We also have supportive quotes from Power Advisory, supportive quotes from the Ontario Home Builders' Association—I think that one is really important, especially given the need to build more housing in Ontario, which, once again, goes to show that the work that we are doing is not just impacting energy costs, it's not just keeping energy costs down; what it's doing is creating a domino effect, where it's positively impacting other areas. By keeping energy costs down, not only are we helping our agricultural sector, we're also helping our industrial sector and we're helping our home-building sector as well.

Here is a quote from the Ontario Home Builders' Association. They say, "The Ontario Home Builders' Association applauds the Ford government for introducing legislation to revoke the Ontario Energy Board's December 21, 2023, decision. Securing energy choices for Ontario's communities is vital to support economic development,

energy access and reliability while we take a measured step toward energy transition. In an unprecedented housing and affordability crisis, now is not the time for the OEB to place additional costs on builders or homebuyers.

“Furthermore, the Ontario Home Builders’ Association supports the Ontario government”—that’s us—“to look at every tool it has at its disposal to help get more housing approved and built.” I’m going to repeat that, because that is really important: “The Ontario Home Builders’ Association supports the Ontario government to look at every tool it has at its disposal to help get more housing approved and built.”

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We also have supportive quotes from the Ontario Energy Board, a former COO of the Ontario Energy Board and former chair of the Ontario Securities Commission. We also have supportive quotes from Enbridge Gas. Enbridge Gas says, “Enbridge Gas abides by an existing Ontario Energy Board (OEB) regulation that protects existing natural gas customers from the cost of expanding the natural gas system and ensures costs are appropriately borne by the customers who will benefit from the new infrastructure.” This is really important because natural gas needs to be expanded across the province.

Do you know, Madam Speaker, I live maybe 11 minutes away from the Ottawa International Airport, when there’s no traffic; with traffic, I would say 15, maybe 20 minutes, maximum. But I live about 11, 12 minutes away from the international airport in Ottawa. I don’t have natural gas; I’m on propane—

Mr. Will Bouma: Really?

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: Yes. I live 11 minutes away from the international airport, and I don’t have natural gas. My propane bills have increased exponentially since I moved into my house in 2019—doubled, at least. I can only imagine what a family of four or five is going through when they are paying their propane bills. It is unbelievable how devastating the federal carbon tax has been for people who rely on propane.

That’s why this bill is so important. That’s why it is so important to get natural gas out to communities, to rural communities, to new developing communities. It’s fundamental, because if we want to talk about making life affordable in Ontario, we need to make it easier to build and invest in this critical infrastructure that will allow Ontarians to live an affordable life and to not be subject to these incredibly devastating cost increases due to the carbon tax. I see it myself. I see it myself on my own bills: \$800 just to fill up two propane tanks. It’s unbelievable. I can only imagine what Ontario families are going through. That’s why we want to see an expansion of natural gas.

I’ve actually been very lucky to have worked with Enbridge Gas and with the Minister of Energy to bring natural gas to a section of Metcalfe in my riding of Carleton, which made it more affordable for one of the local businesses there, Stanley’s Olde Maple Lane Farm, which is a pillar not just in the riding of Carleton but across the city of Ottawa. They’re a large farm. They also are an event venue. They’re constantly booked for weddings.

They’re one of those places where if you want to book a wedding there, you have to book it at least a year or a year and a half, sometimes even two years in advance. They’re also selling maple syrup, some of the best maple syrup. In fact, Stanley’s Olde Maple Lane Farm was named one of the top 10 sugar bushes in Canada a few years ago.

That business was struggling until they were able to get natural gas. That’s something I assisted them with. Enbridge as well got involved, and I want to thank Enbridge for finally bringing natural gas to that area because that, in and of itself, was a huge relief for that particular business because, now, it made it affordable for them to continue operating. If they hadn’t received natural gas, I don’t even know if they would be in business right now because the costs are so exponentially high. And we’re seeing that all across the province. Businesses who don’t have access to natural gas are suffering due to the carbon tax. At least with natural gas, even though the carbon tax is still there, the cost is a little bit less and it’s a little bit more affordable, given the infrastructure and the way it works. So that’s why it’s so important.

We have municipal quotes that are supportive of natural gas. I mean, the municipalities who support natural gas—we have the municipality of Manitouwadge, the united counties of Leeds and Grenville, the township of Huron-Kinloss, the municipality of Red Lake, the municipality of Oliver Paipoonge, the township of Ramara, the South Central Ontario Region Economic Development Corp., the township of Uxbridge, the Mohawks of the Bay of Quinte. The list goes on and on and on.

Ultimately, what I want to say: This bill is so critical. It is so important, and it does exactly what the title of it says. It says, “Keeping Energy Costs Down”—because that is something that the people of Ontario wanted. It was one of our campaign promises. It’s what we were voted in on. I’m pleased to be part of a government that is doing exactly that, that is keeping energy costs down, keeping our promises to the people of Ontario, and we are getting it done. That’s why I will be voting in favour of this legislation.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): We’re going to go to questions.

MPP Lise Vaugeois: Thank you for the presentation. I would just like to say, she started by saying they were having to fix the mess that was left behind, but we’ve had seven bills that this government has had to rescind, so I think that they’re quite capable of making their own mess, and a considerable mess.

I’d like to know how increasing the cost to people who are already Enbridge customers by \$600 is keeping costs down for the people of Ontario.

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: At a time when Ontario, like the rest of Canada, is already dealing with difficult headwinds of high interest rates and inflationary pressures, the Ontario Energy Board’s decision would have significantly increased the price of new housing and all other costs, and we could not stand for this. Reversing this decision is going to prevent an average of \$4,400 being added to the price of new homes, or tens of thousands of dollars being added to the price of a home in rural Ontario. Instead,

we're taking a pragmatic approach by supporting electrification of home heating, transportation and manufacturing, with a focus on keeping costs down. And in fact, phase 2 of the natural gas expansion program is supporting 28 projects across the province with \$234 million in funding to connect more homes to our natural gas grid and, in turn, get those homes off more expensive and more emitting forms of energy like home heating oil. This—

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Thank you. We're going to move to the next question.

Mr. Will Bouma: I'd like to say thank you to the member from Carleton for her very good speech.

I'm trying to wrap my brain around why anyone would stand in opposition to this piece of legislation. We've heard from small communities, we've heard from farmers, we've heard from home builders, we've heard from municipalities that this is a great move to help keep costs down in a world where costs are going out of control.

From what I've been hearing from the opposition and the independents, it feels like they're going to be voting against this common-sense, smart piece of legislation for the people of Ontario. Now, I'm no lawyer, but I know the member from Carleton is, and I was wondering if perhaps she could give some insight as to how or why anyone would stand against this piece of legislation.

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: Do you know something? My response to the member from Brantford–Brant is I actually can't give any insight, because it makes no sense to me. I cannot understand the logic behind resisting this piece of legislation. This piece of legislation is exactly what the people of Ontario want. It's exactly what they're asking for. So, unfortunately, to the member from Brantford–Brant, I can't answer your question because I don't understand why they would not support this piece of legislation. What I can say is that I think this position they're taking, just like many of the other positions they've taken in the past, is perhaps one of the reasons that the official opposition is polling at only 19% in the province right now.

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

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I appreciate the member from Carleton's presentation. Maybe I'll help her answer the previous question: The OEB decision that Bill 165 would overturn would save existing ratepayers \$2 billion, or \$600 per household.

I want to ask the member how the member will explain to her constituents that your government has introduced a bill that will increase climate pollution at a time when we're facing a climate emergency and increase their gas bills by \$600.

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: What I hear from the member for the Green Party is that he wants to leave rural Ontario and northern Ontario out in the cold. What I can tell you is that people in rural Ontario—and Carleton is a very rural riding. Like I said, I don't even have natural gas; I'm still on propane. Should I not deserve to have natural gas? Apparently the member from Guelph doesn't think so. The member from Guelph doesn't think that I should be

entitled to natural gas. The member from Guelph thinks it's okay for me to spend \$800 every month in the winter for propane—\$800 a month for propane. That's the only thing I can say to answer that member's question.

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

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I want to congratulate the member for Carleton for her strength and advocacy for her constituents, particularly for people like Earl Stanley's Olde Maple Lane Farm and, of course, our friend Bob and his wife, and the little miracles in Manotick, over there at SunTech.

But I recall many, many years under the Ontario Liberal government that we would be here talking about whether the Liberals wanted people to heat or eat, because they didn't have an option because of the affordability crisis. We're in another affordability crisis. How is that impacting your constituents, those in the city of Ottawa and across Ontario? You talked a little bit about northern Ontario and rural Ontario, but how does it affect everyone who is dealing right now with an affordability crisis?

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: Thank you to the member, my colleague from Nepean. Madam Speaker, Ontarians are struggling right now, and that includes people in the city of Ottawa. There's no question about that, and with terrible policies like the federal government's carbon tax, which we all know that the NDP and Liberals support, the opposition are clearly not willing to do the work to address the issues that the people of Ottawa are facing.

The Keeping Energy Costs Down Act will protect future homebuyers in Ottawa and, in fact, across the province from increased costs, and it will keep shovels in the ground on critical infrastructure projects. While previous governments implemented schemes that led to skyrocketing energy prices, we are using every tool in our tool box to help keep costs down for the people and businesses. This is what we campaigned on, and this is what we're going to do.

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

Mr. Jeff Burch: Thank you to the member from Carleton. A similar question to my other colleague's: This bill takes existing costs not being paid by the consumer after the OEB decision and places them on the backs of consumers. So it takes costs that are not being paid now by consumers and puts it on the backs of consumers into the future. How is that possibly making life more affordable for folks when you're taking costs that they are not paying now and placing them directly on the backs of those consumers?

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: Thank you to the member for the question. Madam Speaker, I've heard from my constituents time and time again how much they are struggling right now with the high prices of groceries, and especially the federal carbon tax, which I know the parties across the aisle support.

That is why I'm so proud to support the Keeping Energy Costs Down Act. This act speaks to not just my constitu-

ents in Carleton, not just to the people of Ottawa, but it speaks to Ontarians across the province. It speaks to their need for affordable housing for all Ontarians, and it ensures that new home buyers aren't burdened with a massive upfront cost for reliable and affordable home heating. This bill ensures that Ontarians do not feel this added pressure when looking at buying a home for their family.

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

Mr. Robert Bailey: My question to the member is, has she heard from local communities in her area—or, for that matter, across the province—about raising the leave-to-construct threshold?

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: Thank you to the member from Sarnia–Lambton for that question. It's always great to get a question from the member.

You know, Madam Speaker, before I answer, I just want to say I have a lot of respect for the member from Sarnia–Lambton—we all do; he's great. I know we're not supposed to name members, but we all call him Uncle Bob, because he is like our uncle.

But to answer his question, Madam Speaker: Again, this piece of legislation is so important, and natural gas is still an important part of the system. We know this because experts have told us that natural gas is an important part of the system. In fact, Ontario's Electrification and Energy Transition Panel has stated, "Natural gas is an important resource for filling three ... essential and distinct functions in Ontario's energy system today": as a fuel for electrical power generation, space and water heating, and industrial and agricultural industry.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): One quick question: the member for Guelph.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I appreciate the member from Carleton's concern for people who live in rural and remote parts of the province. Heat pumps would enable them to reduce their heating costs by 13% over fossil heating costs. PEI is offering free heat pumps for households that earn less than \$100,000. Would the member support such a program in Ontario, so we could ensure that rural and remote households can have highly efficient, affordable heating?

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: Madam Speaker, this piece of legislation allows everyone to determine the kind of heating they want to have, whether it's natural gas, whether it's propane—although I don't know who would want propane—or whether it's heat pumps. We are giving Ontarians the option to choose, and we're also giving them the option by keeping it affordable.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): We have no more time. Thank you very much.

We are going to move to further debate. I recognize the member for University–Rosedale.

Ms. Jessica Bell: Just before Christmas, the Ontario Energy Board issued an important decision affecting the gas bills of nearly four million Ontarians. The Ontario Energy Board ordered natural gas distributor Enbridge Gas to bear the costs of expanding its gas infrastructure, rather than imposing the costs on you and me. This is at a time when

Ontario is moving away from fossil fuels. Any plan to expand natural gas infrastructure carries enormous risks, not just to the environment but also to our bills. So the OEB, the Ontario Energy Board, did the right thing and decided that Enbridge's proposal was not in the interests of consumers.

How did the Conservatives respond? Well, the Conservatives responded with this bill, which is called the Keeping Energy Costs Down Act but really should be called the "hike your energy bills act." That is what it really should be called. That's the bill that we're debating today. This bill reverses the OEB's decision and will continue to permit Enbridge to hike energy bills and make life more expensive for everybody. In essence, this energy bill is bad for new home owners, it is bad for existing gas customers and it is bad for the environment. The only people who benefit from this bill are Enbridge Gas. They are the only people who benefit from this bill.

Right now, your gas bill includes a charge worth hundreds of millions of dollars each year to cover Enbridge's cost of expanding gas pipelines into new developments. On December 21, the Ontario independent energy regulator decided to put a stop to this subsidy, because it raises energy bills for existing gas customers and new home buyers, while also increasing financial risks for the whole gas system.

Ending this subsidy would save gas customers more than \$1 billion over four years in avoided pipeline subsidy costs, which comes to more than \$300 per customer. Ending this subsidy would also encourage developers to install heat pumps in new homes, which provide much cheaper heating and cooling, instead of gas. Ending this subsidy, in essence, would be win-win-win: It would lower energy bills for existing customers, it would lower energy bills for new home buyers, it would lower carbon emissions and it would avoid even more costs down the road when homes heated with natural gas inevitably convert to heat pumps.

There is, however, one loser: Enbridge Gas. Enbridge Gas stands to lose millions of dollars in profits. It is lobbying hard against the energy board decision and it has clearly been successful in doing that. Investing in gas pipelines in 2024 for heating is financially foolish, because they will become obsolete and a massive cost to all current and future customers as we move away from gas heating.

The Ontario Energy Board has made the right decision, based on evidence, to lower your energy bills. This government is choosing to take us on a terrible course. It's making the wrong decision, based on backroom lobbying, in order to raise your energy bills to benefit Enbridge and nobody else.

We have seen this government bend under public pressure and reverse decisions like opening parts of the greenbelt for development. I believe it is time to do that again. I encourage you to contact your local MPP, and urge them to do the right thing for affordability and vote against this bill.

I'm now going to go and explain a little bit more about the bill in detail. In essence, this bill amends the Ontario

Energy Board Act to allow the government to prescribe a revenue horizon, i.e., the number of years of presumed revenue used when assessing a natural gas rate application. The prescribed revenue horizon is used for determining (a) the economic feasibility of a proposed capital investment—for example, whether the costs can be reasonably recovered within the revenue horizon; or (b) a contribution in aid of construction.

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The government says it will set a revenue horizon of 40 years, extending well past 2050, which is Canada's target date for achieving net-zero carbon emissions. I don't know why this government would want to give a subsidy to Enbridge to invest in infrastructure when, based on what the Canadian government is doing, this infrastructure is going to be a stranded asset because we're moving to different energy sources. It doesn't make any sense at all.

There are other things that people have raised, that stakeholders have raised about this bill and I'm going to read them now. Let's start with what the Ontario Energy Board had to say about this. In its recent report, Ontario's energy transition panel made recommendations that seem inconsistent with Bill 165. It says:

"The Ontario Energy Board should employ all tools within its existing mandate to implement activities consistent with Ontario's goals for a clean energy economy and the requirements of the energy transition for Ontario...."

"The Ontario Energy Board should conduct reviews of cost allocation and recovery policies for natural gas and electricity connections, as well as natural gas infrastructure investment evaluations to protect customers and facilitate development of the clean energy economy."

That's the Ontario Energy Board saying that we need to transition to clean energy, and this government is doing the exact opposite of this by asking customers to subsidize Enbridge's gas expansion activities in infrastructure.

This is what ResCon had to say. This is Richard Lyall. He argues that the Ontario Energy Board decision will drive up home prices. He also failed to acknowledge the stark reality that Ontario is not yet prepared for electrification and must remain dependent on natural gas for some time longer. That's the home building industry.

Then we have Ian Mondrow, an energy and policy expert at Gowling. He wrote, "Minister Smith would be well advised to consider the wisdom of the energy panel's recommendation and leave the matter of further consideration of new energy connection cost-recovery policies with the Ontario Energy Board."

In essence, what he's saying is why is the government meddling in independent decisions that are made by electricity experts to the benefit of customers and to the benefit of the entire electricity grid?

"Leaving this in the hands of the independent regulator would maintain transparency, consistency, public accountability and a thoughtful and reasoned balancing of interests. That, after all, is the reason for an independent energy regulator"—makes sense.

This is what Adam Fremeth and Brandon Schaufele from the Ivey Energy Policy and Management Centre had

to say: "Overriding an independent economic regulator is a big deal"—it's a big deal. "It is not something to be done lightly. The government's decision explicitly undermines the Ontario Energy Board and threatens credibility of future energy investment in the province. Moreover, it's not obvious that this move is in Enbridge's long-term interests. Once a precedent to effectively overrule the regulator is established, there's little to stop future governments from using the tactic to different ends, perhaps against natural gas infrastructure."

This is what Environmental Defence had to say: "This legislation would be bad for new home owners, bad for existing gas customers, and bad for the environment. The only one that benefits is Enbridge gas."

This is what Richard Carlson, the energy director at Pollution Probe had to say: "The Ontario Energy Board was clear, correctly in my opinion, that the energy transition is under way and there's uncertainty about the future of natural gas use in the province."

Also: "As far as I know, the government has never intervened this directly in trying to alter an OEB regulatory decision, and that should be concerning to everyone."

There's a lot of people in Ontario who work in the electricity industry who are pretty concerned about what this government is doing. They're concerned about the meddling in an independent decision. They're also concerned about this government's move to side with Enbridge over the costs of gas prices and energy prices in Ontario. It's pretty concerning.

Now, I'm going to go a little bit into the details of the bill and provide some further analysis. As I mentioned, this bill is in response to a December 21, 2023, decision and order by the Ontario Energy Board with respect to Enbridge Gas's ongoing 2024-28 rate-setting proceedings. The Ontario Energy Board set some of the principles governing who should pay what during the transition from fossil fuel heating to net-zero sources. Currently, existing gas consumers absorb the capital costs of new natural gas connections based on the premise that these costs will be recovered from the new customer over the subsequent 40 years. Since Canada has mandated a phase-down of natural gas heating to reach carbon net zero by 2050, the Ontario Energy Board determined that it was too risky for existing consumers to front the costs of new gas connections that might become stranded assets. It ordered Enbridge to reduce its revenue horizon from 40 years to zero, meaning that new gas customers or developers making the choice on behalf of a future new home buyer would need to pay for their own gas connection up front if they chose to install gas. It almost gives you less choice instead of more choice.

The Ontario Energy Board noted that reducing the revenue horizon would not only reduce costs and risks for existing gas consumers; it would make the cost of natural gas connections visible to developers and new home buyers who might be better served by choosing an electric heat pump, whose lifetime operational costs are lower than that of a gas furnace. We have been proposing to the Ontario government that they move forward with bringing in the

heat pump option for a low cost or no cost to consumers so that we can transition away from fossil fuel use into a cleaner energy system. It is what other provinces are doing, and it is what we should be doing here in Ontario as well.

Either way, the Ontario Energy Board decision ensures that the cost of installing a new gas connection would be paid by those who benefit from that choice and not by other consumers who don't benefit. That makes a lot of sense to me.

The next day, the Minister of Energy, probably under some heavy lobbying by Enbridge, announced that he would overturn the Ontario Energy Board decision, arguing that it would drive up cost of new homes by an average of \$4,400 per gas connection where the developer has chosen natural gas heating.

Let's also point out the Minister of Energy's chief of staff is a former lobbyist for Enbridge. It's useful to point that out. Nothing weird happening there, no backroom deals happening there—

Interjection: Nothing to see here.

Ms. Jessica Bell: Nothing to see here. You could make a decision that benefits four million Ontarians, or you could make a decision that benefits Enbridge, especially when your chief of staff is talking to you every single day and used to work Enbridge and now works for you—very interesting; no conflict of interest whatsoever there.

The minister's decision will shift those upfront costs onto existing gas consumers, forcing them to pay over \$1 billion in additional costs over four years, costs that the Ontario Energy Board believes they should not have to pay.

So it's very interesting. There must be some people in the Ontario government, the Conservative government, right now who don't like this bill. Some of you must not like this bill. You must be getting some calls from some of your constituents who are like, "You want me to pay even more for energy than I'm currently paying?" I bet you're getting calls. And when they find out and their energy bills go up, you're going to be getting more calls; I know it.

There are other ways in which Bill 165 would allow the Ontario government to force gas consumers to pay costs that the Ontario Energy Board would otherwise disallow. Currently, no one may construct a new gas pipeline in Ontario unless the Ontario Energy Board determines this expenditure is in the public interest and grants leave to construct. That makes sense. You just don't want Enbridge deciding where to build gas without there being an independent regulator deciding that it's in the public interest. That makes a lot of sense.

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This rule seeks to ensure that expenditures are properly scrutinized so gas customers are not forced to pay for costly and uneconomical projects. By allowing politicians to decide whether or not a gas pipeline is in the public interest, instead of an independent regulator, there is a risk of politicizing the energy planning process and forcing consumers to pay for costly, lobbyist-driven projects they do not benefit from.

The former Liberal government did this with electricity system planning, and hydro bills skyrocketed. With Bill 165, it looks like it's heading down the same trajectory as

what we have seen with the previous government. We are very concerned that this would allow the government to do the same thing with the natural gas system.

The provision allowing the minister to bypass the hearing for a gas pipeline or overturn a refusal where the OEB deemed a project not in the public interest may be related to Enbridge's Panhandle Regional Expansion Project in southwestern Ontario. The government might be claiming that Bill 165 is necessary for these economic priorities to proceed, but we don't think that this is the case.

Another thing that this bill does is it establishes the concept of a generic hearing on matters affecting multiple stakeholders. The minister, with the LG in C's approval—that's the government—may direct the Ontario Energy Board to hold a generic hearing, including on matters that are the subject of an ongoing Ontario Energy Board proceeding.

This bill would also allow the government to prescribe additional persons who shall or may be represented during certain Ontario Energy Board proceedings—not just consumers, generators, distributors, or transmitters etc. For example, developers and the IESO have reportedly asked to participate in Enbridge's ongoing rate application.

In essence, overall, I have a lot of concerns with this bill. I have concerns with this bill because it is not going to be keeping energy costs down; it's going to be driving energy costs up. And this government should take note, because the previous Liberal government—one of the main reasons why they lost their election in 2018 was because of energy prices and energy decisions and people no longer having faith that decisions around electricity and energy were being made in the best interests of Ontarians.

You would hope that this government would not want to head down the same path, and I fear that Bill 165 is doing that. Because how we read it is, it looks like this bill benefits Enbridge, and it doesn't benefit the four million consumers who are going to see their energy bills go up and they're not going to get any direct benefit.

And what also concerns me is that the decision to further invest in gas infrastructure at a time when countries, provinces and states all around the world are moving to a different energy mix means that we could be locking ourselves into stranded assets that are no longer useful within a very short period of time.

We already have ways to generate energy and heat and cool people's homes that don't require gas. Heat pumps are a very cost-effective source of heating and cooling that many countries across Europe and provinces across Canada are adopting. We have alternatives that we should be investing in that are better for the environment, are better for consumers and are better for Ontario. I would much prefer to be debating a bill about that than a bill that is going to lock us into fossil fuels in and is going to lock us into assets which, if we're heading in right direction, are not going to be needed. They're just not going to be needed.

Thank you so much for your time.

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

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Point of order?

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): I recognize the member from Oshawa for a point of order.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I'm seeking unanimous consent for members to wear vintage Ed Broadbent buttons during my member's statement.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): The member for Oshawa is asking for unanimous consent to wear a vintage button for Ed Broadbent during her member's statement. Agreed? Agreed.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Thank you. Sorry to interrupt.

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

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Meegwetch to the member for the presentation on Bill 165. I know the member spoke about the OEB reversal and talked about Enbridge Gas. Can you perhaps elaborate again on why this government did the reversal on the OEB decision that was made?

Ms. Jessica Bell: The Ontario board made the right decision, based on evidence, to lower our energy bills. The Ontario government has made the decision, based on maybe backroom lobbying, to raise our energy bills in order to give Enbridge Gas a continued subsidy. Four million customers are going to see their energy bills go up so that Enbridge can continue to have their infrastructure investment subsidized. I think that is the wrong direction that we should be going in Ontario, and I urge this government to rethink this bill.

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

Ms. Laura Smith: I listened respectfully through her submissions, and I appreciate the member's statement. Our government has been working pretty hard every day to keep the costs down for the people of Ontario. Approximately 3.8 million households in Ontario currently use natural gas for home heating. That's two thirds of all households in Ontario, and that includes households that are represented by members in the House, Cochrane or—let me just see; there are a few others that have applied for it—James Bay. They've applied for the natural gas expansion program to the ministry. So obviously, they want to take advantage of this option.

I guess my question to the member is, will you commit to voting for this act so their constituents can get more access to the reliable and affordable energy that they've asked for?

Ms. Jessica Bell: Thank you for the question. Let's be really clear: The Ontario Energy Board made a decision—and I believe it was the right decision, based on evidence—to lower the cost of energy bills for nearly four million customers. This government has made the decision that they're A-okay with increasing energy costs. They're A-okay with it. That's what this bill means. There must be some Conservative members on the other side who are thinking, "Why have we put this bill forward?" Because it is just going to make our affordability crisis worse.

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

Mr. John Fraser: I enjoyed the member's presentation very much. There are kind of two separate things there.

There's the problem with the mechanics of the bill and with the long-term implications of the minister's intervention in OEB decisions, which is something that I think everybody on both sides of the House needs to be concerned about. But what I'm hearing here, and I've heard from the member from Danforth, is that it's going to drive up four million people's energy bills.

The OEB decision: They made this decision based on keeping people's energy bills lower. But on the other side, what they're saying is, "Well, it's actually driving up the cost of housing." As members here, how do we square that? That's the question that I have. I understand the long-term implications of the bill; they're not good. I'd like to understand where you stand on those two things.

Ms. Jessica Bell: Thank you for that question. I do want to once again refer to the Ontario Energy Board's decision, because they do factor in these various competing interests around how we make sure that our energy system works for everyone and is cost-effective. They made the decision, based on evidence, that it was wise for us not to continue to subsidize Enbridge's expansion but to keep energy costs lower for four million customers.

1010

We also know that it really doesn't work when we have politicians coming in and meddling with decisions that should be made by experts and independent electricity regulators. They have made the decision. It was a wise one. We support it. And instead, this government is heading down the path of listening to the Minister of Energy's chief of staff, a former lobbyist for Enbridge, a staff person for Enbridge, and they are giving Enbridge what looks like a sweetheart deal. I have a lot of concerns with that.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Questions?

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Good morning, everyone, and thank you for that informative and interesting speech from the member from University-Rosedale.

What do you think of the audacity of this government, thinking they can just swoop in and meddle with an independent regulatory body that is supposed to be at arm's length, and they just swoop in and think rules don't apply to them? They're just going to meddle away with this regulatory body who has made this tough decision, forward-thinking and thinking of Ontarians. Does it worry you that they're going to do this with other independent bodies like the FAO, the AG, the Auditor General—thoughts on that?

Ms. Jessica Bell: Thank you to the member for Beaches—East York. This government has a long track record of moving very quickly, breaking things, and then realizing they have made a mistake, they've gone too far, the public pressure is too intense and then they back track.

We have seen that with their decision to bring in strong-mayor powers and undo hundreds of years of tradition with parliamentary democracy where it is majority rule. We saw them move forward with opening up the greenbelt, even though all parties here supported the greenbelt when it was developed. We have seen them try and sabotage collective bargaining and say that the Charter of Rights and Freedoms doesn't apply here in Ontario.

But what we also see is that when people stand up, and say, “Enough. This is not acceptable. This is not the kind of Ontario we want,” this government backs down, and I hope that this government backs down on this bill as well.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Next, the member for Parkdale–High Park.

Ms. Bhutla Karpoché: I want to thank the member from University–Rosedale for her excellent presentation. And I have to say, I agree.

The Ontario Energy Board is an independent regulator whose mandate is to protect the interests of consumers, and with this decision, the OEB could not be more clear. They have told Enbridge that they cannot pass the cost down to the consumers and we cannot lock Ontarians to relying on fossil fuels for the next 40 years.

My question to the member is, we know that it is important to have faith in an independent regulator, and the government overturning the decision undermines it. We know that if this moves forward, it will harm the environment and it will hurt Ontarians. Could the member expand a little bit on what it means for tenants and homeowners at the end of the day if this bill goes through, in the context of the affordability crisis?

