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Mercredi
10 avril 2024

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Service linguistique et des publications parlementaires
Salle 500, aile ouest, Édifice du Parlement
111, rue Wellesley ouest, Queen's Park
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 10 April 2024

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 10 avril 2024

The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

BUILDING A BETTER ONTARIO ACT
(BUDGET MEASURES), 2024

LOI DE 2024 VISANT À BÂTIR
UN ONTARIO MEILLEUR
(MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES)

Resuming the debate adjourned on April 9, 2024, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 180, An Act to implement Budget measures and to enact and amend various statutes / Projet de loi 180, Loi visant à mettre en oeuvre les mesures budgétaires et à édicter et à modifier diverses lois.

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

Mr. Joel Harden: It's a pleasure to rise on behalf of the good people of Ottawa Centre to talk about the government's budget bill, Bill 180, this morning. As I do, I was hoping that you and the House would permit me a little latitude as I get started, because it's been an interesting week for me. I had my family here for the first time in six years on Monday; that was lovely. But I also had an opportunity to eulogize in a member's statement a great Ottawan, Voula Sardelis, who we lost, whose celebration of life I missed on Monday, but I had the opportunity to eulogize Voula, and I just wanted to talk a little bit more about her if you and the House will permit me to do that.

I also wanted to talk about another great Ontarian we lost, a journalist, John Bell, who used to actually be in the press gallery in this building. So I'm just wondering if you and the House will permit me a few minutes to do that before I get into the substance of comments I have about Bill 180—just full disclosure.

Voula Sardelis, as I mentioned on Monday, was a truly remarkable woman. What I didn't have a chance to talk about is her story in arriving to Canada. I focused instead on the collaborative work that I had done with her and her daughter in putting forward a motion on the floor of this House, motion 129, which confirmed that we all believe that seniors and persons with disabilities who live in retirement homes, long-term-care homes and congregate care homes—group homes—have a right to see their powers of attorney, their caregivers, their families and friends. They have a right to receive visitors.

This has been a hotly debated topic, certainly during the COVID-19 pandemic but since, when there have been disagreements over the conditions of life and the conditions of care. There have been a minority—and I want to stress that for the record, a minority—of care home operators for vulnerable persons who have decided to, instead of negotiating disputes with powers of attorney and family caregivers, issue trespass act notices to keep those wanted visitors out of homes.

For all of us who have family members in congregate care facilities—I do; I'm sure most of us here do—the presentation of a visitor on any given day is the highlight of our family member's day, week, month—maybe, if it's a great visit, the year. So I just want to, again, for the record, congratulate Voula and her daughter, Maria, on that victory, but I also want to talk a little bit about Voula's story because I think it tells a little bit about Canada as a country and the kind of province and country we want to build through the government's budget bill.

Voula Sardelis arrived to Canada in 1954. She arrived at Pier 21 in Halifax. I'm sure many of our families have these stories. She was immediately head-counted, assessed by immigration officials and sent on a bus to Montreal, where, because of her training in her homeland of Greece, she became a seamstress. She worked for a tailor in the city of Montreal. She later moved to my city in Ottawa, where she was both a seamstress and a nanny. And her husband, who she knew from the old village, came to join her in Ottawa.

What is remarkable for me, Speaker, about Voula is that this is a woman who came to Canada without any family connections, without the capacity to speak either of our two official languages, who simply took a risk on herself at 33 years of age because, as she told Maria, she was tired of not having shoes. She was tired of not having shoes and tending to animals in the field and, in some cases, she talked to Maria, and related the story to me through Maria, about having her feet hurt because of walking on ice in the small amounts of frozen time in the year in that country, Greece.

It's the immigrant story; it's the striving immigrant story that so many of our families have, Speaker. I think those—they could be genetic; they could be learned tendencies passed from mother to daughter. When I had the opportunity to work with Maria, I just remember meeting someone with such an indomitable spirit because—think about this for a moment: If you were separated from the person who is most important to you for 316 days, if you miss Christmas, you miss her birthday, you miss Easter, you miss Thanksgiving, you miss all the important things,

you're hurting. But at the end of that 316-day period, Maria decided to defy the trespass act. She decided to defy it. She called the Ottawa police ahead of time and she said, "I will be compliant with your officers if they're deployed to the scene, but I believe this care home operator is abusing their power under the Retirement Homes Act. I've contacted the regulator. I've had no progress." I had worked with her, and she had had no progress.

So think about the courage it took Voula Sardelis to come to Canada without any capacity in English or French, without any family connections, to start a life in 1954, and think about how those skills were passed on to her daughter who had that same courage to take personal risk and to test the law. Let's be gratified that we as a House agreed to support the right for Voula and every other person in a congregate care facility to receive their loved ones as guests. God bless you, Voula; God bless you, Maria. Thank you, House, for the opportunity to talk a little bit more about that.

I also want to talk about John Bell, who has got a funny story too. I don't see any London, Ontario, members of the House here, I don't think—oh, pardon me. My goodness, the friend from London North Centre is here, sorry. So, John comes from your city, my friend, and he's the son of a nurse; he's the son of a high school teacher. I met John when I was a graduate student in the city, Speaker, because he was part of the press gallery in this building, but part of the press gallery from a source that I don't think many Ontarians know about. He wrote for a socialist newspaper called the Socialist Worker, and it was something that I had seen around York University when I was a campus member, and I thought it was a pretty outspoken publication. When I met John, he was somebody who I thought was an interesting person. He had a mind of his own.

What I remember from the celebration of life—John passed away on March 28—is that he was one of those people on the left in the early 1980s that was changed by the Polish ship workers strike of 1981, because at that time the people who called themselves the left, the Stalinist regime, was putting down the shipyard workers strike, and if you were to advocate for those Polish shipyard workers in this city or any other Canadian city, you were accused by the so-called left of being agents for the United States or some other surrogate that is supposed to be anti-left. But John had the courage, as a student in the early 1980s to say the following words, and I will repeat them for the record of this House: "Either you backed the workers or you backed the generals and their tanks trying to smash the strike. Shamefully, most of the left backed the tanks, characterizing rebellious Polish workers as agents of the CIA or the Vatican."

0910

John had a mind of his own. He was raised by a teacher and a nurse. He was raised also by an aunt who was a librarian. He thought for himself. He thought deeply. And he, like many Canadians, decided to back the shipyard workers in the early 1980s, despite the names he was called. I saw that same independence of spirit. He decided to devote decades of his life afterwards to writing a

column—I encourage any member of this House to look up—called Left Jab. In Left Jab, he wrote about fascinating topics that were political, cultural. One of my favourite columns John wrote was about the great Charlie Sifford, who is often referred to as golf's Jackie Robinson. He passed away in 2015. He was the apparent mentor for the great Tiger Woods, the golfer Tiger Woods.

Through John's column, I learned a lot more about my country, I learned a lot more about major figures in history, but always from a very independent streak. This is what I want to mention about John. He was somebody who thought for himself and he wasn't afraid to ruffle the feathers of others if it was called for. This is a guy I truly believe could have had a great career as a mainstream journalist or as a professor, but he decided to devote his life to writing for a socialist publication and working on contract.

In 2018, after a debilitating lung illness that John had lived through, he got a double lung transplant, and his productivity as a columnist went through the roof. I remember that. I remember him publishing once a week to publishing twice a week, commenting on social media frequently, and very much enjoying his work. But in November 2023, unfortunately, he had a fall, he broke his hip, he was admitted to hospital. That was the moment I remember of John's columns when he talked about the risks persons with disabilities faced in the COVID-19 pandemic, being immunocompromised, and how getting sick could often mean the end of his life. Unfortunately, John lived out that example himself. He passed away on the 28th of this year, but he lived a remarkable life, and I'm glad that I've had a few moments to talk about him and what he contributed to debate in this country.

I also want to thank the Ottawa Festival Network. This is my substantive contribution for the debate—surprise, I only have 25 seconds left. I thought I had more. I do want to put a nod, because my friend the minister responsible is here. The Ottawa Festival Network has a great pitch in front of him and his ministry for the tulip festival that's happening on the 10th to the 20th of this month, which is our opportunity to celebrate veterans' history and the important sacrifice that 7,600 Canadians made to liberate the Netherlands, and the gift that the country of the Netherlands gives us. My pitch to the government in the budget bill: Don't forget our festivals.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Questions to the member for Ottawa Centre?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: I enjoyed the presentation by the member from Ottawa Centre, and any time he wants to ask me for an indulgence to tell a really good story in this chamber about people coming to this country and making good, I can assure him that he will always have my indulgence.

He did at the end of his presentation talk about tulips in Ottawa. I know a little bit about tulips in Ottawa, and I understand that that's linked to bravery and liberation and certain things that happened in the past. I would like to invite the member from Ottawa Centre, because obviously it's something that's close to him, if he would like to take

a moment to elaborate on this tulip festival and tell us where does it originate from, where do the tulips come from, why do the tulips arrive, where and when they arrive, and why we should all be interested in that and what it commemorates.

Mr. Joel Harden: I thank the member for Essex. What I'll say in response is that this is the 72nd edition of the Ottawa tulip festival. It acknowledges the sacrifice of 7,600 Canadian soldiers who lost their life in liberating the Netherlands. The gift in return that the country of the Netherlands gives our city is 100,000 tulips. If you haven't been to our city to see the blooming of the tulips, you really should. It's very important for Jo Riding, who is the festival director, for it to be no cost so the children can learn about that military history and the sacrifice of those veterans but also appreciate the beauty of those tulips and what they mean. You can go to the Man with Two Hats statue, which is right in Commissioners Park, which is literally geographically facing the same statue in the Netherlands. Princess Margriet of the Netherlands joined us to unveil that two years ago.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Questions?

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I'd like to thank my colleague from Ottawa Centre for recognizing the life and work of John Bell. I think it was very beautifully worded, although I am surprised that you didn't make mention of his cat, who is known as Randy Savage.

In the obituary itself, John and his family called for donations to the London Public Library and, in particular, the A Book for Every Child campaign.

In terms of the government's budget bill, Bill 180, I wonder if the member would like to comment about the historic omission of library grant funding as well as their postures on education funding that are not meeting the needs of libraries as well as the young people in Ontario.

Mr. Joel Harden: Libraries are a historic opportunity and have always been in every single place across this province. They are a gathering spot for people who don't have access to the Internet. They are a gathering place for community programs. And they're an opportunity for people to read and to learn and to reflect. So it's not a surprise to me that that's John's legacy and that that's what he wanted. Maybe they have a cat group too for Randy. Who knows?

The fact of the matter is, I would love this government, in its budget, to invest heavily in libraries because it creates opportunity for people to better themselves, to learn more about their community. We should be investing in that, for sure.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

M^{me} France Gélinas: It was very interesting listening to the member—even listening to the answer that he gave about the tulips. I learned a few things, so I thank you for that.

The bill and the story that you told also told a story of a health care system that did not meet the needs of John and that could have done way better at preventing airborne

infections from spreading from one patient to the next, often making their health status worse.

Given the health infrastructure in Ottawa and the number of people in Ottawa who do not have access to primary care, are you satisfied that the investment in primary care will meet the needs of the people of Ottawa Centre?

Mr. Joel Harden: Thank you for the question from my friend from Nickel Belt.

No, I'm not. I've been on the record here many times saying that we actually have, in our city, the opportunity to cover 30,000 people with primary care through our community health centres and through some family health team proposals before the government, but we've had just one proposal funded, at 30% of its ask, in the downtown. I think we can do better than that.

One thing I do want to say for the record about our health care system and John Bell is that John had that resurgence of creative activity because he got a double lung transplant, thanks to public health care. So that's important—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Thank you.

Further debate?

Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady: I appreciate the opportunity to stand and speak to Bill 180, the budget bill, Building a Better Ontario. We all want and deserve a better Ontario, but I was a bit disappointed with this budget because I think it's one that misses multiple opportunities. However, I'm one who believes there is no monopoly on a good idea. There were items in the budget that I liked, that I can support—but no time in this three minutes to list them all.

I'll highlight the investments in municipal infrastructure, which are welcome, but I do hope that small towns and rural municipalities do see their fair share. I will be watching with interest how the funds will be allocated with respect to the Housing-Enabling Water Systems Fund, which, to this government's credit, has been quadrupled. I know Haldimand, Norfolk and Six Nations will be putting forward an application for their regional water supply project.

Here's where I felt Bill 180 could have been better: Honestly, I felt it needed to demonstrate greater fiscal restraint, with a focus on measures to getting key portfolios back on track. I'll give you some examples.

The finance minister said the government is ready to build infrastructure like roads and bridges. The minister also pledged to build more long-term-care spaces. As we all know, that's all well and good, but there are projects that were previously announced that still haven't seen a shovel in the ground. Of course, everyone knows the people of Caledonia, the people of Haldimand county continue to wait for the reconstruction of the Argyle Street bridge.

An additional \$2 billion over three years in home and community care—that's great, but I am interested to see how these monies will be spent, because until the government pays those on the front line a competitive wage, I believe it's all wasted money. A tree cannot stand

if its roots are rotten. Similarly, more money for addictions and mental health—each year, more and more money being thrown at these critical issues, and yet, poorer results.

0920

The same goes for autism supports: more money but no realignment of services that create real results for Ontario families. Sadly, no relief for those choosing between heating and eating; only crumbs for those needing an investment to base budgets in the developmental services sector; little help for the backbone of many of our small towns, our small businesses; and nary a mention of rural Ontario, our farmers or the ag sector. Many farmers were looking for a top-up of \$100 million to the Ontario Risk Management Program.

At the conclusion, the document reads, “We are not stepping back from the investments that matter. Nor are we going to increase the burden on you.” This is rich, an inference of doing the taxpayer a favour when it’s our money that the government has spent, is spending and, in some cases, has and is mismanaging.

With respect to the deficit, it will more than triple to \$9.8 billion despite promises last year that the books would be balanced by 2025. Speaker, I think we are headed full speed, sadly, toward a debt wall, and in the back seat sit our kids and maybe our grandkids too.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: I noticed that the member made reference to keeping costs down and affordability. I had the opportunity to read the budget document, and in particular, pages 71, 72, 73 and 74. I noticed that there were a host of affordability measures in the budget, including—to me, and most importantly, in my view—keeping the price of gasoline reduced. This budget commits to extending the gas tax reduction, which is an 11-cent-per-litre reduction, extending it until December. I thought that was a very important measure to be taken in this budget because it saves a person who is driving a car 11 cents per litre on the price of gasoline, and that adds up, especially when you’re from a rural area and there are no mass transit systems.

Now, I’m from a rural area called Essex, and I know the member is from a rural area. I’d like to know whether she thinks that that 11-cent gas tax cut is going to help her rural residents.

Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady: I thank the member opposite for the question. Of course, any cost-savings measures will help our rural folks and will help Ontarians in general. But I will go back to the point that we can’t continue, when it comes to cost-savings measures—the member opposite talked about cost-savings measures. There are many instances and opportunities that this government could be taking in order to realign services, in order to put those monies that—we’ve got a \$214-billion budget in front of us, the largest in the province’s history. I am a fiscal Conservative, and I’m not a believer that continuing to throw money at certain problems is always the answer, and

I think that there could have been more work done in realigning services to create real results for Ontario families.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Good morning, Speaker. My question to the member—it’s always interesting to hear you rise in the House. We’re neighbours, and so I like to hear what’s going on in your riding.

You talked about how this government purports to be fiscal Conservatives, but, as you had noted, right now Ontario has the largest net debt per capita in the country. Right now, the debt per capita is \$19,436, so every Ontarian essentially owes that much money.

So this government has the largest debt and deficit ever, and the largest in Ontario, while at the same time, they are pulling up the rear when it comes to per capita spending in health care. Can you square this? How is the government underspending in the things that matter to us—health care and infrastructure in rural communities—at the same time that they have the largest deficit in the history of the province?

Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady: Thank you for the question. I can only guess at what the government is thinking with respect to throwing more money at some of these critical issues, but I’ll go back to what I said in the previous question, that throwing money at these issues isn’t working. If it were working, we would see better results in home care; we would see better results with addictions and homelessness. What we need to do is we need to realign these services. We need to focus the money where it is most needed and get things back on track. Throwing money at the problem simply isn’t working, and it’s like a dog chasing its tail at this point in time.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: My question is about hydro access to farmers. When I was at ROMA this year, a lot of farmers complained that they don’t have access to phase 3 electricity and that for a lot of farmers, it’s hard for them to decarbonize. It’s hard for them to turn their farming enterprise into bigger business, to scale bigger business, because of their access to this kind of infrastructure. I wonder if you could speak to what that really means to your agricultural sector.

Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady: I thank my colleague for the very important question. Of course, providing our farmers with the necessary tools to compete in the global market is probably the most important thing that we can do to help our farmers—hydro, and also Internet. In order for our farmers to play in the global market, they have to have access to proper Internet—and many of them do not—to run their GPS system and everything else they do to remain competitive.

I’ll also talk about the fact that there was very little in this budget with respect to our farmers. I would have really liked to have seen the \$100-million top-up to the Risk Management Program, which would have helped with succession planning for—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Thank you. Sorry; you had a limited time.

Further debate?

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I'd like to give some kudos to the government for some of the things they've provided for the city of Kitchener. They've invested in our Frederick bridge. They've announced investments to new schools, and improvements to make two-way, all-day GO possible. They've also made infrastructure investments that have filled a gap for municipalities on the cuts that have taken place from Bill 23. I am anticipating more funding for supportive housing that I think would help our vulnerable communities in Ontario. Overall, good things for the province—again, some infrastructure investments.

The money spent on transit has gone a long way to help those who are most struggling with affordability, because we know that affordability isn't just for people who own cars, but it's also for people who use transit. And so this expansion of transit is the best way to use our dollars and to reach more people.

The infrastructure money helps us build more housing. We know that this is a gap that cities are struggling with. Not only is there a big price tag on the inflation on construction, but also the cuts to municipalities have led to our municipalities facing massive financial strains and possible cuts.

But while I'm glad we're building hospitals, I'm glad we're building schools, I'm glad we're building infrastructure, we can't just spend money on ribbon-cuttings. Just like all of us who maybe have bought a home, you don't just buy a home and then stop paying the bills. We need to fill in the gaps and make sure we fund properly the operating costs of running this province.

Things that I don't appreciate are the \$10 billion spent on Highway 413. We know that this will save a mere 30 to 60 seconds for people in their daily commutes, and we know that it's cheaper and more cost-effective and will serve more people to expand GO, like creating a Bolton line. That way, we could preserve 2,000 acres of prime farmland and we could preserve 400 acres of the greenbelt.

There are five pages on auto insurance and a mere two paragraphs on the climate crisis. Again, the climate crisis is real, and it has devastating consequences for my kids and all future generations. I hope to see more than a mere 0.01% of the budget spent to discuss the climate crisis that is barreling toward us.

While I'm glad to see the 2.7% increase in funding for education, that is essentially a cut, because that is below the rate of inflation. We need to ensure that we have progress in retaining and recruiting more education staff, and that we address the violence that staff and I, as a school social worker, see in schools and the mental health crisis facing young people, often due to many things—consequences from the COVID crisis.

0930

When it comes to health care, there is nothing to address our drug toxicity and to improve operation costs for our ER departments. So while we do see money—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): My apologies to the member. You're out of time.

Questions?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: I was making earlier reference to certain pages in the budgetary document, and I was specifically making reference to pages 71 and 72 and 73. On page 72, there is what I would describe as a very good program that was introduced. We call it the One Fare program. The One Fare program will essentially lower costs on people using public transportation, and it means that the average user of the public transportation system here in the urban Toronto area, and perhaps the greater area as well, will save approximately, it's estimated, \$1,600 per year. And I think that's wonderful. I think it's so wonderful, sometimes I think to myself that I wish that there was a One Fare program in Essex county that we could use.

I was going to ask the member if she would like to comment on the One Fare program and whether she thinks that's an awesome program, the way I think it is.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I would like to see One Fare come to our region so that we can go to Hamilton and it not take three hours. It's a 50-minute drive. It takes two hours for somebody from downtown Kitchener to get to downtown Cambridge—two hours—and we live 20 minutes apart.

I would like to see investments in more light rail transit, like has been created in Kitchener-Waterloo. Let's expand that to Cambridge. Let's expand that to other municipalities.

To me, spending money on a highway doesn't make any sense. We know that when people have to spend two hours driving to Cambridge, we are shoving people into their cars. A young lady who rents a room in my house, who is from India, just bought a car. It's very unaffordable for her, but she can't handle four hours in transit every day.

So we need to look seriously at our investments in highways and shift them over when they don't make sense into transit options.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Mr. Joel Harden: I just want to thank my friend from Kitchener Centre for focusing on climate policy and just give her this time to elaborate on anything she would like the government to focus on if we were going to elevate the amount of investment in climate policy.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I think one of the biggest things that we will see in the coming months is forest fires. We know that last year our province burned, Yukon and New Brunswick burned, and we are going to spend billions and billions and billions of dollars that I don't see in the budget on dealing with the disaster to northern communities related to forest fires.

I am not confident that we have a good plan in place. We know that for every dollar spent on mitigation, every dollar we spend on adaptation, we will save more than \$10 in both of those categories. We are not looking forward. We are putting Band-Aids on. The \$5 million that's spent right now on forest fires doesn't even come close to what other provinces and other jurisdictions are doing to invest

in prevention. Alberta, for example, can anticipate when the fires are coming. They use AI. They're going there, and they're investing. They're getting new technology, not just trying to keep up.

We are behind on shelter beds, behind on climate disasters and behind on the future of climate readiness.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Mr. Mike Harris: Just to touch quickly on the forest fire piece, even though you may not see it in the budget, there theoretically is almost an unlimited amount that is used to fight forest fires. There's a floor that is set by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry, and then that is added on throughout the year as necessary.