Ms. Jessica Bell: Thank you to the member for Parkdale–High Park for that question. We have an affordability crisis in Ontario. I see no good reason why we would want to increase the energy costs for over four million consumers when things are so expensive.

You go to the supermarket; food has never been more pricey. You pay your rent; we are at record high levels of rent. And the cost of buying a home and then paying off the mortgage has never been higher. It is a huge problem and that is why I am urging this government to rethink this bill and listen to the Ontario Energy Board and respect the decision that they have made.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you. I think there is insufficient time to have another question and response.

Further debate—oh, I’m sorry. It being 10:15 of the clock, it is now time to go to members’ statements.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

MEMBERS’ STATEMENTS

MEMBERS’ SAFETY

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: It’s my pleasure to rise today to talk about something that we don’t discuss often in the public but needs to be discussed here in this chamber, in chambers across Canada and in our city council chambers.

Last week, when the mayor of Gatineau announced that she was going to resign her seat effective immediately, citing mental health issues and a death threat, it hit home to me. It hit home to me, because I have been here for 18 years, watching a variety of different protests occur at people’s homes, like at Sam Oosterhoff’s, at Kathleen Wynne’s, at Doug Ford’s, at Christine Elliott’s and of

course, at Stephen Lecce’s. I have seen my colleagues see their constituency offices vandalized, like the member from Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock, Laurie Scott, or the leader of His Majesty’s loyal opposition, Marit Stiles.

I, too, have had my share of private security, legislative security and of course, OPP and Ottawa police protection, as someone was incarcerated not once but three times in her uttering of death threats against me. Of course, it came with a significant toll for my mental health.

I think we must have a national conversation, and I think we have to talk about misogyny in politics, radicalization in politics and international influence in politics as it pertains to the safety and security of everyone, from a municipal councillor to a staffer that’s at the front lines, to a federal parliamentarian. I’m pleased that I was able to write an op-ed for iPolitics, and I’ll continue to do this advocacy and this important work.

NORTHERN COST OF LIVING

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: *Remarks in Anishiniimowin.* Speaker, life has become very unaffordable for people across Ontario, for working people, for people on fixed incomes. The lack of competition lets big corporations like the North West Co. control the cost of goods with no consequence.

When we talk about affordability in northern towns and First Nations, it is not comparable to the rest of Ontario. A case of water that costs \$3 here in Toronto, costs \$30 or more in Kiiwetinoong. Gas prices in Webequie last summer were \$4.60 per litre.

Speaker, families need to be able to afford the necessities of life, but how do we fix it in the north? All of us need to work together: leadership, businesses, First Nations, municipalities. We can all work together to ensure people don’t have to choose between buying food or gas because they can’t afford both. We can work together to ensure that there is an affordable, nutritious supply of food available across the north.

We must find these answers because the health and the wellness of the north depends on it. Meegwetch.

TAXATION

Mr. Graham McGregor: Look, Speaker, I have some news today that will dismay members of this House. Believe it or not, on April 1, the federal Liberal government is set to increase the carbon tax. I wish I could tell you this was an April Fool’s joke, but it’s not.

Speaker, the carbon tax makes life way more expensive for families across Canada. It’s a tax on driving your car to work and a tax on driving your kids to school. It’s a tax on heating your home and a tax on the groceries you need to provide for your family. It’s a tax that does absolutely nothing for our environment, because for communities across the country, driving your car, heating your home and buying groceries is not a luxury; it is a necessity.

Look, Speaker, I can appreciate why the wise minds of Canadian academia thought this might be a good idea

when it was first conceptualized. But the carbon tax has clearly not worked. It has clearly punished families for living their lives.

1020

I am pleading with the federal Liberal government not to increase the carbon tax on April 1. Families in Ontario could really use a break. Please give us one. This April Fools' Day, let's leave the jokes to the kids, and let's finally scrap this ridiculous tax.

ED BROADBENT

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Ed Broadbent was born and raised in Oshawa. From early on, by all accounts, he was a leader. Ed was elected in 1968 and served as the member of Parliament for Whitby–Oshawa, then Oshawa, until 1990. He was the federal leader of the New Democratic Party from 1975 until 1989 and served again as the MP for Ottawa Centre from 2004 until 2006. He was always tremendously well liked and respected, even by many who didn't agree with his politics. Ed passed away on January 11 of this year and was 87.

Ed Broadbent shaped so much of what it means to be Canadian. He championed human rights and principles of social democracy. Few politicians have stood as tall or cared with such principled commitment about the betterment of society for all Canadians. In Oshawa, we also mourn the loss of a friend, leader and neighbour who cherished his deep local roots. Across party lines, Ed's legacy endures and will long inspire us to care and work for a better, kinder society.

At the opening of the Ed Broadbent Waterfront Park, Ed did not reflect on his accomplishments but instead on the community volunteers and caring adults who had helped to guide and inspire him. Ed always saw value in all people. He had hope for a life and a fairer path that was filled with opportunity for everyone.

Personally, I'm grateful for each warm and inspirational opportunity I had to learn from him. I remember being a fangirl the first time I met Ed Broadbent. It was shortly after being elected in 2014 and winning the seat back for the NDP. I've been proud to call him through the years with good news or to steal a quick selfie and a laugh in between important engagements.

We offer heartfelt condolences to his family. There are so many who worked with Ed, learned from him, and countless folks who will miss him tremendously. I will continue to work for the vision of society and country that Ed Broadbent championed throughout his career. He wanted us to be better and make the world better.

Thank you, Ed Broadbent, and we miss you.

Applause.

LUNAR NEW YEAR

Mr. Billy Pang: Speaker, it is indeed a pleasure to return to Queen's Park after a productive winter break. I'm grateful for this opportunity today to share my recent engagements with stakeholders and constituents in Markham–Unionville during the lunar new year festivities.

The lunar new year holds profound significance for the Chinese, Vietnamese and Korean communities across Canada. To celebrate this cherished tradition, I hosted a meet-and-greet event and attended different celebrations in the community, which were met with great enthusiasm and participation from local families. Witnessing the community come together to embrace ancient customs and celebrate familial bonds was truly heartwarming.

I want to extend my sincere appreciation to Premier Ford, Minister Dunlop, Minister Lecce, Minister Parsa, Minister Williams, as well as my fellow MPPs Wai, Kanapathi and Smith for gracing us with their presence at the celebration at First Markham Place. Together, we shared warm wishes and distributed red packets to families and friends.

This year marks the Year of the Dragon in the lunar calendar. The dragon symbolizes strength and vitality. As we embrace the spirit of renewal and embark on new beginnings, let's face the opportunities ahead with courage, resilience and unity. May the Year of the Dragon bring strength, vitality and abundance to Ontarians.

TIBET

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: March 10 this year marks the 65th anniversary of the Tibetan people's uprising against China's illegal occupation of Tibet in 1959. Today, Tibet remains an occupied territory under tight military surveillance.

Since 2008, over 160 Tibetans have self-immolated to protest China's repressive policies. UN experts have raised alarms about the forced separation of one million Tibetan children from their families for assimilation into Chinese colonial boarding schools.

Just recently, more than a thousand Tibetans were arrested in one day in Derge county, as there were unprecedented protests against the construction of a hydroelectric dam on the Driчу River by the Chinese government which would force the displacement of thousands. This proposed dam would also cause significant environmental harm and destroy six monasteries, including submerging the Wontod monastery, founded in the 14th century, which has one of the finest examples of Tibetan Buddhist murals, and is of great historical and cultural significance.

Even to see footage of these protests on social media is incredibly rare, as Tibet has consistently been ranked as one of the least free countries in the world by Freedom House, with little to no information making its way out.

Tibetans inside Tibet have shown extraordinary courage. Language, culture, history and identity is under threat in Tibet, but resistance is as strong as ever.

I strongly condemn the brutal crackdown and urge the international community to call on China to free the protesters and halt the construction of the dam.

NICHOLAS NEMBARD

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: Speaker, I want to take a moment to express my deep condolences to the family and friends of Nicholas Nembard. He was a young Black man who

struggled with mental health. He was in a crisis, and was shot and killed by the Waterloo Regional Police Service last week.

Nicholas's family called for help. Unfortunately, Nicholas didn't get the intervention that would've kept him healthy, safe and alive.

I know many in our Kitchener community are deep in grief, anger and pain right now. I share that grief and I share your need for answers.

Yes, we must demand accountability from the SIU process, but we must also acknowledge a bigger systemic issue in our justice system. We need a response that acknowledges anti-Black racism and mental health stigma that exists in our community and across the province. People experiencing a mental health crisis need help from mental health professionals.

I hope that, as provincial leaders, we can learn from this horrific loss and take action to end the cycle of violence, starting by giving mental health professionals the resources they need to do wellness checks and distress calls at all hours of the day, across the province, using an anti-oppressive lens.

Rest in peace, Nicholas. My heart is with you and your family.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I got the rotation mixed up, so we have three Conservatives in a row now.

BON SOO WINTER CARNIVAL

Mr. Ross Romano: The 61st annual Bon Soo Winter Carnival was held from February 2 to February 9, 2024, in beautiful Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, Canada.

Incredible events were planned, including the opening ceremony fireworks, the Polar Bear Dip, the Polar Rush Obstacle Course, the EDM Sno Bath dance party, the Fire and Ice hot sauce challenge, concert with Canadian country singer Brett Kissel and so many more. Nine days of family fun in the Soo were held at the Canal District, Northern Superior Tap Room, the Canadian Bushplane Heritage Centre, Searchmont Resort and others.

The Bon Soo festival has been going on—just to speak a little bit freely about this, Mr. Speaker—all of my life. I remember going there as a kid, participating as a kid. It's changed a lot over the years. It's fun to be able to bring my own children there. Unfortunately, this year was a bit of a tougher year with the snow not being around and us having a very green Christmas—yes, even in Sault Ste. Marie, not a lot of snow—so things like our bum slides, snow sculptures, things like this, had to be removed. Well, we lost the snow sculptures quite a number of years ago.

I would also like to say though I'm really not that disappointed about one piece. Unfortunately, the day of the polar bear swim, I was encouraged to attend and take a dip in the icy cold waters of the St. Marys River, which I have done once before. This year, unfortunately/fortunately, I had to be out of the community with my children at another event and wasn't able to jump in the icy cold St. Marys River. Perhaps another time, Mr. Speaker.

GLENN ARTHUR

Mr. John Yakabuski: The town of Arnprior lost one of its most respected and loved citizens this past Friday. On Sunday, a crowd of over 700 in the appropriately named Glenn Arthur Arena said goodbye to Glenn Arthur. The fact that Glenn's tribute was held in an arena named after him speaks of the affection the community had for him. Glenn was Arnprior's recreation director for over 36 years. During that time, he earned a reputation not only in his own community but throughout the entire valley as one of the best in the business.

1030

Glenn was already a legend when I was elected here some 20 years ago. And from the first time I met him, I knew I was in the presence of someone truly special, someone who was not only immensely talented but also absolutely committed to getting the job done. Glenn was a miracle worker navigating through the maze of government bureaucracy, ensuring Arnprior got its fair share of funding. He would follow that up by delivering results. Every single interaction I had with Glenn, whether in his professional life or after his retirement, was one that always left me feeling how blessed we are to know someone like Glenn Arthur.

His passing leaves a hole in the Arnprior community that will be felt for years to come. Our condolences go out to his dear wife, Kathy; their children, Erin, Shane and Amanda; and their families.

And while Glenn never got to see the Leafs win another Stanley Cup, perhaps they could fulfill that wish this year as a parting gift to their number one fan.

Rest well, my friend. You will be missed.

UBC MILLWRIGHT UNION LOCAL 1916

Ms. Donna Skelly: Good morning, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to highlight an organization in my riding that is a recipient of the Skills Development Fund.

This month, I visited the UBC Millwright Local 1916 training centre in Stoney Creek to tour their new facilities and to hear about how they are using their funding to enhance operations. The training centre, which was originally built in 2015, was extended with two new shops in 2022. This extension allowed the training centre to be successful with their Skills Development Fund stream 2 application.

They received over \$400,000, which they used to fund the equipment purchase for their welding shop. With this shop and through the Canadian Welding Bureau, they train and certify members on four different weld processes, as well as carbon arc gouging and torches. Any funding the organization receives leads directly to employment. All their training is industry relevant and will create employability for its members.

I would like to extend a special thank you to UBC Millwright Local 1916 training centre for the tour earlier this month and for all of their hard work throughout the years.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

M. Guy Bourgouin: Je voudrais souhaiter la bienvenue à la délégation des jeunes de La Passerelle-I.D.É. pour leur journée parlementaire à Queen's Park. On a eu une très belle session ce matin. Comme je vous ai dit, vous êtes les bienvenus chez nous. N'hésitez pas à nous contacter, mais je voulais vous dire bienvenue à Queen's Park.

Mr. Rick Byers: It's my pleasure to welcome members of the Canadian Propane Association to the House today. It's great to see you here. All members, MPPs and staff are invited to a reception hosted by the propane association after question period in rooms 228 and 230. Thank you, and welcome to your House.

Mrs. Daisy Wai: I'd like to welcome the people who came and shared with us about the Homeward Bound program from WoodGreen community centre. I'd like to welcome Dorothy Quon, VP of community; Yordanka Petrova, senior manager of Homeward Bound Toronto; Jennifer Ernewein, manager from Homeward Bound Toronto; and Maisie Watson, Homeward Bound Peterborough.

Ms. Jessica Bell: I would like to introduce people who are here on behalf of Habitat for Humanity. They include Lynn Fergusson, Brooks Barnett, Jackie Isada, Harvey Cooper, Allyson Schmidt, Hope Lee, Zachary Day and Jonathan Tsao.

Welcome to your House. I hear you are having a reception at 5 p.m. today in the dining room. I look forward to attending.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Good morning, everyone. I, too, am echoing my colleague's introduction on Habitat for Humanity, an amazing group that helps us with our housing crisis: Ene Underwood—I don't know if she was mentioned—Brooks Barnett, Eden Grodzinski and Jonathan Tsao, my old colleague.

Mr. Mike Harris: Not to belabour the point, but I would also like to welcome the folks from Habitat for Humanity, especially Jonathan Tsao, who I see up in the gallery. I look forward to meeting with him later today.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: It is my great pleasure to introduce my friend Fiona Coughlin, who is the ED and the CEO at Habitat for Humanity in Windsor-Essex. Welcome to Queen's Park for the first time.

Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos: I'm honoured today to welcome to Queen's Park, along with my colleague the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services, the team from WoodGreen's Homeward Bound program. They're here with us in the gallery: Yordanka Petrova, Maisie Watson, Eric Mariglia, Danielle Mulima, Sonya Goldman, Azfar Islam; as well, from Halton region's Home Suite Hope, Sara Cumming and Catherine Villasenor. Welcome.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I'd like to welcome Mark Carl and Harvey Cooper from Habitat for Humanity. The CEO of Niagara is Mark. Welcome to Queen's Park. I'm looking forward to our meeting later today.

Hon. Nina Tangri: I'd like to welcome Dan Tisch and the Ontario Chamber of Commerce for their advocacy day

here at Queen's Park. I think many members on all sides are having meetings with them.

I'd also like to welcome Saroj Gandhi from my office, who is here together with the Ontario Homeopathic Medical Association. Welcome to Queen's Park.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I recognize the member for Hamilton Mountain.

Miss Monique Taylor: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yes, it's not often we catch ourselves outside of our seats, so that was a great transition.

I also, on behalf of the official opposition, want to welcome WoodGreen Community Services to the Legislature, and a special shout-out to their president and CEO, Anne Babcock. I'm looking forward to continuing conversations with you. Thank you for being here.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): There are more members who wish to introduce guests. Unless there are objections, I shall continue.

The member for Oakville.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: In the members' gallery, it's an honour for me today to welcome, from my riding of Oakville, Evangeline Chima, the founder and CEO of Black Mentorship Inc.; volunteers Pricillia Oyiri and Taiwo Ayinde; graduation coach Akiesha Newton-Williams; staff member Lisa Raposo; students and parents from St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic Secondary School, just down the street from my office; and students and parents from St. Francis Xavier Catholic Secondary School in Milton. Thank you, and welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Chris Glover: I'd like to extend my welcome as well to WoodGreen and Habitat for Humanity. Also, bienvenue à la délégation des jeunes de La Passerelle-I.D.É. pour leur journée parlementaire à Queen's Park. J'ai apprécié nos conversations ce matin.

M^{me} Natalia Kusendova-Bashta: Au nom du gouvernement et de la ministre des Affaires francophones, j'aimerais aussi souhaiter la bienvenue aux jeunes délégués de La Passerelle et du réseau des jeunes parlementaires. Bienvenue à Queen's Park.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: They haven't arrived yet, but we had a great discussion this morning: grade 10 students from Patrick Fogarty Catholic Secondary School from my riding in Simcoe North. Welcome to Queen's Park.

1040

Hon. George Pirie: I'd like to welcome two constituents all the way from the great riding of Timmins: my great friends Mr. Tom Faught, who serves on the board of the Timmins Chamber of Commerce, and Mr. Kraymr Grenke, who is vice-chair of Timmins and District Hospital, a member of the Timmins Police Services Board, a board member of the Timmins Economic Development Corp. and a board member for the Timmins Chamber of Commerce. Welcome to your House.

Mr. David Smith: I rise today to welcome members from WoodGreen: Eric Mariglia, Danielle Mulima, Yordanka Petrova and Sonya Goldman. Welcome to your House today. I'm looking forward to speaking more with all of you.

Mr. Andrew Dowie: I'd like to echo my colleague in welcoming Fiona Coughlin from Habitat for Humanity

Windsor–Essex, as well as Greg Fryer from Habitat for Humanity Grey Bruce. Welcome to Queen's Park.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I believe that concludes our introduction of visitors for this morning.

QUESTION PERIOD

UNIVERSITY AND COLLEGE FUNDING

Ms. Marit Stiles: The post-secondary sector is at a breaking point, with decades of chronic underfunding. Now, as we all know, Ontario's colleges and universities are bracing for the impact of a 50% reduction in international student permits. Under this government, provincial operating grants have been cut by 30%, and at least 10 universities are projecting dramatic deficits. At the same time, international student recruitment has shot up. It has been outpacing, unfortunately, supports and housing. That's happened since this Premier took office.

This government's plan seems to be to always break it and then privatize it, and it's us who pay for it. This time, it's the international students too. To the Premier: Wasn't it the government's strategy all along to underfund colleges and universities, and rely on the exploitation of international student tuition to make up the difference?

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

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Let's do a little bit of contrast here: under Liberal leadership, continued to increase tuition in this province so that it was the highest in Canada; under the leadership of Premier Ford, in 2019, decreased tuition by 10%. Look at the NDP government: voted against those measures.

Mr. Speaker, yesterday's historic announcement: \$1.3 billion in new funding for post-secondary education in this province, and not on the backs of our students. We will continue to make tuition affordable for every student in this province.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: The minister knows perfectly well that that is just half of what colleges and universities need.

These aren't just numbers. These students came to Ontario with the promise of a better future, with good jobs and a safe place to live. We need those skilled workers here, but they were sold a bill of goods and given false hope by this government. What does the Premier have to say to those students who have had their dreams dashed because of this government's terrible decisions?

Hon. Jill Dunlop: You know what this Premier said? He said \$1.3 billion in new funding for post-secondary education.

We are going to ensure that students in this province have access and affordability in post-secondary education. We can all agree there's an affordability crisis in this province and across Canada. It's expensive to heat, to eat, for gas, and we acknowledge that.

I see OUSA in the crowd with us today; thank you for your support.

This is why we are doing this. We want to ensure affordability in tuition in this province. Thank you to the Premier for his strong leadership in ensuring that will continue for another three years.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: The students know what this means. The government has left our post-secondary sector broken. Schools are struggling under the weight of deficits, students are buried under the weight of tuition and housing and an increased cost of living, but still this government refuses to properly fund post-secondary. For every dollar spent on colleges in other provinces, we are spending 44 cents. For every dollar spent on universities, we are spending just 57 cents.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Government side, come to order.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Speaker, back to the Premier: Will the Premier face the facts here, that he broke the system so that a select few could make a profit and our students, our economy are suffering because of it?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Stop the clock. The member for Essex will come to order. The member for Sault Ste. Marie will come to order.

Start the clock. Minister of Colleges and Universities.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: I would ask the Leader of the Opposition: Is she in favour of increasing tuition, just like the leader of the Liberal Party is? She'll hike taxes; she'll hike tuition. What we are hearing from students—and I want to thank Vivian Chiem from the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance for this quote: “The decision to maintain the domestic tuition freeze for the next three years is very welcoming news to students. Amid a cost-of-living crisis and limited opportunities for income, this move will help with post-secondary affordability and allow students to put money towards basic necessities like rent and food. We appreciate the ministry's consideration of this and look forward to having more conversations about other wrap-around and sustainable avenues to support students.”

Mr. Speaker, yesterday we announced the largest investment in post-secondary education in more than a decade: \$1.3 billion, and not on the backs of our students.

JUSTICE SYSTEM

Ms. Marit Stiles: The Premier has made some pretty shocking statements about his intention to politicize the judicial appointments process. On Friday, the Premier said he intentionally placed former staffers on the judicial appointments committee to select Conservative judges. The Premier's office then tried to quickly walk back the comments, but yesterday in this chamber, he doubled down, saying he plans to personally interfere in the process to ensure that like-minded people are appointed. These statements are being widely condemned as disgraceful and dangerous.

So my question is for the Attorney General: Do you endorse the Premier's comments on who gets appointed to the judicial appointments committee?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): And to reply for the government, the Premier.

Hon. Doug Ford: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not going to double down; I'm tripling down now. We're going to triple down on making sure communities are safe. We're going to triple down on getting judges that believe in throwing someone in jail when they kick the doors in, put a gun to people's heads, terrorizing their kids, terrorizing the parents to the point that the kids don't want to stay at home anymore. They're terrorizing communities, and guess what, Mr. Speaker? They're letting them out, not going out on bail once, not twice, not three times, not four times—up to eight times. Put little Johnny back on the street, give him a gun until he can kick the next door in and put the gun to the next person's head and hand over the keys.

I'm sick and tired of judges letting these people out on bail. We're going to hire tough judges, tough JPs. That's what we're doing.

Interjections.

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

Restart the clock. Supplementary question?

Ms. Marit Stiles: Speaker, I will remind the Premier that it is his government that has overseen the complete collapse of our court system in this province. This is not just my opinion. The Federation of Ontario Law Associations has called the Premier's comments a "juvenile misapprehension," saying that the implication is irresponsible, harmful and dangerous to our democracy. They say that the Premier's comments have put the Attorney General in a "position of disrepute."

My question, back to the Attorney General—maybe the Premier will let him answer the question: Does he stand behind this Premier's undemocratic agenda or will he stand up for the integrity of our legal system?

Interjections.

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

The Attorney General can reply.

1050

Hon. Doug Downey: There sure is a lot of finger-wagging about how the system works or should work, Mr. Speaker. But there's a fundamental misunderstanding of what judicial independence is. It's not appointing the judges. They are not to be appointing their own. We are democratically elected to select judges, and then they have their independence. So I'll take no lectures from the NDP on how this system should work.

Now, Mr. Speaker, it is true that there's a group: it's called an advisory committee, and they are free to do their work. A quarter of that group are judges. They do good work. We take their advice. We don't meddle with them.

But Howard Hampton, the NDP Attorney General in 1992, did meddle with the committee. You can google it. There's a court case on it. I'll read in my supplementary

his experience as Attorney General with the meddling in the Bob Rae days.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Stop the clock. I'll remind the members that we do not use props in the chamber.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order. Order. Start the clock. Final supplementary?

Ms. Marit Stiles: I'll remind the Attorney General again, the Federation of Ontario Law Associations called the Premier's comments a "juvenile misapprehension." He has placed two former staffers on the committee to advance a political agenda in our courts.

The Advocates' Society has sent the Premier a letter saying that his approach poses "a substantial threat to the independence of ... judges" and "the administration of justice" here in the province of Ontario. They may not like it, but that's what they're saying.

Speaker, back to the Attorney General again: He must make clear right here and right now, is he going to move forward on this, or will he show some integrity and condemn the Premier's comments?

Interjections.

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

Put the book down.

Hon. Doug Downey: Mr. Speaker, I—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Put the book down.

Hon. Doug Downey: I'm going to read, Mr. Speaker—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Put the book down. The Attorney General.

Hon. Doug Downey: [*Inaudible*] Mr. Speaker, and I hope I have enough time. Maybe I'll talk about how, in 2011, the Liberals appointed 12 judges; in 2012, they did 10; in 2013, they did 12; and in 2014, they did 27. And guess what 2014 was? It was an election year.

I had a look at some of the donors in their years, and in a period in 2008 to 2010, one third were multiple donors to the Liberal Party and to nobody else. So we can talk about their record and we can be sanctimonious about how the system should work.

Mr. Speaker, Howard Hampton said that there was—he didn't get along with the Toronto left-wing bar. Their hope was that whoever had the AG's job would be someone close, someone they knew, someone they felt comfortable with. Many in the Toronto left-wing bar did, in fact, have an agenda. I'm happy to have the debate later on.

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Ms. Marit Stiles: Speaker, it is chilling to hear—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Stop the clock. Okay. The member for Essex will come to order. The member for Sault Ste. Marie will come to order. If you ignore the Chair's requests to come to order, we will move to warnings very quickly.

Start the clock. Leader of the Opposition.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Thank you, Speaker. I understand why they're so shaken: These are chilling comments coming from the Attorney General of this province.

I'm going to shift here a little. I'd like to get some clarity on the questions that I asked yesterday. After getting caught giving misleading testimony to the Integrity Commissioner under oath, the Premier's former policy adviser and his former Minister for Public and Business Service Delivery both changed their testimony before resigning.

To the Premier, my question is, has Mr. Sackville or any other official in the Premier's office changed their testimony to the Integrity Commissioner?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'm going to ask the Leader of the Opposition to withdraw her unparliamentary comment.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Withdrawn.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): To reply, government House leader and Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Hon. Paul Calandra: The Leader of the Opposition has uncovered section 219 of the Integrity Commissioner's report, so great investigative work on the part of the Leader of the Opposition. Had they read beyond 218, they would have seen the consistency of both of the chiefs of staff.

But look, Mr. Speaker, what we're doing in the province of Ontario is continuing to support the people of the province of Ontario, building more homes across Ontario. For 15 years, they supported the Liberal government that put obstacles in the way of building homes. We are systematically removing every single one of those obstacles so that the people of the province of Ontario can share in the dream of home ownership, a dream that the Liberals took away.

The Liberals have gone so far as to elect a leader who has the worst record in building new homes across the entire province, for crying out loud. In fact, Mississauga is so bad that the population of the province is growing while Mississauga's population decreased. And that's what happens when you raise taxes and when you put obstacles in the way: people find other places to go. Thankfully, they've got a government here that is doing the job and getting it done for the people—

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: That makes three times since yesterday that we've been told there were no inconsistencies in Mr. Sackville's sworn testimony. But there was an inconsistency. Mr. Sackville said under oath that he did not discuss greenbelt removal criteria before being briefed for the first time on October 27, 2022. In fact, we now know that he was briefed on greenbelt removal criteria 10 days earlier. A whole lot can happen in 10 days. We have the email. There's evidence in writing. It was sent to Mr. Sackville's personal account.

So back to the Premier: How can people trust this government when top staff in the Premier's office are repeatedly giving conflicting information about the greenbelt under oath, and what will the Premier do about it?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Again, the Leader of the Opposition and the great investigative work has uncovered section 219 of the Integrity Commissioner's report. But look, having said that, we're going to continue doing what we've done since the beginning. Since 2018, we've been focusing on building a bigger, better province of Ontario.

You look at a guy like George, who went to the GO train station today in Mississauga. He got on the GO train and went to work in Toronto. For the first time, he doesn't have to pay to get on the subway. Do you know what he said? He said he's actually making money before he even gets to his new job in a new long-term-care home that wasn't there before this government came to office. Do you know how he got that job? Because of the support that the Minister of Colleges and Universities put in play to allow him to get that job. When he gets home, he's saying to himself: I wish I could live closer to the GO train station, but because of a NIMBY mayor in Mississauga, he couldn't. But thankfully the licence plate sticker and his fees have been frozen because of this government.

We're getting the job done for the people of the province of Ontario. We'll continue to do that for all people because it's the right thing to do.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: My question is for the Associate Minister of Transportation. Across our province, many seniors are currently struggling to stretch their income. The cost of food as well as everyday goods and services keep rising. For seniors with limited income, transit fares add onto the financial burden that they are already experiencing. They should not have to struggle to pay for the things they need in their everyday life. That's why our government must continue to protect seniors and reduce transit fees.

Speaker, can the minister please tell the House what steps our government is taking to make transit more affordable for seniors in Ontario?

Hon. Vijay Thanigasalam: Thank you to the member from Mississauga–Lakeshore for that question and for his advocacy for one fare.