I did want to touch a little bit on the One Fare program. The One Fare program is available in Waterloo region. It's fantastic. You can use it with the GRT to then connect to GO train networks to then come to Toronto and other places in the GTA. So it's great that we have that in the region, and I was hoping that maybe the member from Kitchener Centre, my next-door neighbour, would maybe like to elaborate on a little bit more about what she'd like to see in regard to the LRT. I know that's something that has been challenging to talk about on both sides, and just get her thoughts a little bit more on what phase 2 could look like.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I use transit to come back and forth, and I very much appreciate the one fare. And I also hope we can add in these extra stops. Many municipalities across the province are doing their own thing to fill in, with micromobility and bikes. I use Bike Share in Toronto. I use Neuron in KW. There's a lot of climate stuff that makes business sense. I hope we can extend One Fare so that we can connect to transit in Guelph, because we know people from Guelph have to use a car. My staff from Guelph can't get to work until 11 a.m. in the morning—from Guelph to Kitchener, which, again, is a 20-minute drive—because we don't have proper transit between Guelph and Kitchener. Hopefully, One Fare will create harmony with our local—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Thank you.

Further debate?

Mr. Michael Mantha: It's always a privilege to take my seat on behalf of the good people of Algoma-Manitoulin, and to speak to, particularly, the 2024 Ontario budget that this government has brought forward. From my seat, now, I bring a different lens. As an independent member and no longer part of the opposition, I look at reasons why I could potentially support the bill. But one thing I want everybody back home to remember is that I will never forget why I'm here, and that's to bring the issues that matter most to people across Algoma-Manitoulin. So I will touch on the shortfalls and what's not in this particular piece of legislation that this government has brought forward.

Having said that, I've looked at this budget very closely and—it's hard to look for new things. There are things that are there that are substantial for people across Algoma-

Manitoulin, like replacing the Little Current Swing Bridge, the key to Manitoulin Island, which is very important, and the investment that is required to making sure that the service, the products, the economy continues on Manitoulin Island. So it was nice to see, again, the reannouncement of this particular piece of infrastructure that's going to be done. I think this is the fourth or fifth time that the government has announced this infrastructure fund—I think if we follow what the previous government had done, it's normally about seven times that they announce it before it actually gets put in place. I'm hoping it's going to get done fairly soon because people on Manitoulin Island deserve a reliable route, and this infrastructure needs to be done.

In the forestry industry, we see that there's going to be \$20 million over three years in the forest biomass program. I do know several communities that are going to be benefiting from that. Wiikwemkoong First Nation has been leading a lot of initiatives towards this, and they are looking at community projects that they're going to hopefully be able to utilize to stimulate the economy and diversify their employment opportunity for community members there as well.

The new school that is being built in Blind River—okay, this is number four, but it's already in the process of being built. So that was a new announcement. I have to give a shout-out to the Algoma District School Board and the Conseil scolaire du Grand Nord, who really put so much work in getting this to move forward.

There are a few other nuggets that are contained within the context of the budget, so I'll give credit where credit is due—the \$10.9 million to bring improved Internet access across the northern communities and First Nations of Ontario. Get it done. It's long overdue. We've been announcing this over and over and over again. Let's get the shovels in the ground and get this work done.

Now let's talk about what's not in this particular budget. Things that I wish this government would have listened to is—early in October, I found out the dire need of the hospital situation. I knew they were in rough waters, but I didn't appreciate how bad it was in hospitals. So I took it upon myself, once I received correspondence from the 25 northern hospitals, to reach out to all 11 hospitals across Algoma-Manitoulin—and, yes, I said “11 hospitals.” Algoma-Manitoulin is a very vast area. The consensus within these hospitals is, at a bare minimum, they need, at the very least, a 10% increase to their base funding in order for them to address a lot of their financial needs that they have in order to continue to provide the services, to keep their emergency rooms open and so on. We didn't see that in this budget. We see a mere pittance that won't even keep the hospitals in line with the cost of inflation.

I'm not sure what this government is not grasping in regard to the dire need of our hospitals and the fact that they need some additional funding in order to meet the services and meet the demands of individuals across this province, but they're not. And that's frightening, Speaker.

0940

I've sat with many of the administration, and I've asked them. I said, "What's missing here? Why aren't they listening to you?" And everybody just seems to step back and say, "We don't know. We get head nods from the government, and saying, 'Yes, we understand, but keep going.'" They're lean. They've cut everything. There's no more integration that they can do.

But again, when the ask is there, it's falling on—there's silence from across the table. The fact that they have to deal with the enormous costs of agency nursing, which is required—they have to have a certain level of professionals within the context of the hospital. Nothing in this budget to deal with agency nursing regulation, nothing on capping—hospitals are paying three to four times more to have this coverage done.

Nothing on enhancing the administrative wages—why would somebody in a hospital setting—if I'm a nurse within the emergency department, why would I step up in an administrative role when there are no compensations for those individuals because there are no base funding increases to their hospital?

Why did we not see the 5% increase in the base funding in developmental services, such as what we have throughout this province as far as Community Living?

The elastic is stretched so much there is no more stretch. That elastic has broken.

Over the weekend, my son and I, we enjoyed a hockey game up in Blind River—go, Blind River Beavers. I hope that you guys can pull off—you're down 3-1. I'll be at the game on Thursday night in Blind River.

After we had supper with my son—my son is one of the individuals that works with developmentally challenged individuals. And I've always said he's a special boy. He's got this knack of identifying someone in the crowd. It doesn't matter if that someone is four years old, 14 years old, 24 years old, 44 years old or 64 years old; he has this ability of identifying someone that's in need. And what he does: He zeroes in on that person and makes them his priority. He's always had that knack. When he was a young boy, while he was in school, we often heard from teachers that, "You've got a special one. Don't change him." And it was such a pleasure for me seeing him going through high school and getting through his education up at Collège Boréal and coming out as a social worker.

The fun part for me is, as much as I love being part of this building—going into his workspace and his office and him showing to me what programs that he does and the activities that he sets up for all of his clients is amazing. But he's limited, because those services have not been recognized by this government. And there's no investment that has been done into that particular field. So, in developmental services across this province, the elastic is broken. I'm looking at this government, and I'm imploring this government to recognize the benefit of these services and make the proper investments that are needed.

Highway improvements across northern Ontario: I drive up from Elliot Lake every week, and I see that big billboard, bulletin board for the 413/Bradford Bypass

investment, and I see the big billion-dollar investments that are coming in there. But highways such as 551, 542 or 637 going into Killarney—I don't see that same kind of recognition or investment that is being done out of this budget from this government. And that's unfortunate.

Highway 519 into Dubreuilville was just done, I would say, about five or six years ago. Not a stitch of additional work was ever done to maintain that road. That brand new road is washing out. What's embarrassing to watch is, since when has it become a standard operating procedure to replace gravel from a washout with a cone? When does that become a standard operating procedure? When does the gravel go back in? It is so bad, Speaker, that there's this one area where the guardrail posts are hanging void, with no gravel there, and this happens time and time again. It's not only in my area; it's across northern Ontario. We really need to look at our service providers that are responsible for returning the gravel to their shoulders.

Heck, I spent an entire day with an Amish and Mennonite group, travelling roads in a horse and buggy on Highway 17, and I tell you, Speaker, if you haven't, I would suggest that each and every one of these members in this room experience that first-hand because that will be an eye-opener for you. There is something that we need to learn in this province: that we all need to share the road, and that road, for many of us, is only between the white lines. Well, there's a shoulder and then there's gravel, and there's a lot of people that are using those roads.

Again, there's a lot of things I didn't get to touch on within the context of this budget, but there's a lot of things that are missing. I take great pride in looking at why I could be supporting this bill, but there are too many things that are missing out of this budget that would be very valuable to people from northern Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Questions?

Mr. John Yakabuski: I want to thank the member from Algoma-Manitoulin for his address this morning. I also want to congratulate him and commend him for doing what we all do here, and that is to stand up for the people who send us here each and every time there's a general election, the people in our constituencies, because that is and must be our first priority.

No budget solves all of the problems individually, and he has pointed out some of the things. We have challenges in our own ridings that we would hope there'd be enough money in this budgetary session to take care of, but we also know that we have to be patient and many things take longer than we'd like.

But the member did say—and I do want to congratulate him on Elliot Lake being chosen the winners of Hockeyville. That's a great honour, and congratulations to the member and to all of us here in Ontario. That's two years in a row that Ontario has had the Kraft Hockeyville.

But can you tell us some of the things that you do like in the budget? Because you are considering voting in favour of it. I'd love to hear that from the member.

Mr. Michael Mantha: Well, first, what I will tell the member is, you're darned right. Elliot Lake and actually

Team Ontario—there are so many individuals that pool together to support Elliot Lake with Hockleyville, and I tell you, it was great for the community to win the \$250,000, but what you can't put a price tag on is the sense of community that came out of that initiative for Elliot Lake and the fact that it brought people together—not just Elliot Lake, but the region, like, from Gore Bay all the way up to Wawa. I got calls from people in Windsor who said, "Listen, I'm voting for you." Heck, I even got a call from a member of the opposition saying, "We're voting for you, Mike. We're going to get this done." Again, I want to thank you for supporting that initiative.

You're right, there are some things that are a re-announcement. What I made in my initial comments is, yes, there are going to be funds for the swing bridge on Manitoulin Island. Yes, there's \$50.5 million that the government permitted me to do the official announcement about in Blind River, which I was surprised there was no official government representative there at the announcement. But it just goes to show you that—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Thank you very much.

Question?

M^{me} France Gélinas: Well, just to follow up on his comments, my entire family voted for hours at the time for Elliot Lake to win. I now know every part of a bicycle, every part of a bus because, every now and then, they would ask you to do that again. I'm really proud that Elliot Lake won.

Something that I'm less proud about is the 25 small rural northern hospitals. Eleven of them are in Algoma-Manitoulin. They serve people who often have very low other access to help; the hospital is it. They do not have a family physician. There's no nurse practitioners around. You depend on the hospital for pretty much all of your care.

Those hospitals have seen 280 emergency room closures. They have seen 1,200 hospital program closures. Most of them come from small and rural hospitals. I'm curious to see, did you see anything in the budget that will reassure the people of Algoma-Manitoulin that they will have access to care when they need it?

Mr. Michael Mantha: The unfortunate part is no, I did not see anything. I did touch on the meagre increase to funding to hospitals, but we don't even know if that's going to be applied to their base funding that is there. Like I said in my earlier statement, the hospitals were looking at a minimum—a minimum—10% increase.

0950

I don't know how much clearer I can put this to this government, but northern hospitals, they are in crisis, and this government needs to take action in order to assist them.

At the last hour, once again, we got this government to extend the locum incentive program. But by the time you made that announcement for the hospitals, those hospitals, who were looking forward to hopefully securing that funding, were trying to secure doctors, but those doctors that would have been available to the communities have

now moved on, are now scheduled for other communities. So they're scrambling, once again, to make sure that their hospitals and their emergency departments stay open over the course of the summer.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I know that there was something that the member from Nickel Belt and also you have shared has been essential for your constituents. I wonder if you can share a bit more about what you were hoping to see in terms of the northern travel health care funding.