I have heard from many seniors across the GTHA who tell me that costs continue to rise. Unlike the Liberals and the NDP, we are the only party focused on making life more affordable.

Mr. Speaker, the successful rollout of the new one-fare program is putting money back into the pockets of seniors as double fares are now gone. On average, this saves commuters \$1,600 a year, which goes a long way for seniors who travel across the region.

The Liberals couldn't do it. The NDP and Liberals were against one fare. Under this Premier, Premier Ford, we got it done.

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

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: Thank you to the associate minister for that response. It is encouraging to see our government providing tangible financial relief for seniors.

Seniors in my riding of Mississauga–Lakeshore will be pleased to know that they can save money while travelling within the transit network.

1100

Speaker, the minister also raised an important point: Not only did the previous Liberal government not remove double fares, but both the Liberals and NDP voted against our one-fare program. That is unacceptable.

Unlike the members opposite, our government is putting more money back into people's pockets, where it belongs.

Can the minister explain how one fare makes life more affordable for the people of Ontario?

Mr. Vijay Thanigasalam: Speaker, Bonnie Crombie hiked the monthly pass for seniors by 10% in her first year as Mississauga mayor. Over her 10 years as Mississauga mayor, she raised transit fares and raised taxes, making life unaffordable for people.

We are eliminating double fares so people, including seniors, can visit the places they love and see the people they love. We are the only party, under the leadership of Premier Ford and Minister Sarkaria, that has eliminated double fares and that puts money—\$1,600—back into people's pockets.

TEACHERS

Ms. Chandra Pasma: For years, this government has been doing everything it can to drive teachers out of our education system: massively underfunding schools and driving up class sizes, refusing to address the rising crisis of violence, suppressing wages with Bill 124, attacking the dedicated professionals who support our children every single day.

Now that the Minister of Education has finally admitted that Ontario has a teacher recruitment and retention problem, what is his plan to reverse the damage his government has caused?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Mr. Speaker, we are looking forward and planning for changes to demographics as educators retire and as the population rises. That's a responsible action of government. It's a wake-up call to the NDP.

This government started, three years ago, to cut certification times for new educators by 50%, which the members opposite opposed.

We hired 2,000 net new teachers this year. The members opposite, supported by the Liberals, opposed that effort as well.

We also created a transitional certificate to allow teacher candidates to work in schools, but that was opposed as well.

We have been systematic in reducing red tape, increasing access to certified, qualified educators, which is why we abolished regulation 274. That allows the best educator to get the job—not those based on seniority.

By the member's logic, if the Premier is responsible for this change, then I suppose in your supplementary you'll condemn the BC NDP Premier. In their province, the teachers' federation calls it a crisis of teacher—

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

Supplementary question.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Six years in power, and this government has only managed to make the teacher shortage worse. That's quite a record.

Teachers and education workers have been raising concerns about the labour shortage for years and have offered to meet with the government to identify meaningful solutions that will address the real reasons why workers are leaving our education system.

Will the minister commit today to actually sitting down with teachers and education workers, listening to their concerns, and consulting on solutions before they are announced?

Interjections.

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

Minister of Education.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Unlike in Quebec or in NDP BC, we do not have a teacher crisis like the provinces east and west. We have been determined to plan ahead, hire more educators and reduce certification times by 50% for the next generation of teachers.

Mr. Speaker, every effort we have taken has been opposed by the Liberals and the New Democrats, and that seems inconsistent with our collective responsibility to ensuring qualified educators.

If the logic of the members opposite is that government is responsible for the exodus of individuals from the workforce, then they will condemn the NDP Premier of BC. In their province, the teachers' federation called it a crisis. The Liberal government in Newfoundland and Labrador is "scrambling" to fill dozens of teacher vacancies. It's a national challenge, but this province, unlike the rest of the country, has a plan. Perhaps you should support it.

TAXATION

Ms. Laura Smith: My question is to the Minister of Transportation.

At a time when costs continue to rise, the federal government has increased the carbon tax five times. Since the implementation of this punitive tax, the people of Ontario have been paying more and more every single day for food, for services and for transportation. Even worse, the federal Liberals are planning an additional seven increases by 2030.

So the carbon tax is making life more expensive for everyone, including the trucking industry, which plays a critical role in transporting the goods we need in our daily lives. Speaker, can the minister please further explain the impact of the federal carbon tax on Ontario's trucking industry?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: This government is proud to stand shoulder to shoulder with our truckers all across this province, Mr. Speaker. Whether it's about making sure our grocery shelves are stocked, whether it's

our hospitals that get the equipment that they need or the manufacturers that get their parts that they need to build Ontario-made products, this government has always stood with truckers and we have always stood against the carbon tax.

We know that the carbon tax makes life more unaffordable, Mr. Speaker. For a long-haul truck driver, the Ontario Trucking Association estimates the 17.4-cent-per-litre fuel costs at \$15,000 to \$20,000 per truck every single year, Mr. Speaker. That's a hard-working truck driver that could spend that \$15,000 on their family, on their child, putting them in hockey or extracurriculars, but the failed policies that are supported by Bonnie Crombie and the NDP and the federal minister of—

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

The supplementary question.

Ms. Laura Smith: Thank you to the minister for his response and his dedicated work for the people of Ontario.

It's the hard-working men and women in our trucking industry who deliver the goods that keep Ontario moving. But, Speaker, the impact of the carbon tax on the trucking industry ultimately affects all families and businesses in every corner of our province. The cost to fuel the trucks to transport the goods is passed on to consumers as they purchase the daily necessities.

Unfortunately, the Liberal members are ignoring their constituents' concerns about the rising cost of living. Our government must continue to stand behind the people of this province and call on our federal counterparts to do the same.

Speaker, can the minister please explain how the carbon tax impacts the trucking industry and all Ontarians?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Mr. Speaker, \$15,000 to \$20,000 every year is taken out of the pockets of hard-working truckers in this province—money that could have gone to their families. Mr. Speaker, the carbon tax is a tax on hard-working families that need to fill up their cars, keep their homes and rely on truckers.

But, Mr. Speaker, the federal government has not listened to our request to make life more affordable. In fact, they've doubled down. Their federal environment minister said he's not going to invest in any more roads or highways, Mr. Speaker, and that's absolutely ridiculous. That's why I invited him to join me to drive on the DVP, to drive on the Gardiner Expressway, the 427 and 410, to see how out of touch they are with the realities of the people that live in the GTA and Ontario and all across Canada. We call on the federal government to drop the carbon tax and to build more roads and highways all across Ontario.

MUNICIPAL FINANCES

Mr. Jeff Burch: Through you to the Premier: While housing starts fell 7% in Ontario, in British Columbia, where that government actually implemented many of the Ontario housing task force recommendations, housing starts rose 11%. This province ignored the advice of their own experts, then took over \$3 billion in development revenue away from municipalities with Bill 23. Many of

them are now facing double-digit tax increases. This Premier broke his promise to return lost revenue and make municipalities whole. Homeowners are now paying for this government's broken promise.

When will this government follow the advice of its own task force, stop stealing revenue from Ontario cities and start treating municipalities as true partners in—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Okay. That's intemperate language. I'm going to ask the member to withdraw the unparliamentary remark.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Withdrawn.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): To reply, the government House leader.

Hon. Paul Calandra: It shows you just how out of touch the NDP are. So, the member is getting up in his place today, on a day when we have Habitat for Humanity in the gallery—he's getting up in his place and saying that municipalities should charge people like Habitat for Humanity for building homes through development charges.

Do you know what we've done? We've alleviated those development charges for affordable housing. Do you know why we've done that? Because we've got more homes in the ground in this province over the last three years than at any other time in the province's history. Do you know why? Because we're removing obstacles, not putting them in the way.

1110

In the member's own community last week, they just voted against building another 120 new affordable homes on a highway, for crying out loud. That is who the member supports; that is who he protects. Do you know who we support and protect? Those people who want to build homes, who want to give people a dream, who want that dream to come true, like Habitat for Humanity, who do not have to pay development charges on their properties. Do you know why? Because we made the changes, and we're going to continue to support organized—

Interjections.

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

Mr. Jeff Burch: Speaker, through you: In a recent op-ed, AMO's executive director stated, "Provincial-municipal financial arrangements are not working for communities, businesses, industries, property taxpayers and the homeless.... With Bill 23 constraints on development charges, municipalities are turning to their only available options. They are hiking property taxes and user fees to increase revenue, or cutting services, to fund essential infrastructure investments."

Speaker, 24 municipalities have now failed to qualify for this government's failed Building Faster Fund, because this Premier and minister can't seem to figure out that a municipality is responsible for issuing approvals, not putting shovels in the ground. When will this government end this incompetence and return this lost revenue to our municipal partners, as they promised?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): To reply, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Hon. Paul Calandra: It's really amazing, right? It just shows how completely irrelevant the NDP have become in the day-to-day lives of the people of the province of Ontario, that he gets in his place and tries to defend taxing the people of the province of Ontario more, taxing people who want to build homes, taxing people who want to move into the homes, taxing a dream. That is the NDP.

We've seen what happens when you do that, Mr. Speaker. Do you know what happens? They did it in Mississauga, and do you know what happened in Mississauga? People left Mississauga. Do you know why? Because in Mississauga, the mayor of Mississauga, who's now the leader of the Liberal Party, put obstacle after obstacle after obstacle in the way, and while the rest of the province was growing, people were leaving Mississauga.

Now, George, who I talked about earlier, who got a job, used to be in manufacturing, and do you know what George said? He left manufacturing—because it's a hallmark of Liberal policies. When he was in, they left. When Conservatives are in, manufacturing is back and strong.

The Liberals ruined Ontario. The NDP are completely irrelevant in the province of Ontario. The only one that stands up for the people of the province of Ontario, gives you the dream of home ownership and gives you a key is the people in this caucus over here, and it is this Premier. Conservatives will always—

Interjections.

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

Restart the clock. The next question.

GOVERNMENT SPENDING

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Ontarians have been subject to a bombardment of government self-praise in recent weeks. The government spent taxpayer dollars on one of the most expensive advertising spots you can buy, a Super Bowl ad, to give themselves a pat on the back. To make matters worse, they won't tell Ontarians how much of their money was spent. Last week, the Minister of Finance said he would get back to us with that number; we're still waiting. I wonder if he checked under all the brown envelopes in the Premier's office. It's just one more example of this government's irresponsible spending and refusal to be transparent.

Super Bowl ads and foreign spas—while universities beg for help, 2.2 million Ontarians don't have a doctor, cities declare opioid crises and Ontarians use their credit cards to access health care. When will the Premier tell Ontarians how much of their money he spent on a Super Bowl ad while failing to deliver for the people of this province?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): And to reply, the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Thank you to the member opposite for the opportunity to answer this question.

Mr. Speaker, who is against promoting Ontario? Anyone in this House? It seems like the Liberals are. Well, maybe

they would promote the fact that they drove 300,000 jobs out of this province. This government has supported the conditions so that 700,000 new jobs were created in this province. That's the party that hasn't seen a tax or a fee that they didn't want to increase. It's this government that's got the backs of business and people and workers in this province. We're reducing the cost of everything, including cutting gas taxes, reducing fees, making it easier, tuition freezes etc., so that the people of this province can have the best province in all of North America and, may I say, the whole world.

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

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Ontarians know all is not well, despite this government's desperate and expensive attempts to change the channel. Do the minister and Premier know that, since July, 300,000 full-time jobs disappeared in Ontario, all while he's been doling out taxpayer money to his friends?

The Premier is looking for a way to hide from the \$8.3-billion greenbelt scandal, the backroom deal to give away Ontario Place to a foreign spa for 95 years and lucrative sole-sourced contracts he gave to large American companies at the expense of small Ontario business owners. The Premier needs to remember he isn't spending his own money; it's the people's money, and they have a right to know how it's being spent.

Speaker, back to the Premier: How does he justify spending millions of taxpayer dollars to pat himself on the back when business confidence is at historic lows, unemployment is rising and he's nowhere close to building 1.5 million homes?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): To reply, the Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade.

Hon. Victor Fedeli: Let's talk about a few numbers. As of this morning, since this Premier was elected, we have 700,000 new jobs created in the province of Ontario. Last year alone, 180,000 jobs were created here in Ontario. We said it yesterday, and we said it last week, but we'll say it again: In 2023, Ontario created more manufacturing jobs than all 50 US states combined. Last month, Ontario led the nation in job creation. Nearly 24,000 new jobs were added in our economy just in the month of January; 9,700 of them were in construction. Ontario accounted for 65% of all jobs created in this country. We are leading the nation in job creation.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: My question is for the Associate Minister of Transportation. There are families and individuals in my riding of Newmarket–Aurora who rely on public transit as their main form of travel, but they have told me that they are concerned that steep transit costs are adding further pressure to their household budgets. Commuters are looking to our government for solutions that will make travelling easier and more affordable. We must continue to deliver on our commitment to bring financial relief to transit users.

Speaker, can the minister highlight what our government is doing to keep costs down for commuters across the GTA?

Hon. Vijay Thanigasalam: Thank you to the member from Newmarket–Aurora for that question and for her advocacy for one fare.

Mr. Speaker, as we have many young people in the gallery today: Because of one fare and the leadership of Premier Doug Ford, students like them, when they commute five days a week to school, save \$1,600. That is why we implemented one fare, a fully funded initiative by this government. This is going to be a game-changer not just for students but for their parents, for seniors as well.

When I graduated, right after university, my first job was in Mississauga, so I used to commute from Scarborough to Mississauga, paying a double fare, triple fare every day. I understand the struggle. This government understands. This Premier understands the struggle. Our caucus members understand the struggle. But Bonnie Crombie doesn't understand the needs of everyday—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

The supplementary question?

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M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: Thank you to the associate minister for that reassuring response.

Speaker, there are people in my riding who rely on public transit to go to work, school and to run errands. Having convenient and affordable transit options is essential to save them time and money. That's why our government must ensure that we are making proactive changes that will provide financial relief to commuters across the province. We must keep costs down for the hard-working people in this great province.

Can the associate minister provide further details on the one-fare program and how it improves Ontarians' public transit experience?

Hon. Vijay Thanigasalam: With one fare, it's all about affordability. Ontarians can use any form of payment now—Presto card, debit card, credit card—hassle-free, Mr. Speaker. Students like them. When they commute, starting yesterday, there is no change in how they tap. There is no change in how they take transit. There's only one change: They're going to save money.

Like seniors, like parents, more than 600,000 students across GTHA take and rely on public transit every single day. And this is not just an impact on students. This is an impact on seniors. This is an impact on their parents.

As I mentioned, when I used to take public transit from Kennedy station to Kipling and take the TTC and go to Mississauga, during that time, under the leadership of Liberals, we paid a double fare. Under the leadership of this government, we are paying one fare.

FOREST FIREFIGHTING

Mr. Guy Bourgoïn: My question is for the Minister of Natural Resources. Seven months ago, forest firefighters across Ontario travelled thousands of kilometres to meet

Minister Smith to talk about the tragic realities they face, to be reclassified and recognized as firefighters. Their minister told them he couldn't make any promises because he wanted to make an informed decision.

Speaker, the fire season is upon us again. The Minister of Labour said yes yesterday, that forest firefighters can receive presumptive WSIB coverage for occupational diseases, but they voted no last week to an NDP motion to do exactly that.

To the minister: Can you confirm how this will be done?

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

Hon. David Piccini: Speaker, I'm happy to. It will be done just like how we delivered in Working for Workers Four Act. The NDP members opposite put forward a good private member's bill, but you know what? If we'd accepted their private member's bill on esophageal cancer for firefighters, the proposed retroactive coverage only applied after 20 years of service. We lowered that to 15 years, because we learned—we can sit down and get to a better result for families like the Bowman family.

Stop playing politics on this. Come to the table. Work for firefighters, as this Premier and this government have done, and let's get it done. Stop with the cheap shots.

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

The supplementary is by the member for Thunder Bay—Superior North.

MPP Lise Vaugeois: I have yet to hear this minister actually say the word “forest” firefighters. I remind the government that only a week ago, you voted against an amendment that would have included forest firefighters under WSIB coverage, so I'm glad that the minister has finally decided to come to the table, even if it is late.

We need to know exactly how and when the government intends to recognize wildland fire rangers as firefighters in legislation. Legislative recognition also means supplying them with the proper PPE so that these firefighters have a chance not to become sick in the first place. Recognizing wildland firefighters as firefighters means better training and having a retention strategy, which means better pay so there is not a shortage of available fire crews as wildfires threaten our communities earlier and earlier each year.

Will the minister commit to including wildland firefighters as firefighters in legislation, with the necessary supports to protect these workers from exposure to toxins, before the start of this year's fire season?

Interjections.

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

The Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry.

Hon. Graydon Smith: I want to thank my colleague, the Minister of Labour, for his comments that have been very clear about what our plans are for the future for our wildland forest fighters.

Mr. Speaker, we continue to make investments not only in our forest firefighters, but in communities all through-

out Ontario to keep them safe. We are making investments to make sure that our firefighters have everything they need to do the job in this province. In fact, the previous government, their budget was \$69.8 million a year. We raised that base budget 92% to \$135.9 million a year to make sure that our firefighters have what they need to do the job.

Mr. Speaker, we care about their safety. We care about the safety of communities, individuals and infrastructure here in Ontario. We will continue to work with our forest firefighters. In fact, it is recruitment time right now, Mr. Speaker, and I call upon the opposition—

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

The next question.

ENERGY POLICIES

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: Speaker, my question is for the Premier. I didn't see the part in the Conservative playbook where it says we need bigger government and subsidies for monopolies. But last week, the government chose to reverse the OEB's decision that supports fairness for all ratepayers and would have created an open and fair market to help Ontarians get off fossil fuels and switch to cheaper, cleaner alternatives. But the Premier is sticking you and you and you—and all of us—with the bill again. Customers would have saved \$2 billion in the next five years, but they sided with Enbridge and the \$19-million CEO.

Last year, global spending in the clean economy was \$1.8 trillion, up 17% from the year before, but we are missing out on jobs and investments. Why? Because ratepayers are subsidizing fossil fuel gas.

Will the Premier commit to subsidizing heat pumps and stop funding a gouging, greedy, polluting energy monopoly?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): To respond? The Minister of Energy.

Hon. Todd Smith: Thank you to the new member of the Green Party for the question. I believe it's her first question in the Legislature—

Interjection: Second.

Hon. Todd Smith: Second question in the Legislature; I missed the first one.

You know what? It's really, really important that the people of Ontario understand that the Green Party has been fairly consistent in their views on where we're going, while the NDP and the Liberals continue to try and figure out what it is that they want to do.

What I can tell you is what we're doing here in Ontario, as the government of Ontario and the Progressive Conservative government, is ensuring that we have a diverse energy system, one that is reliable for the people of Ontario so that we will continue to see the growing economy that we've been experiencing that the minister of economic development just explained to the Liberal members in their small caucus here. We are seeing thousands, hundreds of thousands, of jobs coming back to our province, because we have a reliable, affordable and clean energy sector here

in Ontario, one that's seeing Ontario become the engine of Canada's economy—

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

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: Mr. Speaker, what raises energy bills is making four million ratepayers pay more and giving those dollars to Enbridge, a company that made \$16 billion last year in profits, so that you can pay, you can pay and you can pay for a bad investment. That's what the OEB said: It's a bad investment.

This will raise energy bills. It will stick homeowners with outdated polluting technologies and higher heating costs for decades—technologies that make us sick, that are burning our province down. And the fires are coming this summer.

We are in a housing crisis, and we need to build more homes, not lemons that need retrofits in a few years. For years, we've seen report after report after report showing that renewables are cheaper, safer and cleaner than fossil fuels. So why the double standard?

Speaker, will the Premier save Ontarians money? Will they create jobs and allow Ontarians to start switching to clean energy sources instead of giving money to Enbridge and make a fair market that will create jobs for everyone?

Hon. Todd Smith: Speaker, this is why the Green Party has hit their ceiling: two seats in the Legislature.

Interjection.

Hon. Todd Smith: Yeah, they're on their way up, but this is as far as they're going to go if this is the way they're going to talk to the people of Ontario, because what we need is a diverse energy sector.

1130

The Green Party members and the NDP can look up at the members of the Canadian Propane Association who are here today and tell them, "Get out of our province. We don't want you anymore"—because, basically, that's what they're saying—when there are people across this province who live in rural and northern parts of our province who need propane; they need natural gas to heat their home. They need a reliable, affordable, clean energy system.

We're very, very lucky that we live in one of the cleanest jurisdictions in the entire world when it comes to energy. Some 3% of the province's emissions are coming from our electricity sector, but they want us to shut down natural gas plants. The NDP energy critic wants to shut down natural gas and nuclear. Where would that—

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

Next question.

TAXATION

Mr. Dave Smith: I've got a question for the Minister of Finance. When I meet with businesses and residents in my riding, I constantly hear how the federal carbon tax is putting pressure on the local economy and making businesses far more expensive to run. That's why I find it so disappointing that the federal government continues to play politics and not eliminate the carbon tax; in fact, they're going to increase it in just a month or so.

At this time, families, individuals and local businesses in all communities across Ontario need to feel supported by their governments and not penalized. This government, under the leadership of Premier Ford, recognizes that the carbon tax is unfair to hard-working Ontarians, especially those in rural Ontario, and that's why we continue to advocate for every one of them.

Can the minister please explain how the federal carbon tax is hurting the people of Ontario?

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Thank you to the member opposite, with one of the best-named ridings, Peterborough. Thank you very much for that question.

As I said in my previous answer to the other question, the independent Liberals never found a tax they didn't love. In fact, just last week, their party refused to support the great member from Simcoe–Grey's motion to eliminate the carbon tax and make goods more affordable across the province.

Mr. Speaker, the Bank of Canada has said the carbon tax drives up inflation, and even some in the NDP have finally abandoned it. And yet, somehow these Liberals continue to support this regressive and punitive tax.

Instead, our government is the one standing up for hard-working Ontarians day in and day out.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary question. Back to the member for Peterborough–Kawartha.

Mr. Dave Smith: It's Peterborough, not the borough of Peter.

Thank you to the minister for his response. We've heard the experts; we've heard from other governments, and we've heard from the people of Ontario: The carbon tax harms families. It harms businesses. It harms everyone across this province. With the Bank of Canada's high interest rates and the cost of living so high, it has never been more important for governments to try to keep costs down for people and businesses.

Our government has been very clear: We're working to put more money back into the pockets of the people of this province. That's why it's perplexing that the independent Liberals have failed to once again stand up with us against a tax that's driving up prices and making life more expensive for their constituents.

Through you, Speaker: Can the minister please explain why we need to fight the carbon tax to provide support to the people of Ontario and the businesses in Ontario?

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Thank you to the great member from Peterborough–Kawartha for that question.

The independent Liberals are following the lead of their federal counterparts and playing politics with the people of Ontario. This is the party whose interim leader called our gas tax cut a relief measure. And yet, later, guess what happened when the camera wasn't on? He voted against extending the tax cut and voted against bringing down the price of fuel for Ontario families and businesses. And this is the party whose new leader refused to say that she was against the carbon tax and refused to commit to supporting fewer taxes for the people of Ontario.

Mr. Speaker, it's time for these independent Liberals to decide if they are for the people of Ontario or if they are for an expensive and tax-loving federal government.

HEALTH CARE

Mr. Joel Harden: My question is for the Premier: 134,000 people in the Ottawa region don't have a nurse practitioner or family doctor. They're part of the 2.3 million people in Ontario that don't have that coverage. These neighbours rely on unsuitable walk-in clinics or crammed hospital emergency rooms to get basic health care needs.

For weeks, I've heard the government talk about plans to open 78 primary care practices, but we don't have any details. Will the government today commit to providing a public list of these 78 clinics?

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

Hon. Sylvia Jones: It gives me an opportunity to once again talk about the expansions that we are doing in primary care multidisciplinary teams: 78 teams across Ontario, all, of course, who have been notified and celebrated. Whether it's in Woodstock, whether it's in Orillia, whether across Ontario, we have expansions happening in the province of Ontario.

As well as that, our investment is going to ensure that the existing multidisciplinary teams—whether they are a nurse-practitioner-led team or a FHT, a full family health team—are also getting additional operating dollars, because, frankly, they've been ignored for 12 years: zero operating expansion in the past 12 years. We are making sure that not only the primary care multidisciplinary teams that are operating across Ontario today, but as well the 78 new and expanded—we are getting it done for the people of Ontario.

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

Mr. Joel Harden: Back to the minister: I would hope that getting it done in primary care requires telling the people of Ontario, who fund our work, which 78 clinics are being funded. We still don't have an answer from the minister today: Which successful 78 clinics are going to be funded? I hope in her response we're going to finally hear a commitment to produce that list. Because what I do know about the government is that, in 2022, they promised to spend two bucks per Ontarian—\$30 million on a budget of \$200 billion—to expand primary care, and they didn't spend the money. Now we're hearing about expansion, but we don't have a list.

So, again, Speaker—very clear, yes or no: Will the people of Ontario get this list of 78 clinics today?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: As I have mentioned, all primary care expansion teams, multidisciplinary teams, have been notified of their successful application. We have had multiple announcements that have been so well received in community, including, of course, in the Ottawa region.

We'll continue to make these investments because as we expand access, whether it is through additional physician seats, whether it is additional nurse practitioner or RN seats

in our post-secondary institutions, we're also making sure that those job opportunities are available here in Ontario in communities. Whether it is in hospitals, whether it is in our public health units, whether it is in community care or, of course, expansions of primary care multidisciplinary teams, we will continue to do this work to make sure that everyone who wants and needs a primary care physician has that opportunity with these expansions.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Mr. Deepak Anand: My question is for the Associate Minister of Transportation. I still remember the chilling winter of February 2000, my first winter. I got a part-time job and I had two choices: number one, take Brampton Transit to Westwood mall, take the TTC and pay \$5; or walk five kilometres. Mr. Speaker, as a newcomer, I picked five kilometres many times, and I had to struggle to make those tough choices.

Thankfully, we have a government that proudly rolled out our one-fare program so that residents like me don't have to pick between tough choices or money in their pocket. Speaker, residents in my riding of Mississauga–Malton and across the GTA are thrilled to learn about the savings and the impact this will have on their household budget. You know, Mr. Speaker, for far too long, the transit needs of individuals and families across our province were neglected under the previous Liberal government. In contrast, our government is continuing to make transportation improvements through strategic investments. So Speaker—

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

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The Associate Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Vijay Thanigasalam: Thank you to the member from Mississauga–Malton for that question and for his advocacy for one fare.

Mr. Speaker, through you: The successful launch of one fare means the world to me and our government, because we understand how impactful this is for Ontarians. Thanks to Minister Surma for initiating this and thanks to Minister Stan Cho for his hard work.

Members across the aisle from Mississauga and across the region know that under the previous Liberal government, transit became unaffordable. The Liberals and NDP had the opportunity to support the people of Ontario by voting in favour of one fare, but the Liberals and NDP voted against one fare not just once; they voted against it twice.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Thank you, Associate Minister, for your response and for recognizing the wonderful work this whole caucus is doing and the ministers are doing. It's great to hear how this government is standing up for public transit riders. When we were elected in 2018, we promised to make life more affordable for the people of Ontario. That's why we must continue to make historic investments in public transit so that we can put more money back into the commuters, where it belongs.

I know the minister has spoken to the riders across the GTA, including his own community of Scarborough–Rouge Park, about what to expect from the public transit experience. Through you, Mr. Speaker: Can the minister explain what the successful launch of one fare means for the commuters and the whole of Ontario?

Hon. Vijay Thanigasalam: Thank you again to the member for his advocacy for one fare. I had the opportunity to visit regions across the GTA: Durham region, York region, Mississauga, Brampton, Barrie, Hamilton. I spoke to transit workers, students, seniors and daily commuters, and one thing is crystal clear: Under the leadership of Premier Ford, we are making life more affordable for the people of this province.

While other parties are distracted, we are focused on keeping costs down and putting more money back into the people's pockets. Our government launched one fare, and this is going to enable seniors, parents, students to go from one transit region to another transit region and only pay one fare. That will save \$1,600, Mr. Speaker. It started earlier this week, and we'll continue—

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

The next question.

CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: My question is to the Premier. At pre-budget consultations, the executive director of the Children's Aid Society of London and Middlesex told the committee that, as of October 2023, London had "six youth in care who were not otherwise in need of protection, but for lack of access to" mental health services.

Is this government aware that children are being placed into protection simply so they can access mental health services? And what can the Premier say to families who are living with the pain of surrendering a child because they need access to mental health services?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): To reply, the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services.

Hon. Michael Parsa: I thank the member for the question. Speaker, every single child, every single youth in this province deserves to have a chance at a life, to succeed and thrive in their communities, and we take the protection of every single child and every youth very seriously. That means making sure we provide them with the right supports and services, and protection throughout that state, and that means having the investments to protect youth in every corner in this province.

Speaker, if you look at the Ready, Set, Go Program, if you look at the program that we have set, we are providing supports for children and youth in care, as young as 13 years old, with the life skills to succeed in our communities at 15 and with financial support right up to their 23rd birthday. That is support that never existed, and that's because we said from day one that we will never leave anyone behind in this province, Mr. Speaker, whether you're in care or not.

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

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Point of order: the member for Sault Ste. Marie.

Mr. Ross Romano: Mr. Speaker, I did not get a chance to do this earlier, but I'd like to be able to introduce a party and welcome to the House today Katie Blunt, CEO, and Allyson Schmidt, chair of the board of Habitat for Humanity in Sault Ste. Marie. I know they were just in the room and left a little bit early, but I just want to thank them for being here and look forward to seeing them later today.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I gather the Minister of Transportation has a point of order; he's standing up.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Sorry, Mr. Speaker. I just want to welcome Stephen Pickett, who works in my office, who's in the gallery today as well. I just want to welcome him to the House.

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

The House recessed from 1145 to 1500.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I beg leave to present a report from the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs and move its adoption.

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

Bill Pr32, An Act to revive Allied Contractors (Kitchener) Limited.

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

Report adopted.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I beg leave to present a report from the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs and move its adoption.

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

Bill Pr36, An Act to revive Eastern Children of Israel Congregation.

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

Report adopted.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

DOREEN SCOLNICK INVESTMENTS LIMITED ACT, 2024

Ms. Smith moved first reading of the following bill:
Bill Pr37, An Act to revive Doreen Scolnick Investments Limited.

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

First reading agreed to.

PETITIONS

HEALTH CARE

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): It is now time for petitions. I recognize the member for Nickel Belt.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Thank you, Speaker. It was nice of you to look my way. I appreciate that.

I would like to present this petition. I have over 16,000 names that were collected by Leadnow. It reads as follows:

“No Public Money for Private Care.

“Whereas on November 14, 2023, the CBC published documents showing that the Ontario government is paying a for-profit health clinic in Toronto more than twice as much as public hospitals to perform the same OHIP-covered procedure; and

“Whereas Ontario's public health care system remains understaffed and under-resourced; and

“Whereas data from the Canadian Institute for Health Information indicates outsourcing essential surgery to private, for-profit clinics is a false solution to the health care crisis and instead lines the pockets of private investors; and

“Whereas the Ford government continues to hide the true cost of its expansion of for-profit health clinics;

They petition the Legislative Assembly “of Ontario to stop using public money to fund private, for-profit health care clinics and instead invest in our public health care system.”

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

ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE

Ms. Laura Smith: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Alzheimer's disease affects over 250,000 people in and across this province of Ontario;

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

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

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

“Whereas 69% of” long-term-care “residents are living with dementia;

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

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

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

“To urge all members of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to build on the progress this government has made on building a patient-centred home and community care system.”

I will affix my name thereto. I fully support this bill, and I will pass this to page Jeremy.

MISSING PERSONS

Miss Monique Taylor: I have a petition entitled “Vulnerable Persons Alert.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas there is a gap in our current emergency alert system that needs to be addressed;

“Whereas a vulnerable persons alert would help ensure the safety of our loved ones in a situation where time is critical;

“Whereas several municipal councils, including, Brighton, Midland, Bonfield township, Cobourg and Mississauga and several others, have passed resolutions calling for a new emergency alert to protect our loved ones;

“Whereas over 90,000 people have signed an online petition calling for a ‘Draven Alert’ and over 6,000 people have signed an online petition calling for ‘Love’s Law’, for vulnerable people who go missing;

“Whereas this new alert would be an additional tool in the tool box for police forces to use to locate missing, vulnerable people locally and regionally;

“Whereas this bill is a common-sense proposal and non-partisan in nature, to help missing vulnerable persons find their way safely home;

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

“Support and pass Bill 74, Missing Persons Amendment Act, 2023.”

I wholeheartedly support this petition. I will affix my name to it and give it to Ellen to bring to the Clerk.

TUITION

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: I have a petition from the Canadian Federation of Students, signed by York University students.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Where as since 1980, whilst accounting for inflation, the average domestic undergraduate tuition has increased

by 215% and the average domestic graduate tuition by 247%; and

“Whereas upon graduation, 50% of students will have a median debt of around \$17,500, which takes an average of 9.5 years to repay; and

“Whereas the average undergraduate tuition for international students has increased by 192% between 2011 and 2021, and in colleges, they pay an average of \$14,306 annually compared to the average domestic fee of \$3,228; and

“Whereas the government of Ontario made changes to OSAP and student financial assistance in 2018-19, resulting in over a \$1-billion dollar cut in assistance to students; and

“Whereas the so-called Student Choice Initiative was defeated in the courts, students need legislation to protect their right to organize and funding for students’ groups;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, support the Canadian Federation of Students–Ontario’s call and petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to commit to (1) free and accessible education for all, (2) grants, not loans, and (3) legislate students’ right to organize.”

I will be signing this petition and giving it to page Max.

TUITION

MPP Jamie West: I would like to thank the Canadian Federation of Students for this petition to fight the fees.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas since 1980, whilst accounting for inflation, the average domestic undergraduate tuition has increased by 215%, and the average domestic graduate tuition by 247%; and

“Whereas upon graduation, 50% of students will have a median debt of around \$17,500, which takes an average of 9.5 years to repay; and

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“Whereas the average undergraduate tuition for international students has increased by 192% between 2011 and 2021, and in colleges, they pay an average of \$14,306 annually compared to the average domestic fee of \$3,228; and

“Whereas the government of Ontario made changes to OSAP and student financial assistance in 2018-19, resulting in over a \$1-billion cut in assistance to students; and

“Whereas the so-called Student Choice Initiative was defeated in the courts, students need legislation to protect their right to organize and funding for students’ groups;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, support the Canadian Federation of Students–Ontario’s call and petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to commit to (1) free and accessible education for all, (2) grants, not loans, and (3) legislate students’ right to organize.”

I support this petition. I’ll affix my signature and will provide it to page Mesapé for the table.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mr. John Fraser: A petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas people waiting for complex spinal surgeries, including for scoliosis, are forced to wait years in debilitating pain for the care they need, risking lifelong consequences and deterioration in function;

“Whereas surgeons are willing and able to help, but the system puts up many barriers. Surgeons face the difficult choice of offering routine spinal surgeries—which guarantee compensation—over complex spinal surgeries, further lengthening the wait times for patients with complex cases;

“Whereas the lack of collaboration between the Ministry of Health adjudicators and providers has led to challenges in conducting fair and accurate assessments of complex cases;

“Whereas Ontario’s funding for complex cases for spinal surgeries, derived from the general funding bucket, deprioritizes complex spinal surgeries, over routine/simple surgeries;

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

“—address the ever-increasing wait times and make complex spinal surgeries available in a timely manner;

“—immediately improve access to surgery for complex spinal conditions by increasing and equitably funding spine care in Ontario hospitals.”

I agree with this petition. I’m going to sign it, and I’m going to give it to page Mercy.

TUITION

Mr. Guy Bourgoin: I have a petition from the Canadian Federation of Students.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas since 1980, whilst accounting for inflation, the average domestic undergraduate tuition has increased by 215%, and the average domestic graduate tuition by 247%; and

“Whereas upon graduation, 50% of students will have a median debt of around \$17,500, which takes an average of 9.5 years to repay; and

“Whereas the average undergraduate tuition for international students has increased by 192% between 2011 and 2021, and in colleges, they pay an average of \$14,306 annually compared to the average domestic fee of \$3,228; and

“Whereas the government of Ontario made changes to OSAP and student financial assistance in 2018-19, resulting in over a \$1-billion cut in assistance to students; and

“Whereas the so-called Student Choice Initiative was defeated in the courts, students need legislation to protect their right to organize and funding for students’ groups;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, support the Canadian Federation of Students—Ontario’s call and petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to commit to”—I fully

support this petition, and I will give it to Ella to bring to the Clerks’ table.

BROADBAND INFRASTRUCTURE

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank Ken King from Hanmer in my riding for this petition.

“Improving Broadband in Northern Ontario.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas people and businesses in northern Ontario need reliable and affordable broadband Internet now to work, learn and connect with friends and family; and

“Whereas too many people can only access unreliable Internet”—like me—“and cellular or don’t have any connectivity at all especially in northern Ontario; and

“Whereas the current provincial Broadband and Cellular Action Plan has failed to provide northern communities with the same opportunities for economic growth, recovery and participation;”

They petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

“To call on the Ford government to immediately provide a plan with dates and actions to be taken for every area of northern Ontario to have access to reliable and affordable broadband Internet.”

I can’t wait, Speaker. I will affix my name to it and ask my good page Isaac to bring it to the Clerk.

SÉCURITÉ ROUTIÈRE

M^{me} France Gélinas: J’aimerais remercier Léonne Alberton de Chelmsford dans mon conté pour ces pétitions.

« Rendre l’autoroute 144 près de la rue Marina sécuritaire.

« Alors que les résidents et résidentes de Levack, Onaping et Cartier, et les gens qui voyagent sur l’autoroute 144, sont préoccupés par la sécurité d’une section de l’autoroute 144 près de l’intersection de la rue Marina et aimeraient prévenir d’autres accidents et décès;

« Alors que trois accidents sont survenus en 2021, trois autres cet hiver, qui ont entraîné des blessures, le déversement de diesel dans l’eau et la fermeture de la route 144 pendant des heures, ce qui a retardé la circulation et bloqué les résidents et résidentes;

« Alors que le ministère des Transports a terminé l’examen de l’autoroute 144 près de la rue Marina, ont fait des améliorations et se sont engagés à réévaluer pour s’assurer que l’autoroute est sécuritaire.

« Ils demandent à l’Assemblée législative de l’Ontario pour que le ministère des Transports revoit immédiatement l’autoroute 144 près de la rue Marina et s’engage à la rendre sécuritaire, le plus tôt possible, et ça, au plus tard, avant le mois de décembre 2024. »

J’appuie cette pétition, je vais la signer et je demande à Sarah de l’amener à la table des greffiers.

HEALTH CARE

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank Tom White from Lively in my riding for these petitions.

“Stop Privatization...:

“Whereas Ontarians get health care based on their needs, not their ability to pay;

“Whereas the Ford government wants to privatize our health care system;

“Whereas privatization will bleed nurses, doctors and PSWs out of our public hospitals and will download costs to patients;”

They petition the Legislative Assembly as follows: “to immediately stop all plans to privatize Ontario’s health care system, and fix the crisis in health care by:

“—repealing Bill 124...;

“—licensing tens of thousands of internationally educated ... and other health care professionals already in Ontario;

“—incentivizing health care professionals to choose to live and work in northern Ontario.”

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

NORTHERN HEALTH TRAVEL GRANT

M^{me} France Gélinas: I’d like to thank Vicki Gervais from Foleyet in my riding for these petitions.

“Let’s Fix the Northern Health Travel Grant....

“Whereas people in the north are not getting the same access to health care because of the high cost of travel and accommodations;

“Whereas by refusing to raise the Northern Health Travel Grant (NHTG) rates, the Ford government is putting a massive burden on northern Ontarians who are sick;

“Whereas gas prices cost more in northern Ontario;”

They petition the Legislative Assembly as follows: “to establish a committee with a mandate to fix and improve the NHTG;

“This NHTG advisory committee would bring together health care providers in the north, as well as recipients of the NHTG to make recommendations to the Minister of Health that would improve access to health care in northern Ontario through adequate reimbursement of travel costs.”

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

ORDERS OF THE DAY

KEEPING ENERGY COSTS DOWN ACT, 2024

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

Resuming the debate adjourned on February 27, 2024, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 165, An Act to amend the Ontario Energy Board Act, 1998 respecting certain Board proceedings and related matters / Projet de loi 165, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1998 sur la Commission de l’énergie de l’Ontario en ce qui

concerne certaines instances dont la Commission est saisie et des questions connexes.

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

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: I cannot actually believe we are having this debate, that we’re having to debate this topic, especially on a day like today, February 27, when temperatures are soaring—just another balmy day of plus 12 degrees, in the middle of winter. Does this government read weather forecasts, UN warnings, newspapers, health reports or even tea leaves? The climate emergency is all around us.

Today, I come before you with a sense of urgency and deep concern regarding Bill 165, the so-called Keeping Energy Costs Down Act, a piece of legislation that threatens any environmental progress and will actually increase the price of gas for consumers. This bill seeks to undermine the authority of an independent energy watchdog and, as is routine for this government, prioritize corporate interests over the well-being of Ontarians.

To the people of Ontario: I am so sorry that you are being misled time and time again by this government.

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Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Yes. I’m going to ask the member to withdraw the unparliamentary comment.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Withdraw.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Continue.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: They are failing the futures of your children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, nieces and nephews. Their only priority is lining the pockets of their friends and wealthy insiders they serve. Well, how do they expect to spend that money on a dead planet?

Okay, where do we begin? The Ontario Energy Board, an independent, arm’s-length regulator mandated to protect the interests of energy customers, released a landmark decision telling Enbridge Gas to stop subsidizing its plans to expand infrastructure for methane-heavy natural gas by charging buyers of new homes for connections. I agree with this decision. It should have been done and dusted after the board made that bold and brave choice—a forward-thinking choice, I might add.

Well, here is the problem: This government has an obsession with fossil fuels and heating up the planet. They just love it. This decision got them really heated, so to speak.

Enter Bill 165: Not only is it poor environmental and energy policy; it overrides the sound decision from a regulatory body. Why not just stay out of it? Do you think you know it all? Obviously.

The government’s insistence on pushing forward with methane-heavy natural gas expansion, despite its detrimental effects on global warming, is deeply troubling. What side of history does this government want to be on?

Trust me when I say that future generations will look back on these decisions with astonishment and disdain, in seeing that their government knowingly put their futures at stake.

The climate crisis is here and now. Wake up, dinosaurs.

With this bill, the government is attempting to overrule the Ontario Energy Board—

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Point of order, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): I apologize; I need to interrupt the member. I do have a point of order.

The member for Nepean.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I'd just like to seek some clarification: Did the member opposite just accuse members of the government of being dinosaurs?

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): I will just caution the member to use appropriate language when talking about other parties generally. Let's try to be respectful in making your point across.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Sorry. Pterodactyls. With this bill, the government—

Interjections.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Wow. Look in the mirror. I see that every day.

With this bill, the government is attempting to overrule the Ontario Energy Board, an independent regulator mandated to safeguard the interests of energy consumers in order to appease Enbridge Gas. Here we have the Ontario government taking an unprecedented step, overruling an Ontario Energy Board decision designed to protect homeowners and ratepayers in order to benefit a fossil fuel giant. Come on.

The Minister of Energy told reporters this legislation was needed because the board's decision was "rushed" and "irrational." Whoa.

Do you want to talk about rushed and irrational decisions? Everything this government has done is rushed and irrational. Let me remind you. The greenbelt: rushed, irrational, reversed and revoked, not to mention now under a criminal investigation by the RCMP. The "notwithstanding" clause: rushed, irrational, reversed and revoked. Bill 124: rushed, irrational, reversed and revoked. Severing farmland: rushed—

Hon. Andrea Khanjin: Point of order, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): I apologize to the member again. I have a point of order.

The Minister of Environment.

Hon. Andrea Khanjin: I'm just perplexed as to what this has to do with the bill. Through you, Speaker—if you could just kindly remind us what we're debating at this moment.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): I will remind the member to focus her comments on the subject of the bill.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Yes. It was a quote that someone else used in the debate that I was addressing. Thank you very much for the clarification. Thanks for your interest.

I could go on, but I only have 10 minutes.

According to the minister, "This was a wrong decision that was made without proper consultation." Hmm. Let's see about that.

Thanks to the Narwhal for reporting on this and the quote I will now read:

"The Ontario Energy Board's year-long decision-making process involved tens of thousands of pages of documents analyzed in public hearings and dozens of interviews with experts across the energy industry. It also heard from stakeholders such as the Federation of Rental-housing Providers of Ontario and the Building Owners and Managers Association. The board considered the perspective of the province's Independent Electricity System Operator, including its policy on decarbonization and the energy transition." That sounds like a heck of a lot of consultation to me.

Why don't we ramp up heat pumps? The Minister of Energy actually told us that he even has one in his own home. How great is that? A leader. The minister actually believes in renewable energy for himself and yet axes that opportunity for others. Ontario has the lowest per capita rate of heat pumps, sitting at just 2% of households using a heat pump as its primary source.

Under the Canada Greener Homes Grant, Ontario residents are eligible for a rebate for a heat pump and a home energy audit. While the rebate has slowly helped Ontarians make the switch, the program is set to end in March, with no commitment from this government and no support for future incentives. Will the government continue providing the rebate and promote heat pumps, or ramp up natural gas production to continue to dirty the province's once 94% emissions-free electricity grid? If it's good enough for the Minister of Energy's house, I'm sure it's good enough for all the people of Ontario.

Why is the government so opposed to addressing the climate crisis and implementing more renewable energy sources?

A little history lesson for all of you: Back in 2018, when the Conservatives took office, what did they do? They killed the Green Energy Act and spent over \$230 million to cancel 758 green energy projects in wind and solar energy. Most of these initiatives were already in the building process, and the government axed them.

The government continues to move away from the biggest economic opportunity of the century: green jobs and green energy. It is the future. Look at the rest of the world. We are missing out on a global opportunity. This government continues to drive in reverse—cancelled, reversed and revoked.

At the end of the day, you want to trust your government to create forward-thinking, smart, fair policy decisions. The people of Ontario are losing confidence in this government, because they continue to revoke, reverse and override.

Bill 165 will make energy bills more expensive for ratepayers, will work to destroy Ontario's chances at reaching our emission targets to combat the climate emergency, and will force us to lose out and fall behind in the global green economy.

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

Mr. Billy Pang: The member of the opposition talked about the Ontario Energy Board. While the Ontario Energy

Board makes hundreds of decisions a year—and to their credit, almost all of them I've agreed with—this one particular decision did some raise concerns about public engagement in the decision-making process. One commissioner noted that this decision, which could have a significant impact on electricity demands, was reached without input from the province's Independent Electricity System Operator. It is concerning that members of the commission didn't know the impact of the decision before signing it off. Therefore, we've proposed to increase public engagement.

1530

Does the member opposite agree that increasing public engagement is the right thing to do?

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: It's interesting how this government wants public engagement now. How much did you have for the greenbelt debacle? How much did you have for the "notwithstanding" clause? How much did you have for Bill 124? How much did you have for severing of the farmland? All of a sudden, now you want community engagement, you want public engagement.

Well, as I told you, there were tens of thousands of pages of documents analyzed in public hearings, dozens of interviews with experts across the energy industry—and hearing from stakeholders such as the Federation of Rental-housing Providers of Ontario and the Building Owners and Managers Association, as well as the IESO. That's a heck of a lot more engagement than this government has ever done.

Walk the talk.

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

M^{me} France Gélinas: Would the member agree that the Ontario Energy Board is an independent regulator? When you decide to get natural gas, you cannot go to the competition and see if you get the best prices. We get the best price because we have an agency that oversees Enbridge and that says, "Yes, this is reasonable," or "No, this is not reasonable."

Now, with this bill, we will have politicians who welcome all sorts of lobbyists into their office—

Miss Monique Taylor: And their staff.

M^{me} France Gélinas: And their staff—making decisions as to what will Enbridge be allowed to.

Do you think that the method where we have an oversight agency, the Ontario Energy Board, that is there to protect the public is a safer method than leaving it to the government?

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Thank you for the question.

We have these regulatory bodies, which are supposed to be independent and arm's-length, for a reason: because, unlike what some people think in this chamber, we don't know it all. We need checks and balances. And that's what the OEB is.

I cannot believe that this government has the audacity to meddle with the Ontario Energy Board's decision. Who do you think you are?

Now, with the judges—you're going to appoint your judges. Are you going to look at the FAO and all of a

sudden have your buddy on there—the Auditor General, the Integrity Commissioner?

We need unbiased regulators.

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

Hon. Andrea Khanjin: In her remarks, was the member proposing that we go back to the green energy deal that the former Liberal government proposed—the same green energy deal that saw the cost of energy three and a half times more expensive in Ontario than our U.S. counterparts; that made people in Ontario choose between heating and eating—and one of the primary reasons that the former Liberal government lost government?

We were brought in, and we stabilized electricity prices; we stabilized the grid. We're diversifying our energy; we're reducing greenhouse gas emissions and meeting our targets, versus our federal counterparts, who are not. And we're doing this without a carbon tax, unlike the federal government.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: I would like this government to do something on climate action—just something. It's not going to be solved with just EVs and a provincial park.

How about you look at deep energy retrofits and subsidies for that—heat pumps, cooling—actual concrete action to help people and to prevent the crisis that's upon us right now?

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

Mr. Brian Saunderson: It is a pleasure to rise in the House this afternoon, on behalf of the hard-working residents of Simcoe–Grey, to join the debate on Bill 165, Keeping Energy Costs Down Act, 2024.

In light of the debate and discussion I have heard so far, my comments today are going to focus on the question of a sustainable Ontario and the competing challenges of housing and energy costs for the residents of our beautiful province.

After listening to the debate yesterday, I'd like to start by reviewing the mandate of the Ontario Energy Board, or OEB, and the December 21, 2023, decision and order in Enbridge Gas Inc. application for 2024 rates – phase 1 that is the reason for Bill 165.

The OEB is a statutory creature of the province with a mandate to regulate Ontario's energy sector as required under provincial legislation. It is, in fact, governed by seven separate pieces of provincial legislation, including the Ontario Energy Board Act, 1998, the Electricity Act, 1998, and the Energy Consumer Protection Act, 2010.

The fact is that the OEB is a regulator, not a consumer protection agency. The OEB has regulated the natural gas sector since 1960 and the electrical sector since 1999. As a government agency, the OEB has been delegated the authority and responsibility for setting the delivery rates that electricity and natural gas utilities can charge and to monitor the financial and operational performance of these utilities.

According to its website, the OEB's vision is to be a trusted regulator that is recognized for enabling Ontario's growing economy and improving the quality of life for the

people of this province, who deserve safe, reliable and affordable energy. And its mission statement is to deliver public value through prudent regulation and independent adjudicative decision-making processes that contribute to Ontario's economic, social and environmental development. Indeed, these three headings are central to the sustainability of our province—economic, environmental, and social sustainability. They are part of a continuum and cannot be considered in isolation, and any change in one will impact the others.

The OEB's decision in the Enbridge rate application of December 21 last year was phase 1 of a multi-phase process to determine the parameters for Enbridge's 2024 rates. Rate-setting is a complex process in which the utilities provide detail and extensive information about their maintenance plans, their projected capital costs for expansion, the cost of supply, the long-term market for their utility and forecasted changes to their sector, all of which is subject to scrutiny by interested stakeholders or intervenors, such as industry groups, consumer groups, environmental groups, municipalities, First Nations and others. In all, there were 33 organizations that applied for intervenor status, of which 20 were approved by the OEB.

Speaker, the decision itself is 145 pages. It is technical and extensive, and it refers extensively to the OEB's guidelines for assessing and reporting on natural gas system expansion in Ontario, otherwise known as EBO 188, which sets out the factors and parameters the OEB must take into consideration in deciding such rate applications.

Section 2 of EBO 188 sets out the standard test for financial feasibility and has a number of subsections. Subsection 2.2 is of particular relevance to our discussion today and sets out the specific parameters for the common elements, including the following subsections:

“(a) a 10-year customer attachment horizon;

“(b) a customer revenue horizon of 40 years from the in-service date of the initial mains (20 years for large volume customers);...”

Speaker, the intent of these provisions is to set the assumptions for the horizon or, as referred to in the OEB decision, the amortization period for the recovery of the capital costs of the common elements or lateral infrastructure necessary to connect the customer to the utility service. In fact, the term “amortization” will be familiar to anyone in this House or in this province who has a mortgage, and it allows the customer to spread these capital costs over a set period of time rather than pay them all at once, up front. The amortization period is there to make life more affordable. Without this mechanism, many would not be able to afford to connect to an essential service to heat their homes, their water heaters and their clothes dryers.

1540

To cut to the chase, Speaker, EBO 188 sets out the parameters for the OEB to determine the utility rates based on two critical and essential considerations: first, that a customer will use the utility for 10 years; and, second, that

the capital costs of the necessary infrastructure to service the clients will have a 40-year horizon for standard clients or 20 years for large-volume customers such as industrial clients. That distinction—to shorten the amortization period for large industrial clients—makes perfect sense. Larger industrial clients will have more consumption and have the ability to pay their share of the capital costs faster. They can afford to pay faster, and the corollary to that is that the residential customers need a longer period in which to pay those costs. This practice has been in place for many, many years and, until this recent decision of the OEB, has been a guiding parameter for the OEB.

The amortization of capital costs has been central to the OEB's process to make access to safe, reliable and affordable energy, as set out in its mandate. We, on this side of the House, think it should remain that way, pending further discussion.

That is why Minister Smith and this government are introducing Bill 165 to pause the implications of the OEB's decision in phase 1 of Enbridge's ongoing application, pending review of the regulations and policy, and then send it back to the OEB for reconsideration.

To be very clear, at issue in the recent OEB decision, which was a split 2-to-1 decision, which is very unusual in the context of the OEB—to not only ignore the amortization period parameter, but to eliminate it entirely and rule that all capital costs for connecting a new Enbridge customer must be paid forward up front. The OEB found that the connection cost of a new home will increase by approximately \$4,400, on average, across the province, at a time when this province and this country is facing a housing shortage and the cost of home ownership is beyond the reach of so many Ontarians, young and old. That cost will be significantly more—tens of thousands, in fact—for farms and residents in rural ridings like my riding of Simcoe–Grey.

For example, a recent 311-home subdivision in eastern Ontario would see an upfront connection cost of approximately \$925,000, and those costs will need to be carried by the builder for multiple years until those homes are occupied, at which point they will be passed on to the purchaser in the upfront purchase price.

A small greenhouse in eastern Ontario will have an upfront connection charge of approximately \$36,000, a crippling charge in an industry that is growing in Ontario and is, in fact, one of our largest economic drivers—\$45 billion annually, one in 10 jobs across this province in the agricultural sector. This is a stumbling block which will prohibit many from going into that sector.

A recent seven-year commercial strip mall plaza in southwestern Ontario has an upfront cost of approximately \$49,000.

And a recent restaurant project in a commercial plaza, also in western Ontario, would have upfront connection costs of \$18,000.

Speaker, these are just a few real-life examples of the scale and scope and the impacts of the OEB's decision to eliminate the amortization period completely. They are

untenable, they are unaffordable, and they will cripple the development across all sectors, be it residential, commercial, agricultural or industrial.

Subsection 2.2(b) of EBO 188 requires the OEB to consider a horizon for the amortization of the capital costs, and in its decision the OEB disregarded that completely. In her dissent, Commissioner Duff spoke to that issue and made the following comments:

“I do not support a zero-year revenue horizon for assessing the economics of small volume gas expansion customers. I do not find the evidentiary record supports this conclusion. The CIAC comparison table filed by Enbridge Gas did not even consider zero within the range of revenue horizon options. Zero is not a horizon. It is fundamentally inconsistent with the intent of EBO 188 by requiring 100% of connection costs upfront as a payment, rather than a contribution in aid of construction. There was no mention of zero in EBO 188—yet a 20- to 30-year revenue horizon was considered. To me, the risk of unintended consequences to Enbridge Gas, its customers and other stakeholders increases given the magnitude of this conclusive change.”

Speaker, I agree with Commissioner Duff’s comments. Zero is not a horizon. The OEB decision chose to ignore the status quo, ignore the current and long-standing practice, and it did so despite the lack of evidence as to the impacts of such a drastic departure. As Commissioner Duff stated, the risk of unintended consequences to Enbridge, its customers and other stakeholders is massive because of—in her words—“the magnitude of this conclusive change.”

It is for this reason that the Minister of Energy has introduced Bill 165 to pause the impacts of the OEB’s decision, to maintain the current status quo, and to look at changes to the policy framework for the OEB, in consultation with stakeholder groups across the province, and then to send the issue back to the OEB for reconsideration. This is the responsible thing to do, given the magnitude of this conclusive and drastic change and the dearth of evidence before the OEB about the potential unintended consequences.

No one in this government, despite what they might say on the other side, disputes climate change, its dramatic impacts on Ontarians and the importance of meeting our commitments to reducing our carbon footprint by 2030 and beyond. We’re committed to ensuring Ontario fulfills its obligations to make our province more sustainable, more resilient and better equipped to meet the challenges of climate change.

As I said in my comments on my private member’s motion to push the federal government to eliminate the carbon tax on transportation fuels—a motion, I’m proud to say, that was supported by the official opposition. Interestingly, the minivan caucus of the Liberal Party sat on their hands and abstained from voting—perhaps they had a minivan mechanical that day.