Mr. Michael Mantha: Well, again, I will say there was a nugget when it comes to the Northern Health Travel Grant, but it's a small nugget. It sounds big; it sounds like the government is putting some significant amount of dollars—which is \$45 million—towards accommodations for individuals, which will mean instead of getting \$100 on their first night of accommodation, they will get \$175, and that will be reduced on subsequent nights.

Now, if the government wanted to do something substantial to the Northern Health Travel Grant, they could have looked at increasing the travel mileage. Heck, we don't have a problem doing that for the people that are in this room. Why can't we do it for those that are most vulnerable? Because most of those individuals that are most vulnerable are the ones that need it the most.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Mr. Mike Harris: Well, thank you very much, and my partner from Kitchener kind of stole my thunder a little bit on that question. Because I know you're very passionate about the northern Ontario travel grant, you and I have talked about this previously. I've had some family experience with it as well, and sometimes it can be a little bit cumbersome, but I think there are some good things on the way.

I did want to hear a little bit more from you as to what you think some of the changes or beneficial changes could be. Obviously, seeing the accommodation amounts go up to \$175 is a good start. What are some other things that you would like to see that are real, plausible, tangible things that we might be able to look at in the future?

Mr. Michael Mantha: With the legislation that I had proposed to the government, as far as the process, it's not just the reimbursement but it's the delivery of it. We all have a health card. In today's day and age, why can't travel grants be triggered through a health card? Why is it that a person that goes for cancer treatments week after week, every time, to the same destination, seeing the same doctors, seeing the same specialists and so on—why do they have to be burdened and suffer the hardship of waiting months at a time in order to get the reimbursements of their travel grants? Why is it that people do not get special consideration for—if you're not included within that hundred-kilometre diameter and you're initially denied, like people in Espanola or people in White River, why don't we look at a pro-rated rate for them to get some reimbursement as well? There's a few things that

would have been beneficial to having this greater discussion.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

M. Guy Bourgouin: Merci à mon collègue. Ce matin, quand tu as parlé des routes dans ton allocution, on voit qu'il y a tellement d'investissements dans les routes dans le Sud, mais quand ça arrive aux routes comme la 11, la 17 et, encore pire, les routes secondaires comme, tu as mentionné, Dubreuilville—je peux penser à Hornepayne; je peux penser à la 655, la 144, que le monde du Nord utilise beaucoup—bien là, l'investissement n'est pas autant. J'ai aimé ton—quand on voit les cônes et on voit les poteaux. Ça, on voit ça souvent sur les routes secondaires.

J'aimerais entendre que l'investissement—et on sait qu'avec tout le développement du Nord, les ressources viennent du Nord; elles ne viennent pas du sud de l'Ontario. Et qu'on voit nos infrastructures, nos routes, nos ponts, tout ce qui est entouré pour ramener ces ressources—là dans le sud de l'Ontario, puis que le Nord soit oublié—j'aimerais entendre plus là-dessus.

M. Michael Mantha: C'est comme j'ai indiqué dans mes commentaires plus de bonne heure : est-ce qu'il y en a, des carottes, dans le budget? Oui, il y en a, des carottes, mais il faudrait qu'on partage les carottes.

Ce que je veux dire par ça : c'est de l'infrastructure dont on a besoin dans le Nord—nos routes, nos ponts, nos chemins. C'est ça qui nous donne accès à nos emplois. C'est ça qui nous donne accès à nos événements récréatifs. C'est ça qui nous donne accès à nos soins de santé. Puis, on ne les voit pas. On voit des pratiques qui ne sont pas idéales pour les gens du Nord.

Puis, je pense—il y a eu une demande. Ils vont être ici, là, dans une autre deux semaines : Good Roads. Good Roads vont être ici. Et dans leur demande, ils ont demandé que le gouvernement fasse une revue en général de l'infrastructure de tous nos chemins. Est-ce que nos chemins sont bâtis pour accommoder la transportation et puis les gens, les équipements qui sont en train d'utiliser nos chemins correctement aujourd'hui, avec les capacités qu'on a aujourd'hui? Ça, c'est une bonne suggestion que j'encouragerai ce gouvernement de prendre. C'est une bonne revue de tous nos chemins à travers la province.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further debate?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: I'm thoroughly enjoying the debate this morning on the budgetary measures in the province of Ontario.

I am going to start my remarks today at a point where the member from Mississauga–Lakeshore left off. I had heard him making remarks not particularly on this specific motion, but on budgetary items, and they were one-hour remarks. Right at the very end, he said something that I found very important, and I'm going to elaborate on that.

Before I do that, though, I did want to make some comments about the member from Mississauga–Lakeshore, because I find that in this assembly there are many interesting people with fascinating qualifications and

backgrounds, and we don't spend enough time talking about those fascinating backgrounds and qualifications.

I wanted to take an opportunity to just tell the assembly a little bit about my colleague from Mississauga–Lakeshore, who has been inducted into the order of the Knights of Malta. The order of the Knights of Malta is a very ancient order; it's a thousand years old. It started in the city of Jerusalem. The Knights of Malta were attacked and expelled from the city of Jerusalem, and then they took up residence on the island of Cyprus. They were attacked again and expelled from the island of Cyprus. From there, they took up residence on the island of Rhodes. They were then attacked again and expelled from the island of Rhodes and took up residence on the island of Malta. They were then besieged in what is known as the great Siege of Malta of 1565, which they withstood, and withstood the test of time and survived today as a charitable organization doing good works for people around the world.

We are lucky that the member from Mississauga–Lakeshore is actually a member of this august order, the Knights of Malta, and I did want to take an opportunity to recognize him for that and congratulate him for that.

At the end of his one-hour presentation with regard to financial matters in this House, he touched on something which I felt was very, very important. He said, if I may paraphrase what he said, that in 2018, the total revenue for the province of Ontario—that is to say, the treasury of the province of Ontario—was approximately \$150 billion. And today, the total revenue for the province of Ontario—that is, its governmental operations—stands at over \$200 billion.

The member from Mississauga–Lakeshore properly observed that that is an increase of over one third in revenue, and that has been accomplished entirely without raising a single tax and without raising a single fee. That is quite an accomplishment. To raise the governmental revenues by one third over the course of six years without raising a tax and without raising a fee is an accomplishment and a very good one and a very important one.

I'm sure if the Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade were here, he would give a very brief, succinct and very good explanation of how that was done. I've heard him give that explanation before, and I'm going to try to give that explanation now, because it's important. I think that the Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade would say that we were able to increase the revenue of the government of Ontario without raising taxes and without raising fees by doing some very specific things. He would start by saying, "First, we lowered the cost of doing business." And by saying that, he would give examples, such as reducing the cost of WSIB premiums and other costs associated with doing business in the province of Ontario, to the point where we attracted so much business into the province of Ontario that many, many, many companies—from small ones to large ones to multinationals—are now investing in the province of Ontario, creating jobs, creating economic

activity, and thereby increasing the revenue that is being collected by the government of the province of Ontario.

1000

That would be a great success story, and I think it is a success story. I think it's the success story of the last six years, encapsulated by the fact that this government has not raised a single tax or fee in six years. In fact, we've done the opposite.

That brings me to the budget that's before us now. I have made some reference earlier to pages 71, 72 and 73, which set out a brief host of affordability measures that the government has undertaken, and, by doing so, demonstrating that not only have we simultaneously increased revenue but, at the same time, decreased taxes and decreased fees.

I would like to take this opportunity to mention just a few, and the one that I refer to most commonly is the reduction of the gasoline tax, which saves approximately 10 cents per litre on gasoline. That's particularly important for people in the riding of Essex and, I would suggest, very important to people in other rural parts of Ontario, because we don't have mass transit in Essex county. In fact, it's impossible to deliver mass transit in Essex county because of the rural nature of the riding. And so people have to rely on their cars and their trucks. Every time you fill up your truck or every time you fill up your car and every time you take a trip, whether it's to the grocery store or whether you're bringing your kids to the arena or the soccer field, or whether you're bringing your kids to dance class, you have to take a private automobile of some sort. There are a few exceptions, but very small exceptions to that rule.

And so every time somebody drives across the county of Essex to deliver their kids to wherever they're going, there's a cost involved in that, and we've reduced that cost by 10 cents per litre, which, accumulated day in and day out, really makes a difference for people, because I can tell you that the most common expense that people have is to put gas in their cars.

Related to the transportation in rural areas is also the cost associated with owning a car and licensing a car and permitting a car. Those costs, as we know, Madam Speaker, have either gone down or been frozen. For example, we removed the fee for the licence plate sticker on automobiles, which saves the average family approximately \$240 per year. And that's an important measure, because that's an extra \$240 per year that people now have to put their kids in soccer or to buy dance classes or simply to celebrate a birthday.

I think that's an important cost-saving measure. It's an affordability measure and it helps everybody. It doesn't help just a certain group of people; it helps everybody who owns a car or a truck, and certainly helps my constituents in the county of Essex. I just thought I would highlight those two measures, which I thought were particularly important.

On that, Madam Speaker, I move that the question now be put.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Mr. Leardi has moved that the question be now put. There has been

over nine hours of debate, with 24 speakers. I am satisfied that there has been sufficient debate to allow this question to be put to the House.

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

All those in favour of the motion that the question be now put, please say "aye."

All those opposed to the motion that the question be now put, say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

A recorded vote being required, this vote will be deferred until after question period.

Second reading vote deferred.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Orders of the day? I recognize the deputy House leader.

Mr. Trevor Jones: No further business.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): There being no further business, this House stands in recess until 10:15 this morning.

The House recessed from 1005 to 1015.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: Last Friday, our government announced the launch of the Bereavement Support Program, committing over \$3 million to support families of first responders and public safety personnel with rapid access to vital mental health supports. The funding will support free bereavement counselling to those grappling with the loss of a loved one who was killed in the line of duty or has died by suicide.

It was an honour to make this announcement in our esteemed town of Aurora at Station 4-5, alongside the Solicitor General and the Minister of Health, a place that embodies the spirit and dedication of Central York Fire Services. Situated at the heart of our community, this station stands as a symbol of safety and resilience, soon to be renamed in honour of our dearly departed Fire Chief Ian Laing, a fitting tribute to his enduring legacy.

This announcement underscores our government's commitment to those who serve us with such bravery. Our first responders and their families make immense sacrifices. Supporting them through all circumstances is not just our responsibility, it is our profound duty.

Thank you to the families and loved ones who stand beside Ontario's public safety personnel as they bravely serve and protect Ontarians. Thank you.

GORD SINGLETON

Mr. Wayne Gates: Gord Singleton: I want to rise today and speak about someone who was an important member of our community, the fastest man on two wheels, Gord Singleton. As one of Canada's greatest cyclists, Gord was an Olympian, a national champion, a world champion, a

world record holder, a generous and dedicated local business owner, but most importantly, he was a devoted husband and father. Gord received the Order of Canada and was inducted into the sports hall of fame. He was a true champion.