As I stated at the outset, sustainability is a critical topic for Ontarians and for hard-working residents of Simcoe–Grey, and it comes in many forms: environmental, economic, and social.

And 2030 is a big year for Ontarians, for a number of very important reasons. It is the year by which we are to reduce our GHG emissions by 30% from 2005 levels, and it is the year by which the CMHC, in its 2023 housing update, made a stark prediction about the housing shortage in Canada and Ontario.

Starting with greenhouse gas emissions, based on the Auditor General’s report of last spring, the State of the Environment in Ontario, we have reduced our greenhouse gas emissions by 27%. We’re 90% of the way to our target with six years to go now, and I’m proud to say that we will exceed that target, when we look at our projects in terms of converting our steel producers to green steel through arc furnaces and eliminating coke furnaces—a deal that is costing this province approximately \$1 billion.

And I’m very proud to say that we have one of the most diversified electrical grids in Canada, utilizing nuclear energy for approximately 60%, hydroelectric for about 24%, renewables for 9%, and natural gas and biomass for approximately 8%.

These numbers in aggregate show that we are over 90% GHG-free in Ontario, and those numbers will increase when we get our four new small modular nuclear reactors online, which will power 1.2 million homes. The first one will come online by 2028.

I’m also very proud to say that Ontarians have one of the smallest per capita GHG footprints in Canada—we’re 10.1 tonnes per individual; the national average is 17.7, so we’re 43% below that. Ontario, with approximately 38% of Canada’s population, only emits 22% of our greenhouse gases.

We are being proactive, and we are being aggressive, and we have a plan to move forward.

Recently, at COP28, Minister Guilbeault was able to sign an undertaking to increase our nuclear capacity as a nation by 300%; he could only do that because, two days earlier, our very capable Minister of the Environment and Minister of Energy signed the very same one. Ontario has 90% of Canada’s active nuclear reactors.

Speaker, the real crisis facing Ontarians and Canadians is a housing shortage, and that is why it is a priority for our government. We are committed to building 1.5 million new homes by 2030. We ran on that in the last election, and we won convincingly—so convincingly that we bulged our caucus so that it sits between the NDP and the independents.

1550

But let’s be very, very clear. CMHC predicted, in its recent 2023 housing update, that if Canada continues along its current rate of 200,000 new housing starts per year, 100,000 of which are in this province, we will be 3.5 million homes under-housed by 2030. At the same time, we’ll be crushing our GHG emissions. That is a crisis of massive proportions. If we look at issues of homelessness and affordability and food security today, if you magnify that, on the projection by CMHC, it will be a much more dire situation in 2030.

That is why this government is focused on making housing affordable. That is why this government is trying

to push down upfront costs and eliminate barriers to new homeowners moving forward. And that is why the OEB decision that brings us here today is another roadblock to housing affordability. It disrupts the status quo by eliminating the long-standing 40-year horizon to amortize the cost for new customers. It forces homebuyers to pay for these costs upfront and puts another significant financial barrier in the way of prospective purchasers.

In the recent report on barriers to housing supply in Ontario, the Fraser Institute said, “Housing affordability has eroded significantly in many parts of Ontario in recent years, prompting a more thorough review of governments’ role in facilitating or impeding the construction of needed homes. While recent policy initiatives signal positive shifts, formidable obstacles persist.” And the OEB has just dropped another major obstacle in the way of home purchasers.

Ontario is now the third-biggest economy behind the US and Canada only. We’re attracting international attention and investment as a safe, reliable and sustainable partner for global businesses. This is all part of our plan to build a sustainable province environmentally and economically. So that third branch, social sustainability and housing, faces the real crisis, and that is why it is a priority for this government.

Speaker, this government is committed to the sustainability of our province and making life more affordable for Ontarians. We are committed to protecting our environment, meeting our GHG emissions targets. I have every confidence that we will not only meet that target, but we will exceed it, and we will do that while continuing to grow our economy and make us one of the most dynamic, diverse and sustainable economies in North America and internationally. To do that, we must solve the housing shortage. We must get critically needed homes built so that our residents, our workers, our students and our future can live there and continue on the path that we are on today.

If we contrast ourselves with the now-empty seats over there and their green energy program that drove 300,000 jobs south of the border, we know—and we heard it this morning in debate from our Minister of Economic Development—that we have brought 700,000 jobs back to this province since 2018, that we have made Ontario the third-biggest economy in North America behind the US and Canada, that we are seen internationally as a safe haven for industry and commerce.

We, on this side of the House, believe that the environment and the economy can go together. That is why we are focused on growing a green economy, reducing our greenhouse gas emissions.

The big roadblock to getting us where we need to go is housing supply, and we’re seeing that across—when I go to town hall meetings in my riding, I hear from the social sector, from the commercial sector, from the retail sector: “We can’t attract employees here, because they have nowhere to live.” The speed bump for this great province is that we need to make sure we have housing for our residents and for our future.

This OEB decision is putting a major roadblock in the way of our prospective homebuyers. We are not usurping

the jurisdiction of the OEB. We’re pausing their decision. We’re re-looking at their policies. We’re going to stakeholder engagement, and we are going to go back to them to re-examine their decision, with new policies in place to ensure that we can continue to grow while respecting the need to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions and our carbon footprint.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): We’re going to go to questions.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: I listened intently to the government member’s speech, and I have to admit I was a little surprised to hear that quote—“The OEB is a regulator, not a consumer protection agency.”

My question is this: Do you believe that the job of a regulator is to simply look at the interests and to benefit the interests of the people they’re regulating and not the actual people of Ontario, who in many cases are the consumers? What the OEB said in their ruling was that this was not in the best interests of consumers. Why does this member think that the decisions of the OEB should be so much in favour of the energy providers and not at all for the consumers themselves? Please explain this.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: Thank you to the member opposite for your question.

It is a regulator. It’s not a consumer protection agency. It has to consider a broad spectrum. When I went through the implications and the process for rate reviews—and I can tell you, in the town of Collingwood, we sold our local electrical distributor, and both transactions had to be approved by the OEB. The test is to see what the impacts are for the local ratepayers, given the long-term needs of the area.

There’s a balancing act in the pricing process, not just about the current supply, but about updating your current infrastructure to make sure that you are ready for the needs of tomorrow. In the electrical sector, it’s like looking at the smart meters, where you can now understand where a power outage is without even leaving your office.

To invest in those up-to-date types of infrastructure—that has costs, and those costs have to be borne by the ultimate user on a responsible timeline, not up front.

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

Mr. Robert Bailey: I listened intently to the remarks, so far, from everyone.

I’d like the member from Simcoe–Grey to speak to something that probably won’t be asked by too many others: about the leave to construct, about the changes in there. I think that’s important. I don’t know whether anyone else will touch on it.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: Thank you to my hard-working colleague from Sarnia–Lambton for that question.

It goes, again, to the long-term viability of our utility providers, which serve our residents. If you have an out-of-date utility, you’re going to have brownouts, power outages and heating losses.

Infrastructure is a critical process, and it costs millions and millions of dollars to put in the ground. The whole exercise on the pricing regulation regime is, how do you

amortize those costs responsibly to make sure that the residents of Ontario have access to safe, reliable and affordable energy? “Safe energy” means you’re not having explosions in your power boxes, or gas leaks; “reliable” means it’s going to happen when you flip the switch—and “safe” means it gets there with up-to-date processes. Those costs have to be borne and amortized over an appropriate period of time; otherwise, connecting becomes unaffordable.

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

Mr. Guy Bourgouin: When we look at what the tendency in the world is that is happening, we’re heading more in the direction of green energy. We have the energy board saying that we should not go to natural gas; that we should go more to green energy—and we need to protect the consumer, because we know it’s a dying industry. Go back 20 years, when coal—and then we went to natural gas. Well, guess what? Natural gas is the coal now. So we need to go to green energy.

What do you have against protecting the consumer? It doesn’t stop you from building houses. All you need to do is put an incentive to put heat pumps and other energy-efficient things. But no, you prefer protecting Enbridge, to the cost of consumers. Why do you do that?

Mr. Brian Saunderson: Let’s be very clear: We’re not protecting any supplier here. This is a policy decision that’s being made for the benefit of the end users.

This government, on this side of the floor, has the clean home energy heating initiative, which is giving a grant to people to buy heat pumps, but many heat pumps require backup sources, whether it be electrical or gas.

Let’s be very clear: 70% of Ontarians heat their homes with gas. They use gas for their dryers; they use gas for their water heaters. Gas is not going to disappear. We need to maintain that infrastructure, and we need to give Ontarians a choice about how they wish to heat their homes.

1600

Heat pumps are more expensive. I can tell you that in my family, we recently had a discussion. In my area, a heat pump is \$14,000 and still requires a backup of gas. So you can buy a \$5,000 heating system, or you can upgrade. Many have chosen to upgrade, as have our minister and the PA. It’s a good thing. We’re not discouraging that. We’re promoting—

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Thank you. We’re going to move to the next question.

Hon. Andrea Khanjin: I want to thank the member first for his motion that he passed. I know he has spoken to a lot of Ontarians and a lot of farmers who use natural gas; actually, they rely on that. They feed us, and we rely on them for food security. Those same farmers—and I speak to many of them—also say that the carbon tax is holding them back from investing in things that would actually reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and hurting their ability to invest in innovative technology. But do you know what else stymies their growth? Access to energy.

I know the member’s riding is adjacent to mine. While we grow lots of onions and asparagus, he has a lot of the potatoes.

I want to ask him, what is he hearing from his local agricultural sector on the need for natural gas?

Mr. Brian Saunderson: I want to thank the minister for her hard work and for the question.

She’s absolutely right; we’ve seen the carbon tax impact the drying operations of our local farmers. A lot of those drying operations are using gas. These facilities are in place, and the intent here is to make sure—

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Stop the clock.

I need to apologize to the member. I need to interrupt the proceeding to announce that we’ve reached six and a half hours of debate.

Pursuant to standing order 50(c), I am now required to interrupt the proceedings and announce that there has been six and a half hours of debate on the motion for second reading of this bill. This debate will therefore be deemed adjourned unless the government House leader directs the debate to continue.

The minister?

Hon. Andrea Khanjin: I would love to hear the answer to my question, so please continue.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Let’s continue. You can start the clock.

You can resume your answer, member for Simcoe–Grey.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. To the question on the agricultural uses: They’re rural, so hookup fees are expensive there, and it’s all about giving options to our rural sector and to our agricultural sector. The options, especially on the drying front—if you’re not using natural gas, you’re probably using propane or potentially heating oil, which have a far bigger carbon footprint. We’re trying to make natural gas accessible, which is the second-cleanest burning fuel.

At the same time, we have massive, massive plans to expand our nuclear sector, which will increase our already clean grid from over 90% upwards to 98%. It’s all part—

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Thank you. We’ll have to move to the next question.

Miss Monique Taylor: To the member opposite: The Canadian government has mandated a phase-down of natural gas heating and to have carbon zero by 2050. This cost that Enbridge is asking for—the OEB has decided that it’s not fair to ask the ratepayers to pay into something that is actually so risky and not going to be able to be built over years and years, since natural gas will eventually phase out.

We’ve seen \$16 billion in profit to Enbridge. Why does the government think that the ratepayers, the people who pay the bills every month, can afford to pay more instead of taking it from a monopoly corporation that made \$16 billion in profit last year?

Mr. Brian Saunderson: I’m going to be blunt here. I got a headache last night listening to the debate on this.

For years and years, implementation of capital costs have been paid. So if you’re on gas now, you’re paying for the infrastructure that you use and everybody else uses across the province. It has been going on for years. This is not new.

And if you want to tell us about the federal government—you're taking us backward decades. We're going to meet our target. We're going to crush it; the federal government is not. They are so woefully behind, so we will not take any lessons on GHG emissions from the federal government.

I'll tell you another thing. In Alliston, Ontario, when the federal government switched from hybrid cars and GHG emissions for the automotive sector to electric vehicle quotas, they're crushing the industry and they're kneecapping a planned way forward—and this is a planned way forward—just like the feds. The feds should be watching this. They should be listening to us, because we're leading the country.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): There's no time for another question.

We're going to move to further debate.

Interjections.

MPP Jamie West: Thank you for the applause. I appreciate that.

We are debating Bill 165. It is called the Keeping Energy Costs Down Act, which is a little bit of creative writing, I think, and we're going to get into it.

I was here during the kickoff debate. I listened to the minister speak, I listened to our critic speak—and I have to tell you, Speaker, I'm pretty aligned with our critic. He said several times, when he kicked off his debate, "Premier Ford wants to raise your gas bill. That's what this is about." Quite frankly, that is the beginning and end of this debate. There's a lot of meat to put on the bones about explaining why, but that is what this is about. This is a track history with the Conservative government, where they continually put billionaires ahead of average Canadian people. For the average person in Ontario who is worried about putting food on the table, they couldn't care less—but for billionaires like Uber, billionaires like developers, they cannot do enough for them.

There is an article that was in the Toronto Sun—as we know, a very far-left-leaning paper. I want to read this too. It was an op-ed by Peter Tabuns. It starts off: "Doug Ford Wants to Raise Your Gas Bill..."

"Just before Christmas, the Ontario Energy Board (OEB) issued an important decision affecting the gas bills of nearly four million Ontario consumers.

"The OEB ordered natural gas distributor Enbridge Gas to bear the costs of expanding its natural gas infrastructure,"—basically saying, Enbridge Gas, you pay for this; it's your infrastructure—"rather than imposing these costs on existing consumers.

"The OEB decision acknowledged the obvious: At a time when Ontario is moving away from fossil fuels, any plan to expand natural gas infrastructure carries enormous risks—not just to the environment but to your pocketbook. And so, the OEB decided Enbridge's proposal was not in the interests of consumers."

I'm going to just repeat that—it's not in the article, but this is not in the interests of consumers. We keep hearing from the Conservative government how great this is for consumers, but this non-partisan independent organization

clearly spells out that, no, it's not. You're being sold a plastic carrot. This is not good for the consumers.

The article goes on: "The next day the" Conservative "government announced that it would reverse the decision and protect the interests of Enbridge. It plans to pass legislation in February that will raise energy bills across the province and make life more expensive for new home buyers.

"It all goes back to a subsidy that most gas customers don't even know they are paying. Right now, your gas bill"—if you're paying a gas bill—"includes a charge worth hundreds of millions of dollars each year to cover Enbridge's cost of expanding gas pipelines into new developments. On Dec. 21"—just before Christmas—"Ontario's independent energy regulator decided to put a stop to this subsidy because it raises energy bills for existing gas customers and new home buyers, while also increasing financial risks for the whole gas system."

So you have a system in place where affordability is top of mind for everybody. It doesn't matter if you have a decent middle-class income—especially if you're really struggling to make ends meet. But if you have a double income and you're making good wages, you're feeling it at the grocery store. Your price of natural gas, if you have natural gas—there's not a person who says, "Oh, I don't know roughly what it is." They know it's a lot, and when they look on that fee, they see that one of the fees is basically for the consumers, the ratepayers, to pay for Enbridge to carry their freight. What this independent board has said is that is not fair; that is not in the best interests of the consumers.

I was telling my colleagues earlier: This is no different, their argument about how if we amortize this and pass the consumers on to everybody—when I bought a house, it came with shingles, and the shingles were passed on to the cost to me. We didn't amortize it by everybody who had shingles in the neighbourhood. It's the cost of doing business.

And so what they're telling Enbridge—Enbridge, which is incredibly wealthy. Enbridge's profits last year—this isn't just in general—was \$16.507 billion. It's not a mom-and-pop shop—\$16.507 billion for Enbridge. We're talking literally about billionaires here. What the Conservative government is saying: "Well, we can't have Enbridge pay for this. Do you know who should pay for this?" The Conservative government is saying seniors should pay for this, renters should pay for this; everyone should pay for it except for the billionaires.

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As New Democrats, we're not into helping billionaires. They've got two parties already bending over backwards to help billionaires. We're going to stay with working-class people. We think they need to have fewer hands in their pockets and keep a little money to themselves.

Going on: "Ending the subsidy would save gas customers more than \$1 billion over four years in avoided pipeline subsidy costs, which comes to more than \$300 per customer." I talked to our critic about this. It ranges between \$300 and \$600. Honestly, I don't want to get into that debate because I can't do the math on it—but \$300 is

a strong number that you can count on. So, imagine you're paying your bill, you're heating your house, you're paying for a service, you're understanding it, and then somebody like Peter Tabuns comes along and explains to you, "What's happening with the Conservative government is, they're adding \$300 to your bill." You would be outraged. And when you say, "Why? What's the rationale for this?"—the rationale is that the Conservative government wants to keep developers and wants to keep Enbridge happy, and so they want you to pay for their expenses. That's what they think is fair. You pay \$300 out of your pocket so that billionaire companies can increase profits to their shareholders.

"Ending the subsidy will also encourage developers to install heat pumps in new homes, which provide much cheaper heating and cooling, instead of gas."

Basically, what they're saying is, you have your thumb on the scale. Natural gas is starting to phase out. When I first got my first house, it was mainly heated by electricity, and electricity prices were going up. We had a little natural gas fireplace. There was a time when natural gas was cheaper, but the world is moving on. There are new technologies that are less expensive, and more and more people are going to be looking at heat pumps as they move along. As the end of life for your natural gas furnace starts to decline, you have to look at other alternatives.

The same way that people moved from oil furnaces to natural gas or to baseboards, people will start looking at things like heat pumps and other energy sources to heat their house. That's just the reality.

What the OEB is saying to the people of Ontario and to Enbridge is, this trend is ending. We cannot sign up people and have people pay for this for decades as they transition away from it. It's not fair to the ratepayers to carry the freight for something—that you need to invest in your own infrastructure.

The article continues: "Ending the subsidy would be a win-win-win-win. It would lower energy bills for existing customers," because we wouldn't be paying the \$300 each. It would "lower energy bills for new homebuyers, lower carbon emissions," which more and more people in Ontario are very concerned about. It is the end of February, for anyone watching at an earlier time or reading Hansard. It is the end of February, and we're in the middle of a rainstorm in Toronto. In Sudbury, which is northern Ontario—not as far north as my colleague here, but Sudbury is northern Ontario—it was raining on Christmas day. I walked my dogs in the mud.

Climate is affecting what's going on here, and people are moving along, and more and more people, especially youth but, as well, people who are older, are opening their eyes to the fact that we have to do something about carbon emissions. It is not a tomorrow problem. It's a today problem. We had youth here yesterday talking to me, basically saying that they're not sure if they should have kids because they don't know what world they'll be bringing their kids into, when it comes to how carbon is affecting our environment.

This plan basically is about avoiding even more costs down the road when homes heated with natural gas

convert to heat pumps. The loser, though—and the article basically says—is Enbridge Gas. We get this. Enbridge Gas is a billion-dollar company—and just to repeat, it's a \$16.507-billion company, one-year profit. It's the loser in this decision. And first out of the gate, Doug Ford and the Conservative government—"We've got to stand up for these billionaires, man." They are front and centre. And we saw this during the greenbelt grab. We saw this in the last Working for Workers bill, when their members voted down an amendment to have misclassified independent contractors as workers so they can make at least minimum wage, right? Billionaires are always first in line when it comes to the Conservative government. They cannot wait to do enough for billionaires. They don't care about regular people. They're helped; they're hurt—it doesn't matter. It's billionaires, it's donors, front and centre.

So, Enbridge Gas, absolutely, is the loser. It would lose millions of dollars in profits, and it's lobbying hard against the energy board decision.

"It's no surprise that the Premier's Minister of Energy"—whose name is here, but I won't say it, because we can't for parliamentary reasons—"has announced that they will pass legislation to overturn the decision." This is what we're debating right now.

The reality, though, is gas is no longer the cheapest heating source. "Investing in gas pipelines for heating is financially foolish because they will become obsolete and a massive cost to all current and future customers as we move away from gas heating." That's not to say that you can't invest in gas. There's this false choice that's being presented by the Conservative government—where, because we're not supporting these fees being downloaded on ratepayers, we're against natural gas. If somebody wants natural gas—if that's the alternative for them, absolutely they can. We're saying that everyone else doesn't have to pay for it.

Interjection.

MPP Jamie West: The member opposite is heckling me about heat pumps or something. What I'm saying is that people should have choice, and the people who are paying for natural gas in their house—people like me. I have a natural gas furnace. I have a natural gas fireplace. I don't want to pay for Enbridge to have more profit. I'm going to pay for what I get and that's all. That company is doing okay. They can get their hand out of my pocket and put it in their pocket and pay for the expansions they want to make.

Natural gas is no longer the cheapest heating source; it's financially foolish. Now, this creates a cycle as well, because as people move away from natural gas—the same way people moved away from oil in the past, people are going to begin to move away from natural gas, and as they move away from natural gas, there will be fewer and fewer ratepayers. There will be fewer and fewer people using natural gas, and the cost of natural gas will go up; it will climb. There are fewer and fewer people paying for it.

When I was 15 or 16 years old, my parents had an oil furnace with this big oil tank, and I remember they would do the math and try to figure out how much we needed. If it was a cold winter, we would come get a little bit more

oil because it was so expensive, but we didn't fill it up; we got a little bit more because the cost was so high compared to everything else, and eventually, that cost forced us to abandon oil completely. And that's what's going to happen to these ratepayers.

The Conservative government is telling people for natural gas to get in there—and if they need to, if people want to, they can, but saying you should, recognizing that independent organizations are saying, “This is going the way of the dinosaur.” This is a gas source that came from the dinosaur, but it's going back the way of the dinosaur. People are moving to new technologies. They're moving on, just like we always have in the province, and that cost is going to amplify for these people. The government's own expert electrification panel noted “growing indications that it is unlikely that the natural gas grid can be decarbonized and continue to deliver cost-effective building heat.”

So this isn't just us sitting around coming up with this in a backroom. What we're doing, as New Democrats, is, we're listening to experts. We're listening to the Conservative government's own expert electrification panel. We are listening to the OEB. We're listening to independent voices telling us stuff. We're not making up our facts and choosing the ones we want. Independent organizations have no stake in the game, aside from being experts. We're listening to them and making good decisions. Quite frankly, that's what the government's role is to do—listen to good voices and make good decisions.

It's cliché to talk about the eagle and the owl, but the idea is, the owl is supposed to make wise decisions, and the eagle, representing the opposition, is supposed to help make improvements. It's really tough if you're not making wise decisions in the first place—a lot of heavy lifting on the eagle's side.

Our neighbours like New York state and Montreal are prohibiting gas in new construction. The world is moving on, like I said. Passing legislation to reinstate a subsidy is completely out of step and risks financial disaster down the road. The Ontario Energy Board made the right decision. It's based on evidence. I want to highlight that: It's an evidence-based decision to lower energy bills.

The Ontario government is on course to make the wrong decision, based on backroom lobbying, to raise your energy bills. That's what it comes down to.

We don't want people on natural gas to have to pay more so that Enbridge can have more profit because apparently \$16.507 billion isn't enough for them.

What we're saying for people who are having a hard time making ends meet is that Enbridge should keep their hands out of their pocket and the Conservative government shouldn't be helping them take money out of your pocket.

I am almost at the end—two more paragraphs.

Over the years, we've seen government bend under public pressure and reverse decisions like opening parts of the greenbelt for development. And so, they have bent to pressure. I think this is going to be rushed through as quick as they can so the public doesn't find out about this, but when the public finds out they're going to be paying more and not getting anything for it, they're going to be outraged,

especially when they're having a hard time making ends meet. I'm outraged that this is happening. I cannot believe the backlash when people find out what's going to happen with this—that they're paying for a billion-dollar company to be subsidized.

Where's the subsidy for the person at home? Where's the subsidy that we brought forward? We brought forward a subsidy so people would have heat pumps and access to them, like they're doing in the Maritimes, and they voted against that. They said, “No, no. You've got to stick with Enbridge. Enbridge is our pal.”

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The Conservative government has made this argument several times about, “We're going to lower the cost for homes because the cost of having natural gas in the home is going to be passed on to the homebuyer.” They are out of their mind if they think that any homebuyer is going to think that that money is going to leave developers' pockets and be passed on to them. There is no way that's going to happen. Do you know where it's going to be? It's going to be in the developers' pockets. It's going to be a couple of grand in their pocket, and they're going to peel off a couple of grand and they're going to feed it back into donations for their buddies who helped them out. That's what this is about. This isn't about helping regular people. This is about helping people who donate to this party. This is about helping people who are billion-dollar companies.

“Hopefully the evidence and the truth will prevail, the government will respect the independent decision of the Ontario Energy Board, and you”—I'm talking to the people of Ontario—“will be protected from this rate increase.” That was by our energy critic. I'm not supposed to say his name, but it's just spelled here: Peter Tabuns, “the NDP MPP for Toronto–Danforth and is the party's critic for energy and climate action”—just for credit on what was in there.

So what we're talking about in this bill, and I've said it again and again—and really, I started with this statement. I stole it from our energy critic, because he started with it: “Premier Ford wants to raise your gas bill. That's what this is about.”

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): I'm sorry; I'm just going to interrupt the member. According to the rules, you can't refer to the Premier by his name—so the title of the riding, please.

MPP Jamie West: Okay.

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

MPP Jamie West: I actually pulled it from draft Hansard, and they probably didn't adjust it. I apologize for that.

So this really is coming down to a point where people are going to pay more, and it doesn't make sense. There isn't a rational argument. I know there are a bunch of spinning plates they're trying to distract people with, and they're basically flicking laser pointers to distract people, but at the end of the day, you're going to pay more; you're going to see it on your bill.

Independent organizations have said consumers should not pay for this. Enbridge should pay for this. And instead

of standing up for the consumers, the Conservative government has rushed in to stand with Enbridge and say, “No, no, what we’re going to do is we’re going to overrule this. We think the independent agency is wrong. We think that these independent decisions are wrong. Coincidentally, it helps one of our friends. But we think they’re wrong, and so we’re going to overrule it.”

Ultimately, in debate, they’ll say, if this bill is passed—they have a majority government; this bill is going to pass. But I don’t know if they can withstand the backlash from the communities when they find out that they’re downloading more fees to them. They did this already with municipal taxes. Anyone who’s frustrated with the amount that your municipal taxes have been raised over the last year—what they did is, they downloaded developer fees to municipalities. Municipalities cannot run a deficit, and so that means they lower services or increase taxes—or a mix of both. So if you are upset with your municipal services or your property taxes going up, I want you to take some of that anger and rage away from your city council, and I want you to point it where it belongs: with a provincial government that decided that developer fees should be borne by the taxpayer.

The Premier is very proud of often saying there is only one taxpayer. He’s basically saying, “You’ll pay for it in the taxes.” And when you look at property taxes, you’re looking at seniors on fixed income; you’re looking at homeowners; you’re looking at rank-and-file regular people paying more and more because the Conservative government is balancing their books on the back of the municipalities and saying that you as property taxpayers can pay it. And they’re hoping you’re going to keep your rage in the municipality and not where it belongs with this Conservative government.

This bill is going to drive up energy costs. It is not going to bring them down. This is about raising your gas bill. I said it in the beginning. I said it halfway through. I’m going to say it again. I’m going to say it to everyone I speak to because they need to know. This bill is nothing more than a way to raise your gas bill up, to have you pay so that a billionaire company can make even more profit. That’s all it is. That’s not my opinion. That’s the opinion of independent regulators. That’s the opinion of independent voices who look at everything. They don’t really have a stake in the game—just that they’re experts. If you’re not listening to experts saying, “This is the wrong thing to do and an unfair thing to do,” you have to at least look at the math and say, “I don’t think that you should be paying for services that you’re not getting, and you should not be paying for a billion-dollar company like Enbridge”—a \$16.507-billion company. They can pay their own way.

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

Mr. Stéphane Sarrazin: I would like to ask a really simple question to the member for Sudbury. He mentioned that he actually uses natural gas to heat his home. I was wondering how much he paid to get it connected to the natural gas network.

MPP Jamie West: It’s an interesting question. I bought my house—someone owned it before me, so I paid for the

entire house all in one, so I don’t know what the hookup cost was. But it distracts from the conversation that we’re having. At some point, my natural gas furnace is going to be at end of life, and I’m going to be looking at alternative sources. I could look at replacing it with another natural gas or maybe a more high-efficiency—I could look at heat pumps, I could look at electric baseboards, but, at some point, I’m going to look at another alternatives. And if I’m looking at something where this Conservative government has told me I’m going to pay an extra 300 bucks to cover some billionaire’s expenses, I am not going to be looking at that. I can guarantee you that.

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

M^{me} France Gélinas: The member is right; the Ontario Energy Board did the review, they looked at the facts, and they said to Enbridge, “You cannot bill the four million customers that you have in Ontario for development fees for new homes. This is not the way things should go.”