After a battle with prostate cancer, Gord passed away on March 24, and we lost an amazing member of our community. Myself and my entire office offer our condolences to the Singleton family.

Gord's passing is a difficult reminder of how pervasive and common prostate cancer is among men in our province and country. We know that when diagnosed early, nearly 100% of men will survive at least five years after a diagnosis. But right, now Ontario remains one of the last provinces in the country to cover PSA tests under OHIP.

We've worked hard with the Canadian Cancer Society to push this government to do the right thing and expand coverage of PSA testing, including introducing a number of motions to grant coverage to men with a doctor's referral. The more men that are tested, the more lives we save.

Let's celebrate Gord's legacy to our province and our country and expand the necessary health care services to ensure we detect prostate cancer early and save men's lives. Rest in peace, my friend.

SIKH HERITAGE MONTH

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: In April, members of the Sikh community celebrate Sikh Heritage Month. The month of April holds significance for the Sikh community as Vaisakhi marks the birth of the Khalsa, and the Sikh faith is celebrated during April.

During this time, Sikhs across the world take time to reflect on the teachings of Guru Gobind Singh Ji, who established the Khalsa Panth. The values that Guru Gobind Singh Ji embodied and promoted were courage, selflessness and preaching equality.

Throughout April, Sikh Ontarians will be participating in various parades to celebrate the birth of the Khalsa and to promote the Sikh religion and values. As such, during these parades, Sikhs can be seen giving back to the community through the act of seva, which is selfless service.

One of these parades will be taking place at Nathan Phillips Square on April 28, and anyone, regardless of ethnicity or religion, is welcome to come visit, celebrate and learn more about the Sikh religion.

1020

Speaker, it is the time to seize this moment to celebrate Sikh Heritage Month with optimism and a commitment to building a brighter tomorrow, where we continue to embrace diversity and promote inclusivity and, together, we move forward towards a future where unity, understanding and respect for diversity prevail.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Intimate partner violence is an epidemic. Agencies that support women have long been

sounding the alarm. We have many local organizations that have been working to ensure women are safe and supported when leaving abusive situations, so that they and their children can be safe and have hope.

Luke's Place is based in Oshawa but has been reaching its arms and care wide to serve women and children across the province. Pamela Cross, who has long served as the legal director at Luke's Place, has been calling on all of us to take action.

Rates of violence have escalated, and women's ability to access justice is worse. We need investment into legal aid and legal supports for women, as many women fleeing abuse are not working with a lawyer. The province could fix it if it chooses to.

The YWCA in Oshawa gets ministry funding for 15 violence-against-women beds, but they have more than 15 beds that they have to fundraise to use. These beds are for women leaving in the middle of the night with a child under their arm, the clothes they're wearing, and hopefully some identification. There's growing need, and funding doesn't go as far as it used to. Also, women have to stay in those emergency shelter beds longer because they can't find safe housing, and that means those emergency beds are already full when another woman comes looking for safety. It is unimaginable that a woman fleeing for her life and the lives of her children might get turned away. We need funding for more women.

After the terrible murders of Carol Culleton, Anastasia Kuzyk and Nathalie Warmerdam, the Renfrew county coroner's inquest yielded 86 recommendations. I'm glad that the region of Durham resolved to adopt the number one recommendation and declared intimate partner violence an epidemic.

Today, again, we call on the province to show leadership and be clear in declaring intimate partner violence an epidemic in this province, for the women who live with fear and harm, and for the women who have been murdered in this epidemic of gender-based violence.

Women's lives have value, and this province has to do better.

ONE MILLION MEALS PETERBOROUGH

Mr. Dave Smith: This past weekend, I had the pleasure of taking part in an event that has been going on in my riding since 2008. The humanitarian group Kids Against Hunger held their annual One Million Meals Peterborough. Their original goal, back in 2008, was to make a million meals for those experiencing malnutrition. Volunteers each raised \$65 to help pay for the food that was packed.

We had ground soy—because it's higher in protein than meat—rice, a mix of ground vegetables and minerals and dehydrated vegetables. All the food was mixed together in a bag of about 400 grams. When you boil that with water for half an hour, it provides enough nutrition for six people for an entire day. And the genius of the process is that you don't need to start with potable water. By boiling the water for half an hour, that makes it potable.

Speaker, more than 330 people volunteered their time to pack these bags, and I'm proud to announce that, by the end of the day, we had filled enough bags that we surpassed 900,000 meals made since 2008.

I want to give a big shout-out to the Drain Brothers, who will be warehousing the food until it can be shipped where it's needed, and to EG Gray transport for shipping the cases of food to the port for us. Saturday's food is destined for Haiti to help in that humanitarian effort.

I really want to thank all of the volunteers who gave their time to make a difference for people they will never meet.

HEALTH CARE

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: Here are 10 outrageous things happening in our health care system under the Ford Conservative government:

(1) Some 2.2 million Ontarians are without primary care.

(2) Clinics charging an annual subscription fee simply to access primary care are growing.

(3) Hospitals are having to borrow money at high interest rates due to underfunding.

(4) Underfunding of hospitals has turned hallway health care into waiting room health care.

(5) Use of private agency nurses has exploded under this government's watch, costing the system significantly more than hiring directly.

(6) Private clinics are renting space in public hospitals and being paid more for the same services, like cataract surgeries, leaving taxpayers with a higher bill.

(7) The Ontario government owes \$6 billion in wages to the public sector, including health care workers, because their Bill 124 to cap wages was found unconstitutional.

(8) Over 280 emergency room closures in communities across Ontario due to underfunding, with people having to travel hours to access emergency care.

(9) Despite promises, still no coverage for take-home cancer treatments, leaving people to pay out of pocket if they don't have private insurance.

(10) Pharmacists are being pressured by corporate offices at companies like Shoppers Drug Mart to do unnecessary medication reviews, which has cost the system as high as \$1.4 million in one week.

Speaker, this government is delivering worse services at a higher cost, with questionable ethics. Are they so incompetent, or is this by design? Either way, Ontarians are getting a bad deal.

JOE BAXTER

Mr. John Yakabuski: This past Saturday, I had the pleasure to attend the 100th birthday celebration of Joe Baxter at Royal Canadian Legion Branch 406, Barry's Bay. I had the honour of bringing greetings to Joe, his family and the packed house, and to congratulate Joe on his amazing achievement. Joe then sang along as I treated

him to a couple of his favourite Irish songs, When Irish Eyes are Smiling and Danny Boy.

It was then Joe's turn to take the mike. I have known Joe for close to forty years. Joe has gravitas and draws a crowd wherever he goes. Well, he went on to educate and entertain the folks for 45 minutes. That's right: not four to five; 45 minutes. He treated us with stories and his memories of growing up on a farm near Ottawa and the challenges that it presented, but also how grateful he was to be raised in that environment. He spoke of when his father died young and how many of those responsibilities were passed on to him.

Joe then went on to work for the Bank of Canada, interrupting that career to serve overseas during the Second World War. Following the war, he returned to the Bank of Canada, retiring after 40 years, only to be asked to come back. Well, he worked for another 37 years, retiring permanently at the age of 93.

Joe is indeed a very remarkable man, blessed with a wonderful family and admired in his community. His vitality at 100 is hard to describe, but easy to admire. His energy makes us all feel young again.

The great Waylon Jennings once said that if we could all sing the way we wanted to, we would all sing like George Jones. Well, Speaker, if we can all live to be 100, I think we'd all like to live it like Joe.

OTTAWA FOOD BANK

M^{me} Lucille Collard: The Ottawa Food Bank is seeing new people every day. More and more food bank clients are employed people and families coming from two-parent households, blurring traditional poverty lines.

Cort Sarion's family have been clients of the Ottawa Food Bank. She said last week, "We are all equally teetering on the precipice of falling into one bad year, month or day away from ending up on the street, not one good year away from making millions."

Food insecurity in Ottawa has doubled, with a 68% increase in visits since 2019. Other food banks across Ontario have reported similar increases in visits. Food insecurity across the province is a direct result of the rising cost of living, and my community of Ottawa-Vanier is really struggling to keep up. Minimum wage in Ontario is \$16.55, but the minimum living wage in Ottawa is set at \$21.95. Are we really okay with knowingly paying less than what people need to survive?

As I reflected on the Ottawa Food Bank's 40th anniversary event, I was reminded of the importance of addressing food insecurity and implementing direct policy solutions. Before the Ottawa Food Bank reaches 80 years, let's support the hard-working families in Ottawa and beyond coping with the rising cost of living.

1030

DAVE SOPHA

Mr. Brian Riddell: Dave Sopha was a legend in Cambridge. Mr. Sopha was the creator of the world-renowned

Portraits of Honour, an oil painting that features the 158 Canadian soldiers, sailors and air crew who lost their lives in Afghanistan. It was a labour of love. Portraits of Honour, a 42-foot by 10-foot-high canvas, took more than 10,000 hours to create. In 2011, Mr. Sopha took his painting on a tour of 120 Canadian cities, where millions of people flocked to see what was quickly becoming a national treasure.

Dave Sopha was a household name in Cambridge. Following his death in 2021, his daughter Terri committed to carrying on her father's good work by continuing to operate the Portraits of Honour museum and the Portraits of Honour Foundation. Recently, the museum had to find a new home, and it was a challenging time for Terri before space was secured at the Preston Scout House, where her father's military artifacts and memorabilia are displayed.

JIM FLAHERTY

Mr. Lorne Coe: Today is the 10th anniversary of James Michael Flaherty's untimely death. He served in this Legislature as the MPP for Whitby–Ajax in several roles from 1995 to 2005, including Deputy Premier and Minister of Finance.

The Right Honourable Stephen Harper, Canada's former Prime Minister, said appointing Jim Flaherty in 2006 as finance minister was one of the most meaningful decisions ever for this country, as James steered the economy through the global recession of 2008-09 and worked hard to get the country on a sound financial footing in the years afterward.

Jim Flaherty entered public life to make sure that everyone, regardless of their abilities, had the chance to live happy lives of purpose and dignity. Inclusion in every respect was his ultimate goal. He and Christine Elliott were instrumental in creating the Abilities Centre, a fully accessible recreational and community facility in Whitby. The centre's mission is to enrich the quality of life for people of all ages and abilities.

We cannot know for certain how long we have here, nor the trials or misfortunes which test us along the way. We can learn from our mistakes and grow from our failures, and we can strive at all costs to make a better province so that someday, if we're blessed with the chance to look back at our time here, we know that we spent it well and that our fleeting presence has a lasting impact on the lives of others.

This is how James Michael Flaherty lived. That, Speaker, is his legacy.

REPORT, FINANCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICER

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I beg to inform the House that the following document was tabled: a report entitled 2022-23 Interprovincial Budget Comparison, from the Financial Accountability Office of Ontario.

MEMBERS' SEATING

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I also beg to inform the House that, pursuant to the authority granted to the Speaker under standing order 2, I am temporarily authorizing the members for Toronto–St. Paul's and Scarborough Southwest to switch seats in the chamber.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Hon. Graydon Smith: I think this is the first time I've been first; I'm usually last on the introductions. I want to welcome the members from the Ontario Federation of Trail Riders here today. I'm looking forward to meeting with them later today, and there's a reception tonight in 228. Let's welcome them to the House.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: I have a few introductions. I will try and get through them quickly. I would like to welcome folks here today for the debate on Bill 173: Erin Lee, the executive director of Lanark County Interval House and Community Support; Cait Alexander, who is a survivor of intimate partner violence; Kirsten Mercer, a lawyer who represented end violence against Renfrew county; OSSTF members Kelly Bevan and Tracey Marshall; the vice-president of OSSTF, Martha Hradowy; and all the way from Windsor, Fartumo Kusow, who is here—her daughter was killed by her intimate partner last year.

I also want to welcome Chief Mary Duckworth of Caldwell First Nation, Councillors Duckworth and Heil of Caldwell First Nation, former chief and councillor Larry Sault of Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation and Chief Claire Sault of Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady: I'd like to take a few seconds to introduce and recognize today's page captain, Emerson Ricker, who hails from Dunnville in my beautiful riding of Haldimand–Norfolk. Emerson attends Cairn Christian School. Welcome, Emerson, and I truly hope you enjoy your stay here at Queen's Park.

Ms. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta: Good morning. Before I introduce my visitors today, I'd like to beg the indulgence of the House for just a few seconds, because today is the most significant observance in the Muslim faith. After weeks of fasting and prayer, Muslim Canadian families in Mississauga and across Ontario are observing Eid. To all my Muslim Canadian friends, a very happy and joyous Eid Mubarak and Eid-Ul-Fitr.

Mr. Chris Glover: I want to welcome several people for the debate on intimate partner violence this afternoon: Alison Irons, the mother of Lindsay Wilson, who was killed in a murder-suicide in Bracebridge in April 2013; Dan and Michelle Jennings, parents of Caitlin Jennings, who was murdered in London, Ontario, in July 2023; as well as Emily McIntosh, Janice Jim and Amani Yagoub. Welcome to the House.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: An old friend from the town of Amherstburg from Red Cloud Securities, David Talbot. Welcome to the Ontario Legislative Assembly.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I'd like to welcome one of my staff members from Niagara Falls in my constituency office, Shannon Mitchell, who's here. Welcome to Queen's Park. Enjoy your day.

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: I would like to welcome my friends from Brampton: Abhishek Jain, Napinderpal Masaun, Puneet Sahi, Manu Mahajan, and a special guest from India, Updeep Singh. Welcome to Queen's Park.

MPP Jill Andrew: I would like to thank all those who participated in this morning's press conference on intimate partner violence. I would also like to thank community members from my home in St. Paul's: Barbara Captijn and her husband Joost, Habiba Haque and Keren Harvey, who will be joining along this afternoon for the debate.

Mr. Andrew Dowie: I wish a warm welcome to two of my constituents, Norm Mero and Dillon Mero, who are here in the members' gallery today.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Today we have folks from Oshawa for the debate on intimate partner violence. I want to welcome Karly Church from Victim Services of Durham Region, and Pamela Cross, legal director at Luke's Place in Oshawa.

Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos: I'd like to welcome, from my Oakville North–Burlington community, Alan Harrington, who volunteers with the Burlington Historical Society and the city's citizens heritage advisory committee. Welcome.

Mr. Joel Harden: I'm just adding to the list of our friends who are here for a very important debate this afternoon: Yamikani Msoa from the Ottawa Coalition to End Violence Against Women—very happy you're with us today, Yami.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): If I have the agreement of the House, I'd like to continue with introduction of visitors.

Ms. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta: I would like to welcome a large delegation we have here today from the Rwanda Community Abroad. They are here to commemorate the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda. We have Mr. Théophile Rwigimba, who is the chairman of RCA Toronto. We have John Rukumbura; William Deluce; Leo Kabalisa, president of Ibuka Canada. We have Zeff Gahamanyi, Alphonse-Marie Barikage and Antoinette Mugisha. Thank you very much and welcome to your House. Bienvenue chez vous.

1040

Ms. Catherine Fife: I'd like to welcome Jenna Mayne and Lillie Proksch from the Women's Crisis Services of Waterloo Region. They're here today for the intimate partner violence debate. And then Janice Jim, who is also a Waterloo constituent. Welcome to your House.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: On behalf of both Hamilton members here, we want to welcome to our House members from the Woman Abuse Working Group, Erin Griver, and from the YWCA, Daniela Giuliatti. I want to thank all of the agencies in Hamilton working around intimate partner violence. It's an important issue, and we really appreciate you coming here today to stand up—thank you.

Mr. Deepak Anand: It's always a pleasure when the people from our community from Peel region are here, including Abhishek Jain, Napinderpal, Puneet Sahi, Manu Mahajan and his guest from India, Updeep Singh. Welcome to Queen's Park.

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

QUESTION PERIOD

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Ms. Marit Stiles: Good morning. This question is for the Premier. Nearly 10 years ago, three women were tragically murdered in Renfrew county on the same day by the same man. Since then, hundreds of women have lost their lives to acts of intimate partner violence. The first recommendation from the coroner's inquest into the murders in Renfrew county was to formally declare intimate partner violence an epidemic. It's a simple yet very important and impactful step that this government has so far resisted.

My question is, will the Premier right this wrong and support the NDP's bill to declare intimate partner violence an epidemic in Ontario?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: I appreciate the question from the Leader of the Opposition. Indeed, the government and this caucus will be supporting the private member's bill that comes before the House later today.

In fact, we'll be going a step further. The Premier has asked that we seek the advice of the standing committee on justice to do an in-depth study on all of the aspects with respect to intimate partner violence: both the current programs that are available, some of the root causes of it, and how we can do better in the province of Ontario. So we will be seeking that advice from the standing committee on justice in the coming days, as well.

Applause.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: Premier, well, there's not many days when we do something like that, so I want to thank the government for agreeing today.

I think all of us here often feel like we have a great privilege in being able to speak for so many who have been more directly impacted, often, by things like intimate partner violence. I always say it's a privilege that we are able to be the ones to be here to advocate, and I do want to thank the government.

I am going to move on: I appreciate the government's commitment to creating a committee. I'd like the government to consider taking everything a little bit of a step further today. We are joined, as I mentioned earlier, by dozens of survivors, their supporters, their loved ones, and they are here because, frankly, this government has

ignored survivors for too long. This is the same government that cut millions in funding for the victims' compensation fund and they changed the eligibility rules so that it's even harder for survivors to get justice.

So I'd ask the minister and the Premier if they might consider explaining to the folks here today why they have taken that lifeline away and to, perhaps, restore it.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Again, I thank the Leader of the Opposition for the question. Look, there are a number of supports that have been put in place, but I think it is fair to say that, as we continue to hear more, we have to do even more in terms of responding to this. We have a very good program with respect to human trafficking that the member for Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock did, and then, in fact, all members of this House did. I think it is an example of what we can accomplish when we work together on this.

We will have the opportunity, should the justice committee seek to approve such a study, to do a very, very in-depth study and come back with recommendations on what supports are available, how can we do better.

We have heard across different ministries that this impacts different communities differently. I think the committee will have to go into all parts of the province and be given the tools and the resources that it needs to come back with recommendations that will ensure that we have all of the supports that are in place and that we continue to lead the nation in terms of how we respond. So we will do that, and we will work aggressively and quickly with the support of all colleagues to get action on this.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: While I appreciate that the government has agreed to pass the NDP's bill today to declare intimate partner violence an epidemic, and I am very grateful that we will have that done today, I have to stress to the government the urgency of this situation. Everywhere I travel in this province, everywhere I go, practically, I have the privilege of visiting organizations that are working with survivors of intimate partner violence. They are struggling. They are struggling deeply. I heard one emergency shelter tell me that they feel often like they're losing staff so fast because they haven't seen an increase in base funding in so long that they feel like they've just become a training ground for social workers and other organizations.

This is urgent. We need to increase that base funding right now. I would ask the government: Let's not push this over to another committee for another 10 years or 12 years; let's get this done today together.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Look, Mr. Speaker, I want to avoid today the temptation to talk about and try to defend all of the programs and services that we have brought forward. I think what we're hearing across the board is that more needs to be done; there need to be more targeted measures and approaches to this.

I think we have, as I said, a very, very good example in the province of Ontario. We literally lead the world when it comes to how we combat human trafficking, and we

have heard not only from members opposite and from members of this caucus but different ministers that there has to be a better coordination of how we approach this. I think a standing committee with the full backing of this entire House to go to all parts of this province, have the ability to call ministers in front of that committee, have the ability to call survivors and victims of this, have the ability to, in fact, call on federal ministers to also appear before that committee, do a very in-depth, thorough investigation to come up with reports that we can enact as quickly as we possibly can—because, look, I agree; this is a challenge that we're facing, another one of these challenges that we're facing.

But as I said, I want to avoid the temptation to talk about—there are many good things that have been done, but we can do better, we will do better and we will ask all parliamentarians to help us in coming forward with something that works not only for the province of Ontario but has been so effective when it comes to human trafficking, so that we can show the rest of Canada and that we can show the rest of the world how Ontario can lead and do a better job for all.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Ms. Marit Stiles: I have to urge the government to consider, please, reinstating the funding for the victims' compensation fund. The government changed the eligibility rules so that it's even harder for survivors to get justice. That fund gave survivors a way to pay for mental health supports or safe and supportive housing, but this government took that lifeline away. This is extremely important.

I also want to mention courts again. We were joined this morning by a survivor who had the case against the accused stayed because too much time had passed. We hear this over and over again. We would ask the government to please consider properly funding the courts so that victims, survivors can truly see justice.

1050

Will the government—and I know the government doesn't want us to be talking about all these issues today, but this is what it means to declare this an epidemic. It means that you have to now treat it like the epidemic that it is. So I would ask the government again to restore the funding to the victims' compensation fund and ensure that our courts are properly funded.

Interjections.

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

To respond, the government House leader.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Again, I know that the Attorney General has been seized with ensuring that we have the proper resources in our court system to address this and the other issues that we're facing in the criminal justice system.

But as I said, and I want to be very clear about this to the Leader of the Opposition and to colleagues on all sides of the House: Everything is on the table. We want to look

at every aspect of this so that we can come with a Team Ontario approach to how we deal with the challenges that are being faced. It could include issues with respect to the criminal justice legislation from the federal government. It could definitely include the supports that we already have in place. How do the courts deal with this? What are victims? What are the challenges that victims have faced in addressing some of the concerns? Are there obstacles? Are there roadblocks?

I would suggest that everything should be on the table. Should the committee accept this challenge, we will authorize them and provide them all the necessary resources that they need to travel the entire province, to go to other jurisdictions, if need be. We will do better, and we can accomplish that together, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary?