I can tell you that in my riding the natural gas pipe goes to the end of my street. None of us are connected to natural gas—and we won’t be, because Enbridge is saying, “Oh, if you want us to come down, you will have to pay thousands and thousands of dollars.”

How could it be that an agency—they are the only providers that make \$16 billion a year—needs to go into the pocket of all four million of their customers in order to stay in business?

MPP Jamie West: Thank you to the member from Nickel Belt for the question.

It makes no sense. This is an organization that is incredibly wealthy—and hats off to them; more than \$16 billion for Enbridge. I think, “Good attempt.” You went for it and you were saying, “Hey, we want to give more money to our shareholders. What if we got our ratepayers to pay for part of this infrastructure, instead of us?” They tried to sneak one past the goalie, and the goalie knocked it out and said, “No, we’re not going to allow this, as the OEB.” That’s where it should have ended. I don’t blame Enbridge for trying. They’re trying to maximize their profits; they absolutely should try.

What’s wrong, though, is the Conservative government overruling this independent agency, these experts, and saying, “No, you got it wrong. Take care of my buddies for me.” That’s not about politics. That’s not what’s best for the people of Ontario. That’s what’s best for Enbridge. That’s what’s best for donors to the Conservative Party.

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

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Thank you for that interesting speech you just did.

My question is, do you have faith in this government with their climate action? Are you proud of their climate action?

Interjections.

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

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Order, please. The member has the floor to respond.

MPP Jamie West: I know there's opportunity here to make jokes and stuff, but let's be honest: We are seeing the results of climate change every single day. We are seeing record forest fires—we were all smelling it last spring. It's raining outside today.

All I can remember over the last four years is the Conservative government having a litter cleanup day. A long time ago, I was a Cub Scout, and we had a litter cleanup day.

We need to take action on climate change. We have to take it seriously. We have to do it in some way.

So I don't have a lot of faith—I don't have a lot of faith in a lot of things they do, but especially not on this issue.

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

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: It's a pleasure to join the debate. I really do enjoy the member opposite, and I've had an opportunity to be in Sudbury, when I was cabinet minister, to do some announcements with him.

What shocks me is, he is saying one thing to his constituents and another thing to this Legislature.

What I think is a problem with the New Democratic Party, obviously, is the two-headed monster that they're wrestling with, which is the environmentalists and then those who are from northern Ontario, like the member from Nickel Belt, like the member from Sudbury.

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I want to know from the member from Sudbury, Mr. West—he has asked in this Legislature, he has asked the minister for expansion of natural gas. We're offering the expansion of natural gas, and he is speaking, now, against natural gas expansion. We all know from those who live in rural Ontario and those who live in northern Ontario that they need natural gas because of the escalation in prices in the province of Ontario.

So my question to the member opposite: Is he going to vote for this act so his constituents can gain access to reliable and affordable energy in his community?

MPP Jamie West: To begin, it's a bit of a strawman conversation. Sudbury is fortunate enough that we have access to natural gas in every area of my riding. But when you talk about access to natural gas, I think it's fine, and I was clear in my debate—

Interjections.

MPP Jamie West: They don't want to hear the answer.

I was clear in my debate that if people want access, that's fine. I don't think everyone else should pay for your access—it's not just that I didn't think that; the Ontario Energy Board didn't think that. Independent experts said, "No, do not do this."

And if I were to go out in my riding and I were to talk to people in my riding and say, "Do you want to pay an extra \$300 for this billion-dollar company to be more profitable?", every single one of them would say no, and they would be outraged that the Conservative government is trying to pass this off as good for them. It's not good for them.

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

Miss Monique Taylor: Thank you to the member from Sudbury for his debate on Bill 165, titled Keeping Energy Costs Down Act. It's the title that concerns me right off the bat—typical of this Conservative government—because, really, it's keeping the costs down for who? It's keeping the costs down for Enbridge, which the government is protecting over the ratepayers. We hear day in and day out how expensive life is for people being able to heat their homes, and now this government is literally going to allow Enbridge to put a bigger cost on our heating bills to protect Enbridge profits.

Can the member give his comments on why he thinks the government is so angry?

Interjections.

MPP Jamie West: I don't know if it's picked up by the mike, but there is a lot of heckling, so I'm just trying to speak over it, to stay focused on this.

What we've heard many times during the debate from the Conservative side, the government side, is that this money is going to be passed along to the homebuyer, this money is going to be passed along to the condo buyer. I think it's laughable.

On the drive down here, around Barrie, there are condos available from the mid-\$800,000 range.

There is not one person looking at a condo, looking into a home, who thinks that Enbridge is going to pass the savings along to them. You guys have lost the thread. Honestly, there is nobody who thinks the price of their house is going to come down because of this incentive.

What's going to happen is, this multi-billion dollar company is going to have a couple more billion dollars in their pocket that the existing ratepayers are going to pay for. It's lose-lose. Everyone in the province will pay more, plus that fee won't be passed along to the consumers who are buying new houses for the first time.

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

Ms. Laura Smith: My friend alluded to something that I still have a very huge curiosity on. Since the launch of the 2019 natural gas expansion program, we've supported projects that are supposed to connect over 17,000 customers in 59 communities across Ontario. We talked about the choice between heating and eating, and we've reached out to local government to expand natural gas to the ridings—and I know the member from Sudbury has some of these communities.

So I am going to continue to ask, would you stop your constituents from heating their homes with natural gas if that was the fuel source that they chose for themselves, given they've already made an application for the natural gas expansion?

MPP Jamie West: It has been asked several times. The idea of stopping people from natural gas—heat however you want. This isn't about that. This is a false story. They're trying to drive this narrative that people won't have access to it. You can have access to natural gas. What I'm saying is that you should not pay for Enbridge's profit for natural gas. This is what experts have said. This is what the OEB says. They're saying it's unfair to pass that cost

to your existing customers and have the existing customers pay the freight for a multi-billion dollar company like Enbridge. Heat however you want, but do not pass that money on to the people of Ontario, especially in the midst of this affordability crisis.

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

Mr. Michael Mantha: As always, it's an honour to stand in my place on behalf of the good people of Algoma-Manitoulin.

Speaker, I'm torn on this piece of legislation—

Interjection: We'd love your vote, Mike.

Mr. Michael Mantha: I just started. Can you give me a break and let me get it out? For crying out loud, you don't even know where I'm standing on this one yet. My goodness.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Comments through the Chair, please.

Mr. Michael Mantha: As far as my role here, my role here has significantly changed, as an independent member. I don't have any party affiliation. The only party I belong to is the Algoma-Manitoulin riding association. I think my role and responsibility, as it has always been, is bringing the views and voices of those across my riding to the floor of the Legislature here at Queen's Park.

If you look at this legislation and you try to analyze and you try to look through the weeds—I've listened to both sides. We have three sides, and sometimes there's a fourth side. Somehow you try to come up the middle with a view and an opinion that will best serve your constituents, and that's what I'm trying to do here—to bring their views to the floor of the Legislature as best as I can.

Some see this as the right call, that this will actually accelerate the process, as far as exposing us more to the use of fossil fuels. Some see this as an opportunity to making the decision and following through with what the OEB has recommended, and that it will take us away from fossil fuels. We see others are concerned that this means that there will be delays in certain housing projects and the construction of infrastructure—and I will bring some of those examples that I have here from some of the municipal leaders that I have in my riding.

What this is, definitely, is a government overreach. The government is going beyond what an independent agency has determined, as far as what's best for Ontarians.

I take this and I look at it from a northern perspective, as well, because in northern Ontario we don't always have the same luxuries that are available in other areas, particularly when it comes to energy costs. If you look at what was left by the previous government in northern Ontario in regard to the hydro costs, that was painful, and it's still painful. Now, the present government that came in, that claims that they've done some adjustments to it—other than changing some of the curtains and changing the paint on the wall, northern Ontarians are still experiencing some increases to their hydro bills, to the tune of about 12% to 15%.

You just have to ask Roslyn Taylor—and I've often talked to the minister about Roslyn Taylor on Manitoulin

Island. This government still hasn't dealt with the delivery of charges for hydro rates, and those are still going up. Most of her charges, the delivery charges, outweigh what she pays for hydro. Would she benefit from being hooked up on natural gas? Absolutely, she would. She would welcome that opportunity.

Here's another example: A lot of people across northern Ontario, when they're looking at their energy costs and reducing it, would love to connect to gas, but they would also like to connect to heat pumps. I had a chat with the minister this morning about heat pumps and the availability of them, and I'm glad he has a heat pump. Many of the Conservative members who stood up have talked about having their own heat pumps. But the reality is, those same opportunities are not available to people in northern Ontario. Why? Because some of the programs that provide those heat pumps require an audit to come into your community or in your home to make that audit. Guess what? They do not come to northern Ontario, in many of our communities, so people are forced to put that up front. If you can afford putting that upfront cost, then you have the ability of participating in changing things—but most of them don't.

The other thing is that there are many projects that are going on in my riding right now. One of them is potentially a new hotel that's going to be built in Blind River. The price of the availability of energy is definitely a big factor in the project going ahead in their community.

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The Bauman grain dryer that was just constructed in Desbarats, which has brought a new storage facility for grain: A lot of the farmers across the North Shore have changed a lot of their production. They're going more to grain storage, which required that storage. The company that did come and build in that area built it with the intention of getting off the propane that they're on now and going onto the cheaper natural gas. Will they be able to make that transition now?

There's also Nairn Centre, which is looking at some major housing development, and also the township of Thessalon. I will start with reading into the record some of the comments that have been sent to this government on behalf of the township of Nairn Centre. They say, "On behalf of the council and residents of the township of Nairn Centre and Hyman to express our deep concern regarding the recent decision to require all new gas consumers to pay the cost of connecting their homes or businesses to natural gas upfront rather than spreading it over a 40-year period. While we understand the need for sustainable energy practices and the importance of ensuring fair distribution costs, we believe this decision disproportionately affects our residents, particularly those in the process of building new homes and business and who already are dealing with inflation costs. Requiring upfront payment for a gas connection imposes sustained financial burden on new consumers, potentially deterring them from accessing this essential energy source and impacting the growth and development of our community."

And from the community of Thessalon:

“Access to affordable energy to support this growth for homes and businesses is crucial. Energy infrastructure is vital to manufacturing, agriculture and consumer goods industries in Ontario. The impact of this decision, which conveys a strong bias against natural gas, will stifle economic growth and put housing and energy affordability at risk. These are issues that matter to most Ontarians and our municipality.

“We are supportive of a measured approach to Ontario’s energy transition. Leveraging pipeline infrastructure to deliver lower-carbon fuels such as renewable natural gas and hydrogen, alongside low-carbon hybrid heating technology such as heating pumps and carbon capture and sequestration, will help Ontario achieve its climate goals, and we want to be part of this solution.

“We recognize that there is simply not enough electricity available to replace the energy provided by natural gas and meet the increased demand for electrification. Government comments indicated that natural gas will continue to play an integral role in meeting the energy needs of this province. We need to work together to evolve Ontario’s energy system, one that leverages pipes and wires.”

I bring their comments to the floor because they are community representatives that are looking at large major projects in their community, and these are the concerns that they have. Do they want to participate and be part of the answer as far as doing a transition? Absolutely; let’s not dispute that fact. I think everybody in this room believes that we are in a process where we’re going to transition away from fossil fuels, and we need to start that now. But from the decision that is being done now by the OEB from 40 to zero or five to zero, there’s got to be somewhere in the middle where we could meet to do that transition so that everybody benefits from this and municipal projects that are in the process of moving forward aren’t put in danger of falling apart.

My gut is also responsible for those that are coming behind me, for my children and my grandchildren. We need to do something now. We need to do something today. We can’t pass the buck down the road, and I’m looking forward to watching at committee where the suggestions are going to be as to what is going to be coming.

The government claims that part of the discussions that were held by this government through the Electrification and Energy Transition Panel—that the information it did contain was not made available or was not provided to the OEB to consider. Okay, well, let’s have that information. Let’s have those discussions at committee so that we can do a transition that will be able to help all Ontarians and not put anybody at a disadvantage and provide the savings that everybody is looking forward to this government actually implementing, but also not overstepping your role as a government and really interfering with an independent agency in this province.

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

Mr. Stéphane Sarrazin: Thank you to the member for Algoma–Manitoulin for representing his constituents. I know, because as a parliamentary assistant to the Minister

of Energy, I have some municipalities all across Ontario that reach out to us about having more natural gas expansion projects. I believe some of your municipalities are part of that and I see that some of your municipalities agree with what we’re doing right now.

I’m wondering, have they been reaching out only since you became an independent member? Or did they want natural gas when you were part of the opposition?

Mr. Michael Mantha: I want to thank the member for Glengarry–Prescott–Russell for his question. I’ve always been engaged with municipal leaders, community members, organizations and so on. Sometimes there are particular sensitive issues that come up that require a little bit more engagement, and this is one of those engagements.

No, it’s not the first time that we’ve talked in my riding when it comes to natural gas. I can tell you I was a huge advocate in order to help the community of Prince township. Just a couple of years ago we were able, and successful, to make a connection to bringing reduced rates to those individuals to get them off of firewood and oil and to get them to provide new options from electricity.

But anyway, this is not going to be an easy issue for any of us in this room. Again, I look at the government, and you’re overstepping your role as a government on an independent agency, and that is not sitting well with many Ontarians.

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

M^{me} France Gélinas: C’est intéressant d’écouter le membre d’Algoma–Manitoulin. Je veux vraiment qu’il clarifie la différence entre aller chercher de l’aide pour des communautés qui veulent être connectées. Ça, ça ne fait pas partie du projet de loi. Le projet de loi, c’est vraiment pour les nouveaux développements où on va aller demander aux quatre millions d’Ontariens et Ontariennes déjà connectés de payer pour la connexion de ça.

Donc, dans son comté, est-ce qu’il y a des municipalités qui auraient aimé ça, être connectées? Oui. Est-ce que ça, ça va les aider? Non. Et est-ce qu’il pense qu’Enbridge, qui fait 16 milliards de dollars par année, pourrait aller chercher le 1 milliard de dollars—qu’on veut aller chercher des quatre millions de contribuables—dans leurs profits plutôt que d’aller chercher ça dans la poche des quatre millions d’Ontariens et Ontariennes qui sont déjà connectés?

M. Michael Mantha: Merci à la députée de Nickel Belt, quelqu’un pour qui j’ai un grand respect dans cette maison.

Il faut croire que les gens des circonscriptions et puis les personnes à la tête des municipalités que j’emporte ici au plancher de la municipalité—eux autres croient, avec la présente réglementation ou la présente décision que le gouvernement est en train de faire, qu’elle va avoir un impact négatif sur eux. Et puis, ils veulent faire certain que leur opinion est partagée avec le gouvernement pour que la décision qui soit prise ne les mette pas en désavantage pour faire le développement de leurs communautés pour offrir du logement, des nouveaux logements, pour les gens qui viennent aux communautés.

Je ne veux pas qu'on se fasse d'accroires : il y a une transition qu'on doit passer à travers dans la province. La transition, il faut qu'elle arrive aujourd'hui. Il faut qu'on commence à prendre des étapes aujourd'hui à faire une transition pour nous ôter à travers les gaz de carbone. Et puis, ces décisions-là devraient être prises avec une transition où elle ne va pas impacter les gens négativement.

La Présidente suppléante (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Prochaine question? Next question?

MPP Jamie West: Thank you to the member for Algoma-Manitoulin. I appreciate the balanced conversation, because this has been framed as, either you're going to have natural gas or you won't, and that's not what's happening here. What we're saying is that an independent organization, the Ontario Energy Board, has said that rate-payers should not have to pay for this. And that's the stance we're taking as New Democrats. The Conservative government is saying, "Well, they should pay for it."

So just for the member for Algoma-Manitoulin: If this bill passes, or if this bill fails, do you think it's going to affect access to natural gas for the people of your riding?

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Mr. Michael Mantha: I want to thank the member from Sudbury. Let's not kid ourselves. This government has a majority; this bill will pass. The debate that we're having here today will hopefully inform the public as to what is actually going to be happening with this bill and who is being impacted and what the things that we need to consider as this bill passes are.

My concern in this bill is that there is information that may be coming out from other agencies that could have been taken into consideration as to how we do this transition. There could have been better steps in regard to how this government decided to approach a decision that was made by the OEB. Why did the OEB make this decision at a time when there was the Electrification and Energy Transition Panel—why did we wait for the information that could have been brought up by them to make a better decision or something different? Who knows? We might be coming back with the panel that will be coming back with the same recommendations that we're dealing with.

My biggest concern is in regard to the overreach that this government is doing.

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

Mr. Graham McGregor: We hear a lot from members opposite and the independent members. They talk about the PCs and their buddies. I've been thinking about some of my buddies. I've been thinking about a buddy of mine. He lives in St. Catharines, works in Milton, drives about 80 kilometres there; I just googled it. It's about an hour to commute and back. That's why I was so proud when we cut the gas tax, why I'm so proud to fight the carbon tax.

I thought about a buddy of mine who lives in Cambridge, a renter who is paying the carbon tax on natural gas, which is why in my member's statement this morning I talked about fighting the carbon tax.

I thought about a buddy of mine, 29 years old, a service manager at a Ford dealership—a pretty good job, a

middle-class job—who, quite frankly, would have to save up for 20 years to afford a down payment for a new home, living at home with his parents because he can't afford a home. And I think about the thousands of dollars that the OEB decision would make that guy pay upfront, increasing the cost of buying a home.

These are some of the stories of my buddies. I'm wondering if the member opposite would think about them and maybe decide to vote with the government, stand up for new home buyers.

Mr. Michael Mantha: I'll have to have a chat with the member from Brampton North with regard to his buddies. You have a lot of buddies. But I think what I tried to bring into focus here was actually from individuals, and I didn't "buddy" and drop names; these are actual people that are there, like the township of Nairn and Hyman, the township of Thessalon, and Roslyn Taylor. She owns Taylor Sawmills on Manitoulin Island. She's responsible for 25 individuals, and hopefully, she'll be able to maintain the work and that place open. These are real people that are being impacted by this and previous governments' bad decisions when it comes to energy.

The options—again, I'm not sure what the question was, but I think part of my role is to really bring those stories, whether right or wrong, true or false, indifferent—these are their life experiences. As the MPP who has the privilege of sitting here in my seat, it's my role to bring those issues forward and those views forward.

Now, I've heard, as I said in my statement—

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

We'll have to move to the next question.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: I want to thank the member for his presentation and his speech today. The member was here when the Conservative government, their members, were actually in the official opposition at the time. And at the time, they were very, very critical, from what I hear, about the politicization of energy, energy delivery, the entire energy system. Liberals at the time used a lot of politics to influence decision-making, not listening to experts, not listening to regulators, just making decisions based on phone calls possibly from donors and others.

How do you feel, considering what the Conservatives are doing now in light of their criticisms before?

Mr. Michael Mantha: I think I've been quite clear with my comments that one of my largest concerns is the overstepping on an independent agency that this government is doing by reversing the decision that they're doing. That's one of my biggest concerns, and this government does not have a good record as far as following the advice or the directives of independent officers of this House. So those are very concerning for me.

At the end of the day, I still have to bring the concerns and the views of individuals not only in my riding but also across northern Ontario. Again, the transition needs to happen in a way that is going to be just and fair and that won't negatively impact consumers.

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

Mr. Lorne Coe: For those joining us at close to 5 o'clock, we're debating the Keeping Energy Costs Down Act, 2024.

What's clear is that, since day one, our government, led by Premier Ford, has taken action to lower energy costs, including by cancelling the previous government's cap-and-trade carbon tax, cutting the gas tax and introducing the Ontario Electricity Rebate.

Now, while previous governments implemented schemes that led to skyrocketing energy prices, we're using every tool in our tool box to keep costs down for residents and businesses like those situated in the town of Whitby and other part of the region of Durham. The Keeping Energy Costs Down Act, 2024, will protect future homebuyers from increased costs and, yes, keep shovels in the ground on critical infrastructure projects.

The proposed legislation would, if passed, give the province authority to reverse the Ontario Energy Board decision to require residential customers and small businesses to pay 100% of the cost of new natural gas connections upfront. These costs would have previously been paid over 40 years. Once the government introduces a natural gas policy statement, a recommendation of the Electrification and Energy Transition Panel's final report, it will require the Ontario Energy Board to consider this issue again.

The government will also appoint a new chair of the Ontario Energy Board this spring with the expectation that the board and commissioners conduct appropriate consultation—in line with the proposed legislative requirements—before reaching decisions that support the objective of an affordable, reliable and clean energy system.

Natural gas will continue to be an important part of Ontario's energy mix as we implement our pragmatic plan to invest in and bring online more clean nuclear energy. For example, the recently announced refurbishment of the Pickering Nuclear Generating Station which creates and sustains approximately 6,400 Ontario jobs per year for decades to come in towns and cities that surround Pickering like Whitby.

Unlike the previous Liberal government, which saddled families with sky-high hydro bills, our government is taking a thoughtful approach that keep costs down for people and businesses and delivers energy security.

To ensure that future decisions made by the Ontario Energy Board consider a wider range of affected parties and government policy priorities, the proposed act would require the Ontario Energy Board to conduct broader engagement with stakeholders and provide the Minister of Energy with the authority to ask for a separate hearing on any matter of public interest that could arise during an Ontario Energy Board proceeding. This would include both transferring an issue from an ongoing Ontario Energy Board proceeding to its own generic hearing and directing a hearing for a matter not currently before the Ontario Energy Board under certain circumstances.

If passed, the government may subsequently propose regulations to require the Ontario Energy Board to notify and invite participation or testimony from specific stakeholders or economic sectors—for example, transit, low-

income service providers, construction, housing or government agencies—that could be significantly impacted by an upcoming decision or hearing.

1700

With the proposed legislation, the government would also ensure new customers do not have to incur upfront contributions towards the construction of certain gas transmission projects that are critical to the province's economic growth. This would preserve the historical treatment of these transmission projects that provide broad energy system benefits and serve many customers in different areas. Preserving this treatment will help ensure that the province can continue to attract critical investments in sectors like greenhouses and automotive in southwestern Ontario, some of which we heard about earlier today during question period.

In discussing legislation like this, I think it's helpful to hear perspectives from third parties, and one of those third parties is Ontario Real Estate Association, and their particular quote, which I'm about to read into the record, I think provides valuable context to our deliberations this afternoon. And it's from Tim Hudak, who is the chief executive officer of the Ontario Real Estate Association:

"If we want to create more Canadian homeowners, we should not whack them with this massive upfront bill for infrastructure that will last for generations." And this legislation is generational.

"This head-scratching overstep by the" Ontario Energy Board "will push affordability further out of reach for Ontarians, and put provincial and municipal housing targets at risk. Such one-size-fits-all policies will be particularly harmful to Ontario's smaller and northern communities, where energy infrastructure is not well-developed..."

The Ontario Energy Board's "bad move to upend Ontario's long-standing approach to finance infrastructure like natural gas over time puts new neighbourhoods and desperately needed new homes in jeopardy...."

"If the short-sighted OEB decision goes through, fewer new connections will be made and fewer homes will be built. Those that do get built will be more expensive and homebuyers will need to pay the entire hookup cost upfront, adding thousands to the price of a home."

This legislation would also enable the government to require the Ontario Energy Board to conduct a separate hearing on any matter of public interest.

The proposed legislation would also maintain the existing treatment of gas transmission projects that are critical to the province's economic growth by ensuring new customers do not have to incur upfront financial contributions and update the Ontario Energy Board's leave-to-construct process to respond to concerns raised by municipalities around supporting critical housing projects and local economic development initiatives.

I'd like to spend a little bit of time on the leave-to-construct process, because I have eight municipalities that form the region of Durham, an upper-tier government, where I live. Many municipalities are very supportive of proposed legislative approach—not only the eight that are in the region of Durham but from the Eastern Ontario

Wardens' Caucus. This is what they had to say: "Modernizing these outdated regulations would reduce delays and costs for economic development initiatives including new industries seeking to locate in Ontario and create jobs (or existing seeking to expand), transit projects, community expansion projects, housing developments" and fuel blending as well. That's from the Eastern Ontario Wardens' Caucus.

Speaker, I see I only have about a minute and nine seconds left, so I'm going to sum up right now.

All of these proposed changes will improve processes, building on the work of the Ontario Energy Board's modernization started back in 2018, ensuring that the entire energy sector and other impacted sectors have more input into Ontario Energy Board decisions and will ensure that future OEB decisions take into account government policy priorities including protecting ratepayers in the town of Whitby and other parts of the region of Durham.

Speaker, as demand continues to grow across Ontario and, yes, the region of Durham, due to economic and population growth, our government, led by Premier Ford, will continue to work hard to ensure a reliable supply of energy continues to be available for hard-working Ontarians now and in the future.

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

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to ask the member what he thinks of a company that makes \$16 billion in profit off of the four million Ontarians who pay Enbridge—their gas bill every month—do they really need \$1 billion more from those four million customers that are connected to Enbridge in order to provide connections to new builds? Is it that terrible to go from a \$16-billion profit to a \$15-billion profit and use that \$1 billion that would go to profit to do exactly what you're trying to do with this bill, but don't charge the four million Ontarians who are already connected, charge it to the owner and shareholders of Enbridge instead?

Mr. Lorne Coe: Well, Speaker, once again, we see the NDP trying to find a way—any way possible that they can to oppose a piece of legislation, even one that makes as much sense as the one that I just spoke to.

This legislation is necessary when we find ourselves in a housing crisis—and I think my colleagues would agree—to ensuring that we can keep shovels in the ground and build the homes that we're talking about building.

Now, recently, Minister Smith, when he was debating the bill, responded to a similar-type question. I'm going to quote from Hansard—it's not a prop, Speaker, so I think that's permissible. He said this: "A recent condominium development here in the GTA would see an upfront connection charge of approximately \$290,000. I don't know who the opposite member thinks is going to pay that...."

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): We'll now move to the next question.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: It's an opportunity for me to be able to speak about some of the fiscal impacts of this piece of legislation. I, of course, enjoyed my time listening to my colleague and good friend from Whitby. It's appropri-

ate that I'm following the member from Nickel Belt who, I might add, has been a very strong advocate for her constituents and health care here, but I do feel has not fully understood how these changes can be beneficial to the health care system and long-term care. I'd like to ask the member from Whitby what the fiscal impacts associated with these changes are and how it may indeed support the health care system, including long-term care.

Mr. Lorne Coe: Well, I thank the member for her question but, the reality with this legislation is there aren't any fiscal impacts. The answer is that simple.

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

Miss Monique Taylor: It's always interesting to be in the Legislature and to participate in debates that this government brings forward. I heard some definitely interesting things from the member opposite. He talked about the legislation would appoint a new chair to the OEB. Is that stacking the deck once again like they're going doing to the judicial system? I mean, this is the trend that we're seeing here.

We're also hearing about new customers, and yet we've heard from folks in the north that they have not been able to get the same privileges of connection, and yet new builds are going to get the privilege because of this government's way of thinking. This is a \$16-billion-a-year-profit company that will benefit once again from the ratepayers who are already overburdened with monthly bills. Why do you think it's acceptable to increase a person's monthly gas bill?

Mr. Lorne Coe: Thank you to my colleague for the question. The Keeping Energy Costs Down Act gives the province the authority to reverse the Ontario Energy Board's decision and would prevent an average of \$4,400 being added to a price of a new home, or tens of thousands of dollars being added to the price of a home in rural Ontario or northern Ontario.

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

Mr. Billy Pang: While we heard that the opposition enjoy adding to the cost of living for Ontarians, we are doing it from the other direction: We are putting money into people's pockets.

We've heard throughout the debate that the Ontario Energy Board's decision in December 2023 would increase housing prices by \$4,400 on average, as the member from Whitby mentioned earlier. Could the member give the House more of an idea on how much we could save if we implement the Keeping Energy Costs Down Act?

Mr. Lorne Coe: I thank my colleague for that. You know, that's an excellent question, because it also, I think, allows a more direct response.

The savings if we implement this act are big, not just for the homeowners, but for taxpayers and businesses as well. Under the OEB's decision, a new recreation and wellness centre in the GTA would cost approximately \$128,000 upfront. A new 39-home subdivision in the GTA would cost approximately \$357,000 upfront. A recent res-

taurant project in southwestern Ontario, inside of a commercial plaza, would cost approximately \$18,000.

By reversing this decision, these costs will be paid over 40 years, just like a mortgage, making new homes and developments—yes—more affordable. That's a win. That's a win for taxpayers.

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

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: You know, it is really astounding to hear. Does the member understand that if you reduce, let's say, the cost of construction to a developer by a couple of thousand dollars—let's say \$4,000, as he's been quoting—that this does not necessarily mean that the cost of purchase to a new home purchaser will be minus \$4,000? Home builders will sell for whatever they can sell for. If they can sell for more, they'll sell for more. Cost of construction does not necessarily equate to cost of purchase, so why do you keep simplifying it? Why does he keep saying it in this way? Because that's simply not correct.