Ms. Marit Stiles: The Renfrew report gave us 86 recommendations; 68 of those are provincial jurisdiction. We don't need another study. We don't need another study. What we need is action from this government. Sixty-eight recommendations—30 women last year were killed in 30 weeks in this province; 58 women were killed in incidents of intimate partner violence.

There is no waiting around. There is no need for more studies. They have written you the recipe for getting close to fixing this. Will the government implement the 68 recommendations of the Renfrew report?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Again, I want to resist the temptation to outline and highlight all of the things that we are doing, because there are a number of things that we have done to implement many of the recommendations of the report. I know the ministers, along with the justice minister and the Solicitor General, have been working very, very hard, across government departments, to ensure that we have a whole-of-government approach.

But it is clear to us, Mr. Speaker, that more needs to be done and that we need greater advice, not only from parliamentarians on both sides of the chamber, but we need to hear from victims of this. We need to hear from subject matter experts. We need to hear from those who respond: What are the challenges that they are facing in helping to deal with this?

Everything is on the table. I don't know how much more clear I can be to the Leader of the Opposition. Everything is on the table. We want to build on the programs and services that we already have, but we also want to look at other jurisdictions to see what they're doing and how Ontario can not only copy good programs but be a leader, the way we have been in so many other ways. So we will get that job done.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: With the greatest of respect to the minister, we have seen this government use committees and opportunities like this to just stretch things out, and people do not have time for that right now.

I want to tell you that one of the issues I wanted to raise today as well is the major hurdle that so many who are escaping intimate partner violence experience. Without

access to funds, survivors are facing an often impossible choice of whether or not they flee violence with their children and risk that and take the risk of ending up homeless or living in poverty or living with endless uncertainty.

The government is, I think, going to maybe call another committee together. I would again urge the government to consider simply looking at the recommendations of the Renfrew inquest. We have had so many reports over so many years. The trauma that people experience is generational. I would ask the government again, consider what you are being told by the experts, the people living on the front line, the people working on the front line, and please don't spread this out anymore. Let's just get this done. Accept the Renfrew recommendations.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Again, Speaker, look, I thank the Leader of the Opposition for the questions. This is about ensuring that we move forward. I know that the ministers responsible, the ministers in co-operation—it's been a whole-of-government approach to how we deal with this so that we can be as effective as possible in dealing with concerns of not only victims but those who provide our services.

Let me be very, very clear: I have every faith that a parliamentary committee, given the resources that are required, will come forward with very valuable recommendations. We have seen this time and time again. We need not look any further than the extraordinary work that was done on human trafficking, led by the member for Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock but supported by all members. We have done such an amazing job on that, Mr. Speaker, that what Ontario has done has become a beacon of hope for jurisdictions around the world, and now we are going to do the same.

I trust parliamentarians to give this vigorous, vigorous study. If the committee agrees, we want to go into every part of this province. We want to go to other jurisdictions. We want to go across Canada. We want to ask our federal partners to participate in this. We will come back with a plan that works better, that improves on what we've already put in place and responds to the needs of victims and those who are helping victims.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: My question is to the Premier. I am incredibly disappointed to hear the government House leader talk about sending this to a committee. Nearly two years ago—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: How about you have some respect for the survivors and the parents who have lost children to intimate partner violence and listen to what I have to say? Almost two years ago, there was an inquest, and a jury said that the government needs to immediately declare intimate partner violence an epidemic. There were other recommendations that came from that that—for two years this government has done nothing.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: So the people on this side of the House and the people in the gallery today don't want you stalling anymore. So I appreciate that the government says that they're going to support Bill 173 and declare intimate partner violence an epidemic. But what I'm asking, not for me, but for the people in the gallery and the people watching at home, is don't send it to committee for another study because the inquest was clear on what needs to be done. Pass the legislation today. Pass it through third reading. Get it through royal assent, and give these people the dignity, the respect that they deserve for everything—

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

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'm going to ask the members to take their seats, and I will remind all members to make their comments through the Chair.

To reply for the government, the government House leader.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Look, again, there has been a tremendous amount of resources put forward, a whole-of-government approach to how we deal with this challenge. I know the ministers have been working on that and have continuously been improving systems. But we know that more needs to be done, and that is why we have agreed that we will pass this today. But at the same time, we want to seek the advice of a parliamentary committee to give us a better understanding of what additional supports are needed.

Now, we've heard this consistently. We've heard this from victims. We've heard it from members of the opposition that they have suggestions and that we can learn. That is what this parliamentary committee will do. I'm disappointed that the opposition is frustrated by that, but I am actually very encouraged by what a parliamentary committee, working together, can accomplish.

We will leave no stone unturned to improve on what we have already built in the province of Ontario. We will look at the justice system. We will look at the services that we provide victims. We will look at ways of making it easier for victims to get those services. We will look at laws or legislation that might be on the table with the federal government that might need to be changed. We'll look at other jurisdictions. We'll work quickly and effectively. And we will criss-cross not only the entire province, but we will go anywhere that we need to ensure that the people who have been victims of this and the people who provide those services get the care and the resources they need to address the—

Interjections.

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

1100

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: Again I will remind the government House leader: You've had almost two years to act on that one recommendation, among others, and you soundly rejected it. So there is no trust on this side of the House, or for survivors or for victims' families or for the advocates,

that you are going to move this bill through committee in a timely fashion. So again I ask that you immediately pass it today, pass it through third reading and give it royal assent, regardless of whether the Minister of Energy wants to heckle me, previously saying that it's not going to go do anything if it receives royal assent.

Speaker, the government rejected recommendation 4, which called on the creation of the role of a survivor advocate, and they rejected recommendation 5, to institute a provincial implementation committee dedicated to ensuring that the recommendations from the inquest are implemented and reported on. So I'm going to ask the government side: Why should survivors and their families and the service providers believe that you are not just going to send this bill to committee in the hopes that nothing actually comes out of it?

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

Government House leader.

Hon. Paul Calandra: To be clear, we are passing the bill through the committee, but simultaneously, we will be reaching out to committee and asking them to conclude or to begin the process of the very extensive study on all aspects of intimate partner violence, concurrent with the bill being in front of committee. We will have the ability to call the ministers in this government. We will have the ability to call victims in front of the committee. We'll have the ability to call providers of services, and we will criss-cross the entire province to find out what we can do better and how quickly we can enact some of those changes.

Look, I can sit here and highlight all of the great work that the ministers have done to address this, but I don't think today is the day for that. What we're going to do is we are going to engage all parliamentarians in an effort to replicate the great work that we did on human trafficking. I think members on both sides of the House will agree that what we accomplished on human trafficking is an example of Parliament working at its best. I believe that we can do the exact same thing here, and we will provide the resources necessary to do just that.

TAXATION

Mr. Matthew Rae: My question is to the Minister of Energy. We all know that the people of Ontario are struggling with the rising costs of food, fuel and everyday essential items because of the federal Liberal carbon tax. However, when Premiers of all political stripes—NDP, Liberal, PC—

Interjections.

Mr. Matthew Rae: The members opposite are saying no, but it's true, Speaker. Even the NDP Premier in Manitoba is against the federal Liberal carbon tax. The Prime Minister said that they were making "political hay" when they did that. I don't think our Prime Minister has ever lifted a bale of hay in his life.

When I speak to farmers in my riding of Perth—Wellington, I constantly hear about how the production—

Mr. John Fraser: Has the Premier lifted a bale of hay?

Mr. Matthew Rae: I have lifted plenty of bales of hay, sir. I grew up on a farm, and I am proud of that.

We know that the rising expenses for our hard-working farmers are only making food more expensive for all Ontarians. The federal government needs to act now and get rid of this regressive tax.

Speaker, can the minister please explain how the carbon tax is driving up the costs of everything for Ontarians, especially—

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

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I can tell the time. Thanks very much.

Minister of Energy.

Hon. Todd Smith: Thank you to the very robust member from Perth–Wellington, who comes from one of the largest agricultural communities in the entire province.

The carbon tax isn't just affecting energy bills; the cost is affecting everything that we purchase in the province and making life more unaffordable for the people of Ontario. That's why, under the leadership of Premier Ford, we've fought the federal carbon tax since 2018. It is causing, obviously, a tax on greenhouses where tomatoes are grown. It's putting a tax on the transportation to get those tomatoes to the grocery store. It's creating a tax at the grocery store, where they're paying the carbon tax. So, clearly, it is having a multiplying effect and driving up the cost of everything, and everybody seems to understand that across Canada except for federal Liberals and Ontario Liberals in this House.

We know the queen of the carbon tax, Bonnie Crombie, supports her federal cousins Justin Trudeau and Steven Guilbeault. We don't, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Matthew Rae: Thank you to the minister for that response. Last week, the Grain Farmers of Ontario said they were going to see an additional \$2.7 billion worth of expenses because of the federal Liberal carbon tax. For vegetable growers, they're looking at an additional \$90,000 per acre in carbon tax by 2030. That is more than three times what the current cost of farmland per acre is in Ontario.

Speaker, our farmers need our support, and that's why our government continues to fight this disastrous Liberal carbon tax every step of the way. But the queen of the carbon tax, Bonnie Crombie, has never seen a tax she does not like. To this date, the Liberals in this place still refuse to stand up against this carbon tax.

Can the minister please tell this House why Ontario families cannot afford this tax increase that Bonnie Crombie is planning for?

Hon. Todd Smith: I want to thank our Minister of Agriculture, who hosted an event along with the Premier last week with a number of different farming organizations, including the Grain Farmers of Ontario, to talk about the impact that the carbon tax is having. It's ironic, actually, that it's driving up the costs, but it's actually discouraging reducing emissions across the agriculture

sector, because many of these grain farmers and many other farmers want access to natural gas so they can move way from more-emitting fuels to this less-emitting natural gas.

Now, the federal Liberal government wants to slap the carbon tax on everybody, and they don't just want to slap it on now, which they did last week; they want to increase it by triple by the end of the decade, which is unheard of. It's going to make everything in our province unattainable and more expensive.

At the same time, the NDP in this House are opposed to Bill 165—which is going to make it impossible for natural gas to be extended to these same grain farmers who want to use it to drive down their emissions from higher-emitting fuels.

So there's only one party you can really trust when it comes to the energy system in Ontario, and that is Premier Doug Ford and our Ministry of Energy that's making life more affordable for the people of Ontario, in spite—

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

VIOLENCE FAMILIALE

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour le premier ministre. La violence commise par des partenaires intimes est malheureusement très présente dans le nord de l'Ontario. Le gouvernement a fermé la station de Police provinciale de l'Ontario à Gogama et à Foleyet. Les longs délais lors des appels à l'aide mettent les survivantes en grand danger.

Je suis heureuse que le gouvernement va appuyer le projet de loi néo-démocrate et déclarer la violence commise par des partenaires intimes une épidémie, mais est-ce que le gouvernement peut nous assurer qu'on aura des solutions mises en place dans les plus brefs délais pour aider les communautés francophones et les communautés du nord de l'Ontario?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: Again, I appreciate the question from the member opposite. Of course, we're going to work as quickly as we can. We understand the severity of the situation.