Mr. Lorne Coe: Well, I think what I heard was really an attempt to teach an economics course, but the end user always pays. The end user always pays, doesn't he?

And we're talking about natural gas connection costs. That's what we're talking about here, and access to reliable, affordable energy is critical to powering the new homes we are building and will be building as, increasingly, we meet our targets—and we are meeting our targets. We just had announcements in Brampton. We had announcements here in the city of Toronto. We're meeting our targets.

The Ontario Energy Board's recent decision to require natural gas connection costs on new homes and small businesses which were previously paid over 40 years to be paid upfront will only increase the cost of new homes and buildings.

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

Mr. Robert Bailey: I want to get something on the record before I ask the member a question: Most people's pension plans in this province are invested in Enbridge pipelines. That's the billionaires you're talking about, so you guys need to go to the economics and understand that most of the people you're talking about are your constituents, who would be hurt if this money—it's not sitting under a mattress somewhere; it's invested in equipment, pipelines etc.

But anyway, back to the member for Whitby: I'd like to ask you about the leave to construct.

Mr. Lorne Coe: I just dropped my glasses, Speaker. I'll try not to step on them.

Anyway, thank you for the question from the member from Sarnia, and all of his sterling service here in the Ontario Legislature.

What's clear is that Ontario is continuing to grow. That means that our regulations need to grow with it. Does that make sense? It does.

Our friends over in British Columbia—and I'm sure the official opposition have a lot of friends in British Colum-

bia—have a threshold of \$20 million for their natural gas. How is Ontario's threshold only \$2 million, the same that it was 20 years ago?

If Ontario wants to keep up with the growth that Ontario has seen in the past 10 years, and it's been significant, then we need to continue to cut red tape, and yes, make life affordable for hard-working families.

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

M. Guy Bourgoin: Ça me fait toujours plaisir de me lever et de parler en Chambre pour représenter ma circonscription de Mushkegowuk—Baie James. On parle de Bill 165, Keeping Energy Costs Down Act—garder les coûts énergétiques bas. Quand tu lis le titre puis après ça que tu commences à réaliser que quand le « energy board » dit de ne pas donner ces coûts-là—vraiment, le projet de loi, il est aussi simple que ça.

Ce qu'on débat ici en Chambre, c'est que les coûts d'Enbridge, devraient-ils être payés par eux ou bien les concitoyens? C'est ça, le projet de loi. On peut mettre ça comme qu'on veut, on peut essayer de montrer : « Regarde ici, ça "shine" », mais tout ce temps-là, on met la main dans les poches des contribuables. C'est exactement ça qui se passe.

C'est pour ça que c'est tout le temps intéressant d'entendre les deux perceptions du gouvernement. Puis nous, l'opposition officielle, on dit : « Écoute, on a des experts du "energy board" qui disent que les quatre millions de consommateurs ne devraient pas payer », parce que le gaz naturel, c'est une énergie de laquelle on s'éloigne. On commence à s'éloigner. Puis, ça devrait être Enbridge qui paye et non les consommateurs. C'est ça qu'ils disent, les experts. Moi, je ne suis pas un expert là-dedans, mais c'est ça que les experts nous disent.

Le gouvernement, tout de suite quand c'est sorti, ça n'a pas été long qu'ils ont dit : « Non, on va le passer; on va passer ces coûts-là. » Ça, ça veut dire que nos coûts vont monter. Ne tombez pas dans l'illusion : même si le titre dit que vous allez payer moins d'énergie, au contraire, les prix vont monter. On sait qu'ils vont monter. C'est là. Le gouvernement dit qu'ils ne monteront pas, mais ce n'est pas la réalité.

Fait que, là, il va y avoir des coûts additionnels. Je pense que personne ne veut voir ses coûts de chauffage monter. J'ai écouté les débats, puis on entend le gouvernement dire : « Quoi? Vous voulez qu'ils payent à l'avant? » Ce n'est pas ça qu'on dit, là. On n'est pas non plus contre le gaz naturel. On dit que ce ne sont pas les consommateurs qui devraient payer. Puis ce n'est pas en disant qu'on est contre le développement pour les maisons ou les condos ou tout le reste. Ce n'est pas ça qu'on dit. On fait juste dire que le gaz naturel, si une personne le veut, c'est Enbridge qui va aller payer. Parce qu'on parle qu'ils ont fait 16,5 milliards de dollars—pas des millions, des milliards.

Puis on dit que ces coûts-là—et les experts nous disent que ce ne devrait pas être les consommateurs qui payent. Je pense que c'est raisonnable parce que, écoute, moi, je viens d'un comté, Mushkegowuk qui va dans la Baie James. S'il y a de quoi qu'on voie quand ça vient à tout le

réchauffement de la planète, plus que tu vas au Nord, plus qu'on le voit.

Cet automne quand j'y suis allé, j'ai vu la rivière Albany puis la rivière Attawapiskat—les « sandbars ». Elles étaient tellement basses qu'ils ne pouvaient même pas aller à la pêche dans leurs territoires ancestraux, sur la rivière où ils allaient pêcher le doré parce qu'ils sont obligés de se faire ramener en hélicoptère parce qu'il n'y a pas assez d'eau dans la rivière. Je n'ai jamais vu ça. Puis je parlais même à des chefs. J'ai parlé avec des « elders », et ils ont dit qu'ils n'ont jamais vu ça.

J'ai une communauté, à Attawapiskat, qui sont dans une situation d'eau où l'eau de leur lac où ils prennent l'eau est rendue à un niveau très dangereux, et ça se peut même qu'ils se fassent évacuer. Là, ils sont dans un processus de faire venir un système pour enlever le sel dans l'eau parce qu'il y a des puits qui ont été creusés trop creux et ils ont été contaminés par l'eau salée. Puis après, vers la fin de mars, il va y avoir le système dans un container pour l'amener. La planète se réchauffe tellement que probablement, quand arrive le temps de déménager, la route hivernale va être fermée.

La route hivernale, elle est ouverte et elle ouvre tout le temps de plus en plus tard puis elle ferme beaucoup plus vite. Ça fait qu'on est dans une réalité qu'aujourd'hui on veut s'éloigner de ce produit-là, que les experts disent qu'il faut s'éloigner de ça. Puis, on voit que la tendance mondiale, en passant, s'en va dans la direction opposée de ce gouvernement-là.

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On a vu des gouvernements conservateurs dans l'Est mettre des nouveaux incitatifs pour aller à la nouvelle énergie comme des « heat pumps » et tout ça dont on parle, dont on entend souvent parler. Ça se fait. La technologie existe. Va-t-elle avancer? Oui, elle va avancer encore. On n'a rien qu'à penser à Norway, qui en a.

On voit que nos hivers sont beaucoup moins froids, qu'il y a des solutions à être mises. On peut avoir un gouvernement qui met des incitatifs. De dire à Enbridge que ce n'est pas aux consommateurs de payer, on s'excuse—« Everything est fini. Allez connecter, puis le consommateur, s'il le veut, il payera. » Il n'y a rien de mal avec ça. Ce n'est pas un concept qui est nouveau, là. Ce n'est pas un concept qui est nouveau.

Mais ce qu'on sait dans le Nord, par exemple—j'entendais mes collègues dire, « dans le Nord, dans le Nord. » Oui, c'est certain qu'il y en a qui veulent l'avoir. Mais s'ils veulent l'avoir, Enbridge aurait à payer pour l'amener. J'entendais ma collègue de Nickel Belt. Ça c'est un exemple qui est exemplaire dans mon comté—que le gaz naturel passe proche de chez eux mais ça va coûter des milles et des milles juste pour l'avoir. Pourquoi Enbridge ne l'amène pas? Pourquoi il ne pourrait pas l'amener chez eux? Si elle veut l'avoir, elle va payer. Pourquoi faut-il que tous les contribuables payent?

Quand les experts disent, « Il faut s'éloigner de ça », non, ça devrait être à Enbridge de payer. Lac-Ste-Thérèse, un exemple pareil encore : s'ils veulent l'avoir, Enbridge veut l'avoir—mais quand Enbridge a passé la ligne, sais-tu pourquoi ils n'ont pas amené la ligne quand le gaz

naturel a passé? Il n'y avait pas d'argent à le faire, madame la Présidente. Il n'y avait pas d'argent à le faire.

On a la ligne qui passe à Val Côté—même chose. La ligne n'est pas loin, là. Ils ne veulent pas mettre une base. Pourquoi? Il n'y avait pas d'argent à le faire. C'est une petite communauté, peut-être, de 20 à 30 personnes.

On a plein d'exemples comme ça. Ils disent, « Oh, les maires du Nord veulent l'avoir. » C'est sûr, mais les gens ne veulent pas que ça nuise. Mais on ne dit pas de nuire à construire des maisons. Au contraire, on veut que ces maisons se bâtissent, là. Mais si le gaz naturel va là, Enbridge l'amènera et ils vont être payés avec des contribuables, comme n'importe quel autre « business » qui se passe. C'est ça que les experts nous disent.

Mais le gouvernement veut vous faire accroire, par exemple, que non, non, non, ça va nuire à bâtir. Non, ça ne nuira pas. On en a besoin, de ces maisons-là. Et crois-moi, je suis convaincu qu'Enbridge va rentrer le gaz qu'ils ont besoin à ces clients-là. Ça va se voir dans les gros développements dans le sud de l'Ontario. Puis là, ça va se faire, parce qu'il y a de l'argent à le faire. Il y a de l'argent à le faire. Mais là où la population est basse, oublie ça. On le vit, comme c'est là. Pensez-vous que ça va changer? Si vous pensez ça, vous vous faites une illusion qui n'est même pas là, parce que c'est ça qui se passe maintenant et ça ne changera pas.

Mais, pour le Sud, Enbridge va rentrer les lignes, même si ce ne sont pas les 4 millions d'habitants, de consommateurs qui payent. Ils vont la rentrer, la ligne, s'ils veulent avoir ces clients. Pourquoi? Ils savent qu'éventuellement, ils vont perdre ces clients-là. Ils savent que ça s'en vient. Ils voient la lumière au bout du tunnel, comme on dit souvent en français. Ça va venir à là, ce qui fait qu'ils vont aller chercher le montant d'argent qu'ils peuvent. Le problème est qu'éventuellement ceux qui ont ça vont payer de plus en plus.

C'est pour ça qu'il faut commencer à regarder—je pense que c'est mon collègue, notre ami d'Algoma-Manitoulin qui l'a mentionné très bien. Il dit qu'on doit commencer à faire de nouveaux incitatifs pour aller à plus d'énergie, la nouvelle énergie verte qui va répondre à la situation. Parce que, moi, dans mon comté, je peux vous dire, je le vois. Venez dans le Nord; je vais vous le montrer. C'est épeurant, parce que ce monde-là, ça touche leur vie. Ça touche leur quotidien.

Quand vous pensez à la route hivernale, elle est rendue au point qu'ils ne savent même pas quand elle va commencer à être capable de rentrer tous les produits dont ils ont besoin—tous les produits dont ils ont besoin pour survivre pour le restant de l'année, là. Puis, avec quel coût? Ça veut dire, qu'est-ce qu'on va faire si la route hivernale n'existe plus? Comment est-ce qu'ils vont rentrer tous les produits dont ils ont besoin pour construire les maisons, pour la bouffe—puis, la liste est longue.

Mais, on a un gouvernement qui est parti à contre-courant. Les États-Unis vont vers là. Des conservateurs au Canada le font dans d'autres choses. Mais nous en Ontario, la plus grosse province, la plus riche, où on est capable de faire les bonnes choses, on est parti à contre-courant.

En Europe, les « heat pumps » existent. On a entendu qu'il y a des ministres qui en ont, des « heat pumps ». Il n'y a rien de mal avec ça. Si la personne veut l'avoir, le gaz naturel, bien Enbridge l'amène, puis après ça, elle paye. Mais ça ne devrait pas être au consommateur de payer. C'est ça le débat aujourd'hui, puis c'est pour ça que nous, on dit que ce n'est pas le consommateur—Enbridge, ils en font, des milliards. Qu'ils prennent un de ces milliards-là et qu'ils connectent, et ça ne nuira pas à la construction comme ils essayent de vous faire—cette belle illusion-là que ça va nuire—parce qu'il y a des incitatifs que le gouvernement pourrait faire.

La Présidente suppléante (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Pour poser la question: le député de Glengarry–Prescott–Russell.

M. Stéphane Sarrazin: J'aimerais poser la question suivante au député de Mushkegowuk–James Bay : premièrement, j'ai bien de la misère à comprendre la façon dont il—la pensée en arrière de ce qui se passe, exactement. Par moment, on parle de l'environnement, de réduire les émissions de gaz, puis à un autre moment on parle des coûts de la connexion.

Donc, il faudrait quand même comprendre ce qu'on débat ici. Est-ce que c'est le côté environnement qui nous préoccupe, ou est-ce que c'est le côté des coûts qui sont reliés à l'installation du gaz naturel? Puis, si c'est l'environnement, bien, pourquoi ce parti-là de l'opposition a-t-il voté contre l'énergie nucléaire? Tous les projets qu'on présente pour l'énergie nucléaire, qui sont exactement la meilleure affaire pour l'environnement—même les environnementalistes le disent, que c'est ça que ça prend, partout au Canada.

Donc, pourquoi? Est-ce que c'est l'environnement qui les préoccupe ou les coûts des connexions?

M. Guy Bourgouin: C'est le fun que mon collègue puisse me poser une question en français. Je sais que c'est beaucoup plus facile pour lui aussi.

Écoute, j'essayais d'expliquer votre logique. D'après ce que je peux voir, vous ne la comprenez pas, vous autres, non plus. Mais ce qui était, en particulier, pourquoi—je disais que le gouvernement dit que ça semble être un problème, qu'ils ne seront pas capables de bâtir à cause que—la personne qui a parlé juste avant moi disait que non, ça va coûter des milles puis des milles s'ils veulent se connecter au gaz naturel. Nous autres, on dit : « Non, ils peuvent se connecter, en autant que c'est Enbridge qui paye. » C'est ça qu'on dit.

Mais vous autres, vous faites illusion : « Non, on ne pourra pas bâtir. » C'est ça que vous dites dans vos discours, et c'est pour ça que je ne comprends pas sa question, parce que c'est ce que vous dites dans vos discours, c'est ce que vous semblez dire à la population. Mais tout ce temps-là, on sait que les coûts vont monter, et vous avez un titre comme « keep the costs down ».

Je m'excuse, mais moi, je n'achète pas.

La Présidente suppléante (M^{me} Lucille Collard): On va continuer avec les questions.

M^{me} France Gélinas: J'ai bien aimé la présentation que le député de Mushkegowuk–Baie James a faite. C'est

clair : le projet de loi existe parce que le conseil de l'énergie de l'Ontario a fait une étude suite à la demande d'Enbridge. Enbridge ne veut pas payer pour les infrastructures pour amener le gaz naturel; ils veulent seulement charger quand on utilise le gaz naturel. Ils veulent que les infrastructures soient payées par n'importe qui, sauf eux.

Le conseil de l'énergie de l'Ontario a vérifié ça puis leur a dit : « Absolument pas. Vous voulez aller vous chercher des nouveaux consommateurs? Vous allez payer pour les infrastructures pour aller chercher des nouveaux consommateurs. »

Le gouvernement Ford n'est pas heureux avec ça. Il a dit : « Mon Dieu, ça va diminuer les profits d'Enbridge, qui ont seulement 16 milliards de profit par année. On ne voudrait pas voir descendre ça. Donc, on va charger aux quatre millions d'Ontariens et Ontariennes qui sont connectés 400 \$ de plus par mois pour qu'Enbridge garde ses profits. »

Est-ce que c'est correct avec vous, ça—

La Présidente suppléante (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Merci.

On a besoin d'une réponse de la part du député de Mushkegowuk–Baie James.

M. Guy Bourgouin: Bien, pour répondre à la question, non, ce n'est pas correct avec moi parce que, moi aussi, je vais les payer, ces 400 piastres-là. Je peux vous dire qu'il y a bien de mes concitoyens qui vont avoir de la misère à les payer. C'est une réalité, ça, là. On oublie qu'il y a du monde qui vit au jour le jour. Il y a du monde qui a de la difficulté à mettre les deux bouts ensemble.

Puis là on dit qu'il y a une multinationale qui fait près de—bien, ce n'est pas « une » multinationale; c'est la seule compagnie énergétique à gaz qu'on a en province. Il n'y a pas de compétition; on s'entend. Puis on dit qu'une institution indépendante, le « energy board », dit de ne pas mettre c'est coûts-là attachés par ce que, tu sais, il faut s'éloigner de tout ça. Qu'Enbridge les amène, mais ce ne devrait pas être les consommateurs qui payent.

1730

Fait que, non, je ne suis pas content avec ça et, non, je ne suis pas d'accord avec ça, et je ne crois pas que n'importe quel concitoyen devrait payer ces 400 \$ à la place d'une compagnie comme Enbridge, qui a fait 16,5 milliards—on ne parle pas de millions, là. Puis même des millions, on s'entend, c'est des bidous. Mais des milliards—

La Présidente suppléante (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Merci.

M. Guy Bourgouin: Ce n'est pas correct—

La Présidente suppléante (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Merci.

Prochaine question? Next question?

Ms. Laura Smith: Reliable and affordable energy: That seems to be what I think we can all agree upon as what we want for the people of Ontario. But once again, the opposition has kind of a conundrum. I know the member represents James Bay, represents constituents who do agree that natural gas should have a role in heating their locations and have applied for natural gas expansion

programs through the ministry. And the Keeping Energy Costs Down Act is a great way for the member opposite to demonstrate to their constituents that they've been listening to them and they want to make it more affordable to buy a home, knowing what the cost of a house will be if we don't do this.

Will the member opposite please commit to voting for this act so their constituents can get access to the reliable and affordable energy that have asked for?

Mr. Guy Bourgoïn: What I'm saying is that if they want natural gas, Enbridge can bring it and then they just pay their bills. Why should it be consumers paying the bill? Why is it okay that they pay \$300 to \$400 more for the same bill? It's wrong. It's taking money away from people who should not be paying. An independent board said, "No, this is not the way to go. Enbridge should pay to connect."

What's wrong with this picture? What's wrong is that you seem to side with a company that is making \$16.5 billion over consumers. Consumers are all your people too. Why would they pay \$300 to \$400 more? It's wrong. Some of these people are struggling. I know they're struggling in my riding. They've got to be struggling in your riding also. We all have them. So why is it okay? Where is it okay to—

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Thank you. I'm going to move to the next question. I'm having a hard time keeping the questions and answers to one minute here.

The member for Ottawa South.

Mr. John Fraser: I just want to get this right. I know that the long-term prospects for giving the minister this kind of power over OEB decisions is just not a good idea. Maybe we're thinking it's a good idea today, but five years from now, is it going to be a good idea? Ten years from now, is it going to be a good idea?

But here's the thing: I think people are having a hard time thinking about the future. What's going to happen here? More and more people are going to buy heat pumps. They're going to go off natural gas, just like happened in the 1960s and 1970s. That's what's going to happen, and what will happen with what you're proposing is, those few people who are left are going to pay more and more and more. Right now, everybody's going to pay more.

I just want to understand why we're not thinking about the future and the kind of pressure that we're going to put on people economically. Like, it's all good to think about today and try to spread that all over four million people, four million users, but there's going to come a point—

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

The member for Mushkegowuk—James Bay to respond.

Mr. Guy Bourgoïn: There's going to come a point—
Interjections.

Mr. Guy Bourgoïn: What it seems here is it's very clear that Enbridge is well connected, very well connected. Let's not kid ourselves. They're well connected to be able to tell the minister or the Premier that this is how it should

go, right after an independent says it shouldn't be brought at the cost. I think, unfortunately, it's very clear.

It's unfair to the consumer. It's unfair to the consumer, and to give that power to the minister—I agree with you; it's wrong. They shouldn't. They should have an independent tell us—don't forget. There's no competition when it comes to natural gas. So why is it that we are bending to Enbridge and passing this cost to the rest of the consumers? It is wrong. People are struggling. We're having a hard time, and this is not the time to put another \$400 or \$300 on their bill.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Okay. We definitely don't have time for another back-and-forth the way this has been going.

We're going to move to further debate.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: It's always an honour to rise on behalf of the people of Humber River—Black Creek who, thanks to this government, will be paying more for their gas bills as a result of this legislation. And you know what? They're not going to be happy. They're not going to buy the line that this is the government for the little guy because, as we see more and more, it is not.

I'd like to go through how a decision like this actually unfolds. So we've got an OEB decision that happens last year. The OEB, which is a regulator that's tasked at looking at all aspects of energy production, distribution, sale, all of it, makes a decision, not just for the present, but for the future—in fact, a decision that the minister and the parliamentary assistant made for themselves choosing a different form of heating their own home. The decision was, "You know what? The investors of Enbridge, the monopoly that provides the gas doesn't want foot the risk." And the OEB says, "We don't think it's acceptable to pass that risk on to consumers, so guess what? The answer is no."

So what do you think happened when that occurred? I'll tell you what happened: Someone high up in Enbridge made a phone call in moments—probably the decision is rendered, and they're on the phone and they're making a phone call. I don't think it's to the minister or to the parliamentary assistant, because we all know that the decisions that are made by this government come from a cloud, a shadow that exists around the leadership, that calls the shots. And those shots are dictated to ministers who have no decision-making in this process—zero. I know this. It certainly is not the backbench members but, shamefully, I don't think it's the ministers, for a large part.

So Enbridge makes this phone call and says, "What are you doing? What are you doing? Guys, what are we paying you for? What are we paying you for? Reverse this. Reverse it." Then, developers who are paying them call and say, "Oh, my god. I don't want to have to pay for this." And they're certainly not going to pass that down in savings of new home purchases. It's simple economics. Home builders will charge what they can charge. If they can charge \$500,000, \$600,000 or \$1 million to sell a home, they're going to charge it, because the cost of construction does not necessarily equate to the cost of sale. It's economics. This is the party of capitalism. They under-

stand it crystal clear. But then they get up here and they read prepared notes and talk about something else. It's outrageous.

So, the power behind this government says to them, "No. You have to go in. Forget democracy. Don't respect what the regulator wants. Do what we say." And you know what this government says?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Is that quote verbatim?

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Yes.

"You call the shots, Enbridge. Of course. Big business always calls the shots with this." Now, did whoever that member was stand up for the little guy and say, "Wait a sec, Enbridge. While all of us are struggling, while all of us are suffering, you, the monopoly, made 6% increase in profits. You're now at \$16.5 billion. Get your investors to pay for this. We're the government of the little guy"? Absolutely not. They said, "Let's take that money and put it on the backs of the consumers."

Interjection.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: That's not what Graham signed up for. That's not what he signed up for. I thought he was for the little guy. But no, he's got to line up like the rest of these guys—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): I'm sorry. Yes, sorry—stop the clock.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): I can't hear myself think here, and I can't hear the member. Can we just tone it down, please? Let's keep the tone reasonable—not to inflame the reactions, please.

1740

Start the clock.

The member for Humber River–Black Creek can resume.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Do you know what? I'm trying to wake up government members, because I'm trying to get them to fight for the interests of their own constituents. They know the people who right now have gas hookups are going to pay more. Are these government members going to send out a newsletter and say, "Do you know what? You're going to pay more thanks to me, thanks to the decisions that we made"? They're absolutely not going to do it. They're going to spin it like a laundry machine, like they always do.

And so here's the decision that's made by the OEB—and I'm going to give a couple of quotes. Someone mentioned there was a dissenting position; the one dissenter said the amortization period of 40 years is too much and to reduce it by half, but the other OEB members looked at it and they said, "This is not fair to the consumer."

I would have expected a government of the little guy to get out there and say, "No, this isn't fair. Everyone else is tightening their belts. No one can afford to pay. Graham's constituents can't afford to pay an extra amount." They can't. So is he or are the rest of them going to get up and say, "Do you know what? This isn't fair. Cut into that"—

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Point of order, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Point of order: the member from Nepean.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: According to the rules and procedures, the standing orders of this chamber, we are not allowed to name members' names; we must name them by riding. I'd just ask the member opposite if he would consider doing that, or if you would make a ruling on that.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): With all the screaming that's going on, I couldn't hear the member saying that. If you keep it down, maybe I'll be able to hear and call the member to order.

The member is reminded of the rules. Please use the title or a member's riding.

You can continue, please.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Speaker, I think the member knows I would never do that. I'm speaking about a Graham who is a constituent; I'm speaking about a Lisa who's a constituent, a Ross who's a constituent—not, obviously, the member—and I apologize for the confusion that resulted. I am not referring to a single member—

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Point of order, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Yes, on a point of order: the member for Nepean.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I do quite enjoy the member opposite, Speaker. However, I've been here for 18 years, and the rule has always been that you only refer to members by their riding, not by their first nor by their last names. As the member—

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Thank you. You've made your point, and it has been called.

I'll allow the member to continue—with carefulness, please.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: All right. I—

Mr. Ross Romano: Withdraw.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Was I asked to withdraw? I don't believe so.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): I'm making the rules here. You can continue.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: I'll talk about my constituent Ross. My constituent Ross—

Interjections.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Okay. Anyway, I'd like to actually go, in the time that is remaining—it's too bad I don't have more time on this.

What did the OEB say? In their own quotes:

"The risk that arises from the energy transition ... from gas customers leaving the gas system as they transition to electricity to meet energy needs ... gives rise to assets that are not fully depreciated but are no longer used and useful. This results in stranded asset costs that Enbridge Gas would seek to recover from the remaining gas customers. This in turn would increase rates for those gas customers, leading more customers to leave the gas system, potentially leading to a continuing financial decline for the utility, often referred to as the utility death spiral"—something that Graham, Lisa and Ross, forward-thinking constituents here in Ontario, are concerned about. And so—

Mr. Ross Romano: Point of order.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: I hope the clock gets stopped.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Stop the clock for a second.

The member for Sault Ste. Marie has a point of order.

Mr. Ross Romano: If the member is referring to a Lisa and Ross from his riding or any other riding, perhaps he can identify who they are, particularly, by their last name, as well.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): I'm sorry; this is not required by the rules.

I will allow the member to continue.

Start the clock, please.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Thank you very much, Speaker.

The OEB, the regulator, looked at what Enbridge wanted to do—the monopoly that has seen an increase in their profits; the monopoly that has seen profits of \$16.5 billion. And the monopoly owner tried to pull a fast one, saying, “Let’s pass this cost on to consumers.” And constituents that I named before—they don’t want their last names to be said here in the chamber, so I referred to them by their first names. The reality is, they don’t want to pay those costs, because the monopoly, Enbridge, could.

The regulator made a decision in the public interest. As usual, this is a government that doesn’t like to take no from experts, doesn’t want to hear no. This is a government that simply wants to do what it wants to do, and when it doesn’t get what it wants, like a little child, it tries to rip up the rules. It’s like playing a card game with someone who flips the table. That’s what they did. They did it because they got the phone call from Enbridge saying, “Don’t do this.”

The OEB is looking to the future of energy production. The minister sees the future and has a heat pump in their home; the parliamentary assistant does the same.

This decision will incentivize the future of energy production in this province. It is a forward-thinking decision, a decision that was made with a lot of thought, and it was a decision made to benefit the existing customers, in the public interest.

Shamefully, this government chose to put more money in the pockets and the profit margins of Enbridge, the monopoly, instead of their own constituents, the Enbridge purchaser right now.

I just can’t see this government, with a straight face, get up and say they’re for the little guy, because they’re just not.

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

Mr. Matthew Rae: It’s wonderful to rise this afternoon to ask a question to the member from Humber River–Black Creek. I know I’m new in this place, but that is the standing orders—so I ask my question to the member for Humber River–Black Creek.

This member is from Toronto. They have the benefit of natural gas in hookups to natural gas everywhere—now they want to take away that ability for rural Ontario, everyone. It’s shameful.

I want to ask the member—just yes or no—do you support natural gas expansion in rural and northern Ontario?

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: I support Enbridge paying their fair share, and I support a government that will stand up for consumers. So when their donors from Enbridge call up and say, “Do our bidding. What are we paying you for?

Come on. Do what we want”—the people who make the decisions behind—this government will say, “Enbridge, be fair. Pay your fair share. Don’t saddle existing customers. Don’t do that.”

Interjections.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Don’t saddle Lisa, Graham and Ross, my constituents and other constituents with that.

Mr. Ross Romano: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Stop the clock, please.

The member for Sault Ste. Marie has a point of order.

Mr. Ross Romano: Madam Speaker, with absolute fairness, as Speaker of this House, at this time, I think this behaviour needs to be completely stopped. I think it is completely a mockery of our system. We clearly know, after several points of order that are being raised, in fairness, this behaviour needs to be forced to stop immediately. I request respectfully that the member be asked to follow the standing order rules as they are written, to please withdraw his unparliamentary comments, and to refrain from using the names of members simply because it is the rules, and it is the rules that we are all required to follow.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): I’ve taken note of the point of order, and I will advise everybody, actually, to just behave and be respectful. The member has used surnames. I cannot attribute motive to the member to be using that for any purpose of what he’s saying he’s using it for. There is nothing in the standing orders that prevents the member from using surnames to give examples.

So we’re going to resume, and we’ll restart the clock. We’re going to complete the answer and move on respectfully. And I would like to be able to hear the answer and the questions. Thank you.

The member for Humber River–Black Creek.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: I really feel harmed by that. I think the government set a record for points of order.

I’ve laid out the rationale. The OEB laid out the rationale. I wish, for once, that this government, maybe in caucus—that the members, even the ministers, would stand up and do something for the little guy in this province, not just what the big, big corporations want, for once. Please, please do that. Please do it for the constituents I named. Do it for all Ontarians, just for once, please.

1750

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

Mr. Guy Bourgouin: I was hearing you speak, and I spoke on this. We have a lot of constituents who are having a very hard time. I know everyone has lots and lots of constituents who are struggling right now to make ends meet and to be able to “mettre les deux bouts ensemble,” to be able to pay the bills.

Can you talk on your end about your constituency? I know you named a few—but can you talk about how difficult it is? If they have another \$300 to \$400 gas bill, how much are they going to struggle, and how much is it going to hurt them? I know if they do it in my riding, they’re going to hurt, and that may mean that they’ll lose

where they're going to be staying. So I'd like to hear from you on that.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Thank you for that excellent question.

It's astounding that this government would choose constituents, existing energy customers, to have to pay increased costs in this affordability crisis instead of Enbridge, posting higher and higher profits—profit margins that are just through the roof. No, they want to pass that down.

And it's just going to be so interesting to see government members, if they want to be fair and honest, explain, maybe in a newsletter, "Hey, your energy bill, your gas bill is going to go up, because Enbridge doesn't want to pay out of its profits, and you know what? We always agree with the big guys making lots of money over the little guy." I just can't wait to see them explain that.

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

Mr. John Fraser: Can't we all just get along in here?

Interjection: No.

Mr. John Fraser: Okay, good. I just wanted to establish that. I knew that, but I just wanted to make sure, because it wasn't fun there for a while. So let's try to get along, if we can.

Here's the thing: I keep thinking about the future, 10, 15—2040—16 years from now. Way more people are going to switch to heat pumps, and then what's going to happen is it's going to drive up the cost for—

Interjections.

Mr. John Fraser: Yes, they will. They will, because it will be a cheaper technology to heat and to cool—and the technology is going down, just like natural gas in the 1960s. That's what's going to happen. So you've got to think about what's going to happen to rural customers when that sort of stuff—new customers—starts to happen, because they'll be at the end of the line for that change, just like what happened with natural gas. So number one is for the future.

Number two is, I'm talking about the future, and they're saying that you don't care about rural customers—I don't believe that. But why would they give the minister the powers that they are if they're that worried about what it is you would do? Because it's not just about what the minister is going to do next week; it's about what a minister is going to do in 2035.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Thank you for the question.

Actually, for the first part of that question, I'd like to quote the OEB report, as reported by theenergymix.com. The OEB looked at that, and they said, "The OEB is not satisfied that Enbridge Gas's proposal will not lead to an overbuilt, underutilized gas system in the face of the energy transition"—this came from the board itself.

And theenergymix.com went on to say:

"That assumption points to a problem for future homeowners, who would be committed to paying installation costs to the utility over the full 40-year span. The decision to construct a new development with gas infrastructure would be the developer's, but would saddle homeowners with the financial burden, even if some of them later

decided to adopt some other heating option, like a heat pump."

That is the rationale, in part, that the decision made by the OEB was based on. But of course, this government doesn't like no—this government wants to do whatever it is, and this government will always say yes when big business says, "Help me instead of the little guy."

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

Mr. Stéphane Sarrazin: I just had a farmer in my region who texted me, and he was wondering if he can install a heat pump on his grain dryer. I said, "No, no. You've got to use natural gas. There's no way."

When we're talking about heat pumps in the northern region—even in my region in eastern Ontario, I've got a heat pump, but I've got a natural gas backup, and that's the story about all rural municipalities in the northern area. If you want to use a heat pump, you've got to have a backup source. It has to be an electric duct heater, whatever. That's the reality.

So how can you not understand the reality of rural Ontario? I know you're living in Toronto, but you've got to understand the reality of rural Ontario.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: The guy who texted you—let's call him Tom. It's a great name; okay? So Tom calls you up or texts you and he says whatever it is he had said. Are you going to say to him, "Tom, Enbridge just made a 60% increase in their profits. They're making \$16.5 billion, and instead of asking them to put some skin in the game, we're going to pass this cost on to existing Enbridge customers." I just don't understand why you want to simplify it to Tom like that. Why do you want to say it in such a way that's not fair and is not exactly the reality?

Just stand up to Enbridge. Stand up to big business. Stand up for Enbridge customers and help them save costs on this. But you don't want to do it, of course—of course not.

MPP Jamie West: The member from Humber River—Black Creek really spelled this out well. He talked about his constituent Tom.

This bill is going to give politicians the power to force consumers to pay costs that the Ontario Energy Board has ruled they shouldn't have to pay. It doesn't make any sense. This means the government is going to add the over \$1 billion in cost to the gas bills of nearly four million consumers, each of them paying an average of \$300 or more from their pocket.

You clearly talked about how the Conservative government is siding with billionaire corporations over regular people.

What is the precedent when a majority government interferes with an independent organization like the Ontario Energy Board to overrule news they don't want to accept?

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: When the last government politicized energy in this province, Conservative members who were there at the time and to this time were up in arms, throwing papers around. But do you know what the difference is? Those same big players now have their phone number, and when they call them and say, "Jump,

save us money, put it on the backs of the customers, on the backs of the consumers,” they say, “Yes, sir. Yes, ma’am,” because this is the government that will always side with the rich, the big industry, the big interests, and never, ever, ever, contrary to what they say, with the little guy.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): It’s almost 6 o’clock, so this debate is now deemed adjourned.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

ADJOURNMENT DEBATE

HOUSING

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): There being no business for private members’ public business, it’s now time to move to the late shows.

The member for London North Centre has given notice of dissatisfaction with the answer to a question given by the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. The member has up to five minutes to debate the matter, and somebody on the government side will have five minutes to reply.

The member for London North Centre.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: It’s not often that we hear responses such as we did from this government. When I look at this speech, I was thinking about distinction without a difference. We’re here this evening because the government failed to answer the most simple of questions. In short, all I requested was an answer to a term that they have been using for the past 18 and some months. My question was: “What does the government mean when it says ‘attainable housing’?”

All of us in the space really should think back to our formative years in the education system. I swear everyone in this chamber would do well to remember standards of behaviour, decorum and manners, but that’s a different topic for a different time.

When asked to provide an answer, as a young person, if you tried too pull the wool over the teacher’s eyes, they would ask you again to try again and answer the question. I think of all the student groups who come and visit us here and the behaviour of government members blustering and backslapping, all while dodging the most simple accountability and transparency. That’s basically what we have here: A situation whereby the government refused to answer the question. They were given a second opportunity; they still refused to answer.

And here we are with their third chance. But quite frankly, Speaker, I’m not holding my breath. If I do end up hearing one, well, I’ll be quite surprised.

1800

I also want to say, if it the government doesn’t know what it means when it says “attainable housing,” that’s okay, too—no harm, no foul—but be forthright, be upfront about it. Just admit that you don’t know what you’re saying when you say this—and it’s been going on for 18 months. You know, another thing your teacher probably

told you in your formative years is that it is far easier to simply tell the truth.

Now, in terms of this question itself, I asked for the definition of “attainable housing” and the responses were bizarre. The responses did not at all address what I was asking. The Minister of Housing, the government House leader, mentioned the 21% increase in homelessness funding that’s coming through to London, and unfortunately indicated something that was contrary to the fact—that it was not something that I had asked for—when in actual point in fact, as I had the opportunity to point out, I had been asking for emergency homeless funding since I was elected.

Cities across Ontario should be evaluated based on rezonings and building permits issued rather than the number of new homes that are under construction or housing starts. Developers get shovels in the ground, not politicians. This government is talking all about—and we’ve seen this happen in Bill 134, the Affordable Homes and Good Jobs Act. They mention “attainable” once in that piece of legislation: “The Development Charges Act, 1997 includes provisions exempting affordable and attainable residential units from development charges.” You would think that when they have that word “attainable” and it’s part of a development charge removal that they would actually understand what “attainable” means. But unfortunately, that’s the only time it appears in it.

For the government’s benefit, I’d like to provide you with the definition of what “attainable” means. It’s an adjective for the verb “to reach, to achieve, to accomplish or to gain, to obtain.”

I also wanted to provide a little bit of background indicating that it was a PC Premier, Bill Davis, who also did really effectively bring in rent control, something this government is ideologically opposed to, and they want people to pay when they’re inhabiting a building after November 2018. There was a radio interview with the Premier on 640 Toronto, and he even admitted that they’re trying to work out what “attainable housing” is and that they’re working with stakeholders. They’ve been using the term for 18 months, and they still don’t know. “Attainable” is going to be a lower cost of a regular-priced home.

You know, Speaker, it’s kind of embarrassing that this government has been using this term, bandying it about, really having it as a carrot for the people of Ontario, when they don’t actually know what it means.

So Speaker, I’d like to ask the question of the government, what is “attainable” when people can’t even get into affordable housing? We have a crisis across this province with housing. I wish this government would stop using it as a shield for what they’re doing and actually address the cost of living crisis that we have here in Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): To respond, the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Mr. Matthew Rae: It’s lovely to rise this to rise this evening to address my colleague from London North Centre’s question. It’s also lovely to be able to address a question on housing in this House. Serving as PA to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, who is also

the government House leader, means I don't have a lot of opportunities to do that—which is fine.

The member opposite mentioned the attainable housing in the bill he referred to. I also have access to Hansard, and I looked up, colleagues, before coming to this place how many times the member opposite has mentioned “attainable housing.” He mentioned it once, on February 22, 2024. Someone who claims to be so worried about attainable housing mentioned it once in this place, Speaker.

Interjection: Once.

Mr. Matthew Rae: Once. But this government will not take any lessons from the members opposite when it comes to getting homes built and shovels in the ground. For example, the NDP had their star candidate in the Kitchener by-election recently, who was one of the biggest NIMBYs in all of Kitchener. Don't take my word for it; this is a quote from the Waterloo Region Record: “What makes Chapman's response to this project especially valuable is that she's not just opposing, she's proposing. She's calling for a moratorium on development in the core area until the city finishes reworking its downtown plan.”

Speaker, this member is part of a party that nominated someone in one of the fastest-growing communities in this country to stop development. We're not going to do that. We're going to continue to get shovels in the ground and ensure that we continue to build homes across Ontario, but especially in our transit corridors—of which downtown Kitchener is one. We're going to continue to get homes built.

This member opposite's colleague who ran in the Kitchener by-election voted against a 1,174-unit development in downtown Kitchener. She opposed a 10-storey, 132-unit condo development, and she voted against 532 residential units in downtown Kitchener. That is not all, Speaker: She also voted against a 238-unit development in downtown Kitchener.

I could continue, but I also want to address the fact that the member for Ottawa South is here this evening, and they just elected a new leader, one of the biggest NIMBYs in all of Ontario, where we actually saw people leave the city she was the mayor of. It shrank, when every other city in this province grew.

Interjection.

Mr. Matthew Rae: Speaker, I know he's heckling me right now, but I'm going to quote from one of his colleagues who I had an opportunity to interact with at committee. This former cabinet minister of the Wynne government said, “Frankly, this housing affordability crisis began when I was ... sitting at the provincial cabinet table.” That member is the mayor of Vaughan now, Speaker, and I know the mayor of Vaughan is working with our government to get homes built and “Get Vaughan Moving,” I believe was his campaign promise and slogan in the last municipal election. I'm glad he has seen the error of the Liberal ways.

I can only hope that the new Liberal leader will see the error of her ways, but I'm not going to hold my breath. She called, for example, a 17-storey unit, 148 units in total, “way too much density.” This was in 2022 that the Liberal leader said this. She has commented saying we don't want

a “wall of condos,” and she called a proposed 12-storey, 195-unit development an “abomination.”

Interjection.

Mr. Matthew Rae: I know the member from Ottawa South is saying I'm trying too hard, but I wish Bonnie Crombie would have tried a little harder, when she was mayor of Mississauga, to get homes built.

GOVERNMENT ADVERTISING

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): On to the next late show: The member for Waterloo has given notice of dissatisfaction with the answer to her question given by the Premier. The member has up to five minutes to debate the matter, and somebody on the government side will reply for up to five minutes.

The member for Waterloo.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Last Thursday I asked the Premier to provide a price tag on the excessive advertising in Ontario and in the United States. I referred to these commercials as “fictional,” because they do not portray what is really happening in Ontario.

Transparency in Ontario's finances actually matters to us in the official opposition. Budget priorities should focus on where the people of Ontario need the investment most. This is a pattern both Liberals and Conservatives share, and it requires a history lesson: In 2015, the majority Liberals pushed through a bill that changed the rules on government advertising.

This significantly limited the Auditor General's ability to reject ads that served to promote the party in power. In her annual report, the then-Auditor General said the legislation “opened the door to publicly funded partisan and self-congratulatory government advertising ... primarily to present the government in a positive light rather than to inform,” and we agree.

During the news conference following that legislation change, the AG called a number of the recent government ads—at that time, Liberal ads—“self-congratulatory.” She said that under the previous legislation, before 2015, she would not have approved them “because they don't provide any information to the public that they need to know.”

Ironically, my PC fellow finance critic and colleague at the time, the member from Nipissing, accused the Liberals of wasting taxpayers' money on self-promotion. We agreed. In 2016, he said, “They've cancelled diabetes testing strips. They've fired nurses.... In my hometown they're closing 60 beds in a hospital, but they can find \$20 million for self promotion. That's egregious.” Well, if the member thought that was egregious then, I wonder what he would call it now.

1810

Today, health care organizations and leaders are calling what's happening in the province of Ontario the worst health care crisis in our history. Ontario saw 203 emergency department closures, largely due to the shortage of nurses as a result of the government's unconstitutional Bill 124. There are 2.3 million Ontarians, Madam Speaker, who do not have a family physician. This number rises to

4.3 million by 2026. Regions across northern Ontario declared a health state of emergency, but somehow, this Conservative government can find \$25 million for ads that the Auditor General is once again saying “foster a positive impression of the government” rather than inform. If the situation was egregious in 2016, it is shameful and embarrassing today.

The previous AG also railed against the ad changes at the time, as did the Progressive Conservative government. And I want to remind all of you on the government members’ bench that the Conservatives actually promised—you promised during the 2018 election to reverse these Liberal rules but decided otherwise once in government.

Speaker, government investment should be prioritized based on the needs of Ontarians. We spent December to February as finance committee travelling this great province. Loud and clear, we heard health care, education, justice, not-for-profit asking, begging this government to do their job by investing in those sectors. Nobody is asking for any of these fluffy commercials. And we heard overwhelming evidence to suggest that without these immediate investments, Ontario is at a tipping point.

Let me say, just last week, we heard from a doctor who’s 76 years old who cannot give up his practice because there is nobody to replace him. He is showing better leadership in this province than this government. Imagine if we actually had a Premier that put people at the centre of decision-making processes. Instead, I’ll quote today’s Star editorial: “There is more at stake here than who gets a seat on the gravy train. With ... ill-considered appointments and incendiary comments, this Premier is following an appalling example and playing a disturbing kind of politics.” Insiders win. Self-interest is at play. Legislation is reversed when discovered to be highly questionable or illegal.

Ontarians deserve so much better. Lives matter more than your commercials. We feel that this province of Ontario, this great province, is worth fighting for. We feel that you need to demonstrate that kind of leadership. You need to tell us how much money you spent on these egregious, egregious commercials. And this Premier needs to do his job, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): To respond, the parliamentary assistant to the Premier.

Mr. Lorne Coe: As Premier Ford’s parliamentary assistant, I’m pleased to respond. Since we took office in 2018, we have set out to restore Ontario’s reputation as a jurisdiction that is open for business.

After 15 years of a Liberal government, Ontario had lost its way. The Liberals took an economy that was once competitive and crippled it with high taxes and mountains of red tape. At every opportunity, they raised taxes and increased costs for businesses and the hard-working people of this province. Businesses packed up their bags and fled Ontario in droves, seeking out more competitive jurisdictions. So too did some of the brightest and most talented workers, who were being deprived of economic opportunities thanks to Liberals’ failed economic plan. When we heard from companies from across the globe

who were looking at new places to invest and expand in, Ontario was not even a consideration for them. Simply put, Ontario wasn’t on the map.

When we got elected, we knew we had to reverse course, and that is exactly what we did. We lowered costs and created the conditions businesses need to succeed. Since 2018, our government has cut more than 500 pieces of red tape, saving businesses more than \$939 million each year in gross compliance costs. As a result, we’ve seen new investments and good-paying jobs being created in every sector and every region of our province.

Look at the auto sector, for example. The Liberals watched as the sector stagnated because they didn’t believe Ontario’s more than 100,000 auto workers had what it took to compete in a global economy. But our government knew Ontario had everything it needed to be an auto-producing powerhouse, and that’s why, over the last three years, Ontario has secured more than \$28 billion in new auto and EV investments, creating thousands of good-paying jobs across the province and setting our auto sector up for success in the years to come. Because of the actions we’ve taken, the cars of the future will be assembled and produced by Ontario workers.

Earlier this month, as a result of the important investments Ontario has secured, Bloomberg announced that Canada ranked first in their annual global battery supply chain rankings. This is the first time China has not claimed the number one spot since the ranking started.

Unfortunately, the Liberals were happy to watch auto and manufacturing jobs leave Ontario and relocate in foreign jurisdictions. They hollowed out our manufacturing base and chased 300,000 manufacturing jobs out of the province. In contrast, we’re restoring Ontario’s manufacturing might, reassuring manufacturing jobs and building things in our province again.

Just last year, Ontario’s economy added more manufacturing jobs than all 50 states combined. In our tech sector, we’ve seen tens of billions of dollars in investments flood into our province. More than 100,000 good-paying tech jobs have been created since we took office.

In our life sciences sector, we’ve secured over \$3 billion in new investments over the last three years. Ontario is now the largest life sciences sector in Canada with over 2,000 firms that employ more than 72,000 people.

The Liberals and the NDP want us to stop promoting Ontario as the destination of choice and close our doors to businesses and good-paying jobs. I can assure you tonight, Speaker, that we will never turn our backs on Ontario businesses and workers. We will never go back to the Liberal days of watching on as jobs and businesses fled the province. In 2023, more than 180,000 good-paying jobs were created across the province, and this is just the start.

To companies looking to invest and expand our message is clear: There is no better place to be than Ontario. We’ll continue to create the conditions for businesses to succeed and promote our province as the best place to do business, so that we can continue together attracting more jobs, creating investments in every region of our great province.

JUSTICE SYSTEM

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Onto the next late show: The member from Ottawa South has given notice of dissatisfaction with the answer to a question given by the Attorney General. The member has up to five minutes to debate the matter, and the Attorney General may reply for up to five minutes.

The member for Ottawa South.

Mr. John Fraser: Speaker, I'm very pleased to stand today. I want to thank the Attorney General for being here because I feel honoured that he's here and that a minister's here, so I really do appreciate it.

On auto: I do want to remind members on the other side that their party voted against the bailout in 2009, so I wouldn't chirp too loud about anybody's record on auto.

So, why are we here? Why am I here? Why are we here at the late, late, late show? Because the Premier, when asked about some appointments to the board that help us choose judges or help the minister choose judges, said that he wanted "like-minded people," that he didn't want Liberal or NDP judges. Well, just saying that is the wrong thing to do. Our courts are supposed to be independent. They need to be independent.

Look, I'm 100% opposed to the politicization of the courts. I think most people in here would be. I don't want a Conservative judge, a New Democratic judge or a Liberal judge. I want independent, non-partisan judges who bring nothing more than and nothing less than good legal judgment to bear on the issues before them without fear or favour or loyalty to any political party or any political philosophy.

Let's all be really honest here. For all of us, as politicians, it's hard to inspire confidence in people. They don't have confidence in us, and there's no doubt that we all bear some responsibility in this. What the Premier is suggesting is infecting the courts with the same virus that now makes public trust in our elected representatives, in us, so weak. So bringing politics into our courts will inevitably mean the public will start to lose trust in the incredibly important work being done there. People will second-guess their judges for the same reason they second-guess all of us: because they can't stand the politics.

1820

It's an incredibly bad and dumb idea to turn independent judges into judges who toe a political line or "think like us." As a society, we can tolerate low levels in all of us here. We understand that. We kind of created that, right? But we can't accept anything less than the highest levels of trust in our courts. I know that the Attorney General knows that, too. It's one thing to lose confidence in politicians, but when people start to lose confidence in the courts, you start to slide towards anarchy. You don't have to look very far south to see where that's happening, and that was my point.

The right answer to the question would have been, "I appointed two people. They're good people. They have good judgment. They are going to help us make good choices, so we'll have good, independent, strong people

on the bench." That's the right answer to the question. The Premier gave a political answer to the question, and that's not good. It's not good, because just uttering those sentences starts to undermine people's confidence in the judicial system.

The other reason that the judicial system is important is that it underpins our democracy. It makes sure that when we make decisions here, we are doing them in accordance with the laws of Canada. And we also have a system where we actually look—and the Attorney General will know—at the judgments that judges make. We have systems of appeal. We have checks and balances. An independent judiciary is an incredibly important check and balance in democracy, and that's the point I'm trying to make.

So the Premier has to do something to restore confidence in whatever he eroded by saying what he said. And look, with all the things that have gone on—with the secret sole-source deals; with the criminal investigation of the \$8.3-billion backroom deal—for the leader whose government is subject to that criminal investigation to suggest that he wants like-minded judges, I don't think that's a really good look. I'm just saying.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): The Attorney General to respond.

Hon. Doug Downey: I'm pleased to be able to join this debate and have a conversation.

I was listening to my colleague intently, and he was saying that just saying it is the wrong thing to do. I think what he meant to say was that hearing it is uncomfortable. Confidence-building doesn't mean doing things in the shadows and assuming that the public can't handle the truth; the truth of the matter is, governments are elected to make decisions to appoint judges, and that's a fundamental part of democracy.

Now, the opposition and some in the bar are throwing around judicial independence—as if this has anything to do with judicial independence. The way that this works is, the Chief Justice sends a letter and says, "We have a vacancy to fill." The letter is passed on to the committee, made up of up to 13 people, including a quarter of them as judges, some from the bar and some from the public. As my colleague suggested, they're excellent, excellent people. They donate their time for this, and they have over time, over the decades. They make recommendations, and those recommendations come to the Attorney General to consider, to make a recommendation to cabinet. Then they're appointed, and then they get their independence. They don't come to the committee with independence, and they don't come to the committee with some sort of sanctified neutrality. It's a human system, and people come with world views.

I have been clear publicly: I want judges who understand victims. I want judges with community service. I want to make sure that they understand communities. Now, I don't think anybody is taking issue with that, but when the Premier says out loud what has been happening for decades, all of a sudden there's outrage, and somehow we've crossed the lexicon into judicial independence.

Let me be really clear: If we're going to talk about actual facts, if we go back to that period between January 1989 and February 1995, the appointments when the Liberals and then the NDP were reigning—they appointed 71 criminal defence and civil rights lawyers to the bench, and 17 crown attorneys. Now, that's not casting aspersions or anything on the individuals—but they may have a world view, and that's okay.

It's curious to me, in 2014, I mentioned this morning, after three years—from 2011, 2012, 2013; 12 judges, 10 judges, 12 judges—all of a sudden, in an election year, the Liberals appointed 27 judges. And that's okay. But then in 2015, they appointed 13 more; in 2016, 17 more; and right before the next election they appointed 47. I actually didn't know the political background of any of them, because that's not how I evaluate people. But I took the opportunity today to run those 47 through some of the publicly available databases, and you may or may not be shocked to know that 40% of them appear to be Liberal and some NDP donors. You may also be shocked to know that it doesn't appear that any of them donated to a Conservative. Does that make them unfit judges? Absolutely not. It is the prerogative of the government of the day to appoint qualified judges—that's the measure: Are they qualified?—not through this false lens of, “Did they go to

a fundraising dinner for somebody one time?” That's not the measure.

When you appoint a judge, it's very much like pulling back the arrow, and when you let go of the arrow you have no control anymore; it goes where it goes. When that judge puts on that sash, they have their independence. There is no kowtowing to a government of any stripe, and I can tell you that any lawyer who operates in the courts will verify that. If you think that a judge is kowtowing to any party—the one that appointed them that's not in power now or the one that is in power—that just does not happen. That is a fallacy.

So this is all a bit of a storm about nothing, because the system is the gold standard. Can it be improved? There are ways we can improve it. But is it better than other systems in Canada? I would argue it's the best, and we have qualified people who are donating their time to sit on that committee and give us their advice, along with the judges and the others. I want that system to continue. I respect that system, and I look forward to more advice from them. We will appoint qualified people to make sure that the people of Ontario receive the kind of justice they expect.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): There being no further business, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow, Wednesday, February 28, at 9 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1828.

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| Gallagher Murphy, Dawn (PC) | Newmarket—Aurora | |
| Gates, Wayne (NDP) | Niagara Falls | |
| Gélinas, France (NDP) | Nickel Belt | |
| Ghamari, Goldie (PC) | Carleton | |
| Glover, Chris (NDP) | Spadina—Fort York | |
| Gretzky, Lisa (NDP) | Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest | |
| Grewal, Hardeep Singh (PC) | Brampton East / Brampton-Est | |
| Hardeman, Ernie (PC) | Oxford | |
| Harden, Joel (NDP) | Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre | |
| Harris, Mike (PC) | Kitchener—Conestoga | |
| Hazell, Andrea (LIB) | Scarborough—Guildwood | |
| Hogarth, Christine (PC) | Etobicoke—Lakeshore | |
| Holland, Kevin (PC) | Thunder Bay—Atikokan | |
| Hsu, Ted (LIB) | Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les Îles | |
| Jama, Sarah (IND) | Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre | |
| Jones, Hon. / L'hon. Sylvia (PC) | Dufferin—Caledon | Minister of Health / Ministre de la Santé |
| | | Deputy Premier / Vice-première ministre |
| Jones, Trevor (PC) | Chatham-Kent—Leamington | Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint du gouvernement |
| Jordan, John (PC) | Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston | |
| Kanapathi, Logan (PC) | Markham—Thornhill | |
| Karpoche, Bhutla (NDP) | Parkdale—High Park | First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Première Vice-Présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative |
| Ke, Vincent (IND) | Don Valley North / Don Valley-Nord | |
| Kernaghan, Terence (NDP) | London North Centre / London-Centre-Nord | Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de l'opposition officielle |
| Kerzner, Hon. / L'hon. Michael S. (PC) | York Centre / York-Centre | Solicitor General / Solliciteur général |
| Khanjin, Hon. / L'hon. Andrea (PC) | Barrie—Innisfil | Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks / Ministre de l'Environnement, de la Protection de la nature et des Parcs |
| | | Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjointe du gouvernement |
| Kusendova-Bashta, Natalia (PC) | Mississauga Centre / Mississauga-Centre | |
| Leardi, Anthony (PC) | Essex | |
| Lecce, Hon. / L'hon. Stephen (PC) | King—Vaughan | Minister of Education / Ministre de l'Éducation |
| Lumsden, Hon. / L'hon. Neil (PC) | Hamilton East—Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est—Stoney Creek | Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport / Ministre du Tourisme, de la Culture et du Sport |
| MacLeod, Lisa (PC) | Nepean | |
| Mamakwa, Sol (NDP) | Kiiwetinoong | Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjoint de l'opposition officielle |
| Mantha, Michael (IND) | Algoma—Manitoulin | |
| Martin, Robin (PC) | Eglinton—Lawrence | |
| McCarthy, Hon. / L'hon. Todd J. (PC) | Durham | Minister of Public and Business Service Delivery / Ministre des Services au public et aux entreprises |
| McCrimmon, Karen (LIB) | Kanata—Carleton | |
| McGregor, Graham (PC) | Brampton North / Brampton-Nord | |
| McMahon, Mary-Margaret (LIB) | Beaches—East York | |
| Mulroney, Hon. / L'hon. Caroline (PC) | York—Simcoe | President of the Treasury Board / Présidente du Conseil du Trésor |
| | | Minister of Francophone Affairs / Ministre des Affaires francophones |
| Oosterhoff, Sam (PC) | Niagara West / Niagara-Ouest | |
| Pang, Billy (PC) | Markham—Unionville | |

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

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