As I said, there is no point in us highlighting all of the extraordinary work that has been done already—I think there are a lot of things that we can be very proud of, but we have to do more, right? We've heard that loud and clear, that more has to be done. There needs to be more work done with respect to how it is impacting northern communities. We've heard from various other communities too that it is impacting them in different ways. We've heard, frankly, across the country, from our partners in other provinces, that more work needs to be done in co-operation with each other and, of course, the people who provide services to the victims have asked for better coordination.

So yes, absolutely, we will work quickly. We will do an extensive study. The committee can work as quickly as it possibly can, and we will provide it with the resources that it needs to get the job done properly and provide Parliament with recommendations that we can act upon as quickly as possible.

1110

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

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: First Nations policing is funded as a program, not as an essential service. Extra resources are needed to ensure women experiencing intimate partner violence on-reserve get the referrals to victim services they need. If First Nations policing were essential services, they wouldn't need to apply to get this kind of funding.

Speaker, will this government stop underfunding First Nations police support services?

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

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: I want to thank the member for the question. We take public safety all across Ontario very, very seriously. And as the federal government is considering making it an essential service, as the member opposite said, this is something that we will absolutely support. But in the meantime, as the member knows, as the Community Safety and Policing Act came into force just last week, First Nation police communities have the right to opt in, and we hope they do, so that we will continue to fund adequate policing services and to provide those monies for the communities that they need.

I take this responsibility very, very seriously. I take public safety across Ontario very seriously.

TAXATION

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: My question is for the Minister of Transportation. The carbon tax is hurting our economy and businesses. When I spoke with many families and business owners just last week in my great riding of Newmarket–Aurora, they were telling me that they feel that the federal Liberals are out of touch.

They are especially concerned about how the federal government is adding to the cost of living by increasing the carbon tax yet again. People in our province are already struggling with high interest rates and living expenses. The last thing they need is another tax hike. Unlike the opposition NDP and the independent Liberals, our government will not stop until the federal Liberals scrap the tax once and for all.

Can the minister please explain the impact the federal carbon tax is having on Ontario families and businesses?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Mr. Speaker, my colleague is absolutely right. In fact, last week, we joined farmers, truckers, small businesses owners and workers in urging the federal government to scrap the 23% increase to our carbon tax.

We know it makes life harder for businesses and families across this province. While those businesses and families are struggling, the federal Liberals continue to

pursue an increase to the federal carbon tax, and we know there are going to be more of these. But what's most surprising is that Bonnie Crombie and the provincial Liberals refuse to add their voice in asking the federal government to scrap the carbon tax.

We will always be supporting small business owners, truckers, and farmers in our fight to stand united against this carbon tax.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary?

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: Thank you to the minister for his response. Every day, the hard-working men and women in our trucking industry deliver the goods that we all rely upon. They play an essential role in keeping our hospitals equipped with the supplies they need and keeping the shelves stocked at our grocery stores. However, the carbon tax only makes it more expensive for our truckers to do their jobs. While the carbon tax queen, Bonnie Crombie, and her Liberal Party continue to ignore the concerns of our constituents, our government will always stand up for Ontarians. It's time to eliminate the tax now.

Can the minister please explain the impact the federal carbon tax is having on our trucking industry?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: The carbon tax makes it harder for truckers to deliver the goods that we all need. The unsung heroes of our economy, whether it was during the pandemic or every single day, they are the reason our store shelves are stocked, our pharmacies are stocked, materials are getting to places across this province.

But let's listen to the Ontario Trucking Association that says that the carbon tax raises the cost of deliveries by 6%. That doesn't even take into consideration the cost to truckers as they deliver these goods: \$15,000 to \$20,000 is what the carbon tax costs a long-haul truck driver in this province. That is \$15,000 to \$20,000 that could be going towards their families. That's \$15,000 to \$20,000 that could be going to them to make life more affordable and easier for themselves.

We continue to call on the federal government and our provincial Liberals to condemn this 23% hike because we need to support the drivers and the people of this province.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: My question is to the Premier. Eighteen months ago, I stood here—right here—demanding action on the Renfrew county recommendations. What did we get? Half measures and empty promises.

Since then, Niagara declared that intimate partner violence is an epidemic. Since then, Niagara's women's shelters, like Gillian's Place and Gateway, have had to turn away nearly 1,000 women for lack of space.

It's a disgrace, a complete disgrace. You've had a plan on your desk for two years and to agree to only now commit to another study is, frankly, not enough.

Minister: Boost the shelters. Commit to increase base funding, and give our survivors the resources and afford-

able housing they desperately need right now. Minister, if you're serious about inter-partner violence and you care about the survivors and respect them, when will you act on this and implement it?

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

The Minister of Children, Community and Social Services.

Hon. Michael Parsa: I thank the honourable member for the question, and I thank all the members here in this House. Mr. Speaker, through our government, I thank the leadership of Premier Ford.

We have made this very clear from day one: This is an issue that affects all communities across the province, one that requires action, which is why, in December, Minister Williams joined me in announcing Ontario-STANDS. Mr. Speaker, it was a statement to the province that we take this issue seriously and we backed that up by investment, working with the federal government.

I've said this throughout the entire time that I've been a minister at this ministry: No woman or girl in this province should ever have to live with the fear of violence or threat or exploitation. We will stand with them. We will make sure every single provider that's helping, in partnership with us across the province, will have a partner in our government. We will not let them down, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I'm wearing purple today in support of the very brave women who endure violent and often unseen crimes. There is no excuse for violence against women, ever.

The Violence Prevention Coordinating Council of Durham represents 35 local agencies and they have reported a significant increase in demand for assistance. These aren't numbers; these are women.

I'm pleased that Durham region, a year ago, adopted the number one recommendation of the Renfrew county inquest: to declare intimate partner violence an epidemic in this province. We're glad to hear that the province is going to, but I can't just say, "Thank you." I'm going to say that many women that Luke's Place resource centre supports and is working with don't have access to a lawyer. Legal aid could waive the eligibility requirements for victims of domestic violence. The province could put money into legal aid.

So we're going to ask for specifics: Will the government put money into legal aid to ensure women leaving abuse have the legal support that they need?

Hon. Michael Parsa: I thank the honourable member again for the question.

Mr. Speaker, through Ontario-STANDS, as I mentioned, when we work with the federal government, there are plenty of initiatives and supports in this statement and this action plan that the province has put forward.

The investments that we announced in December to all the partners on the ground—an additional \$18 million for the duration of this fiscal year. That investment will increase.

In budget 2024, an additional \$13.5 million was added to the support.

There's a lot of great work that's being done underground by service providers and partners. We want to make sure they have the resources to be able to provide those supports. That needs to be backed by investments. We passed legislation to make sure that happens so that people are protected, but that needs to be backed by investments. I thank the Premier for the commitment, and I thank the Minister of Finance.

1120

As I said, we will not let them down. We will make sure they have the supports they need on the ground to help every single person in every community.

GOVERNMENT APPOINTMENTS

Mr. Ted Hsu: Mr. Speaker, retired judges have warned this Premier to give up his agenda of taking away Lady Justice's blindfold and replacing it with blue-tinted glasses. Justice doesn't come from judges thinking like the Premier, but from judges believing they have a duty to follow the law and their conscience, and to serve the people.

For everyday disputes, people rely on Ontario's tribunals and expect to get a fair shake. The powers that be can't just do whatever they want. But under this government, experienced adjudicators appointed under the previous government were not reappointed, leaving many vacancies. The Landlord and Tenant Board, the Social Benefits Tribunal and the Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario lost 35% of their members by 2020.

Will the Premier admit that he is taking his time to find and appoint like-minded adjudicators for Ontario's tribunals?

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

Hon. Doug Downey: Not only are the tribunals independent, but so is the recruitment process.

I'm very proud of the fact that we have doubled the number of Landlord and Tenant Board adjudicators in the last little while.

It's unfortunate that the tremendous members that we have across the 15 tribunals under MAG are being slighted by the member opposite. They are professionals who are doing the work of the people of Ontario in an independent and fair manner, and it really is unfortunate that the member wouldn't celebrate that with us.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary.

Mr. Ted Hsu: Mr. Speaker, the Attorney General touts the large number of adjudicators now working at the LTB. But here's the story. They let the big tribunals lose a third of their experienced adjudicators by 2020, and backlogs grew. By last year, LTB backlogs had grown from 14,000, when they took power, to 53,000. So they had to react to a problem they created. The LTB has doubled the adjudicators it had when the Conservatives took power in 2018, but things have not improved. Big problems, double the pay-

roll—that will fix things, kind of like the Premier's own office.

Will the Premier acknowledge the grief and financial losses because landlords and tenants and victims of accidents, harassment and discrimination have had to wait too long? Will he admit that this can't happen again whenever the government changes?

Will he support Bill 179, the Fewer Backlogs and Less Partisan Tribunals Act and send it to committee?

Hon. Doug Downey: Just by way of an update for the member, who may not have been paying full attention, of the 15 tribunals, 13 have come back to balance after COVID. We are now hitting our targets in 13 of those 15 tribunals, and we are well on our way with the Landlord and Tenant Board, by putting in resources for administrators, for adjudicators, for back office assistants that the Liberals let go fallow. They were broken when we got here. We are fixing it. We are getting it done.

TAXATION

Mr. Ric Bresee: My question is for the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry.

Speaker, last week, when I was in my riding of Hastings–Lennox and Addington, I heard from so many constituents about how the federal Liberal carbon tax is simply making their lives unaffordable. Ontarians are already coping with high interest rates and a rising cost of living, and the last thing they need is another tax hike. With last week's hike, the Liberal carbon tax is now forcing Ontarians to pay 17.6 cents on every litre of gas. That's hundreds of dollars a year for an average household.

Unlike the Liberals and the NDP members across the aisle, who are still refusing to admit that the carbon tax costs all of us, our government will always speak up on behalf of Ontarians. The federal government needs to scrap this tax now.

Will the minister please tell this House how our government is keeping costs down for Ontarians while the members opposite continue to remain silent?

Hon. Graydon Smith: First, I want to thank the member for Hastings–Lennox and Addington for being a great PA for me for almost two years. He did an absolutely fantastic job, and I know the member for Newmarket–Aurora is going to do an equally fantastic job.

Speaker, we all know that when you go to work every day, you're paying the carbon tax in your vehicle driving on the road, but you're also paying it off the road too. We've got members of the Ontario Federation of Trail Riders here today that are supporting responsible trail use all throughout Ontario with off-road motorcycles. Every time you gas up that motorcycle now, you're paying a carbon tax. Every time you want to enjoy the great outdoors by riding your ATV, using a snowmobile, filling up your boat, you're paying a carbon tax.

It's almost like the federal Liberals and their Ontario cousins here do not want people to enjoy the great outdoors in Ontario, because they're taking away a little

bit of fun a little bit at a time with the carbon tax. It's time for them to end this carbon tax. It's time for them to support people getting out and enjoying the great outdoors in Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary?

Mr. Ric Bresee: Thank you to the minister for his response and for being a great leader for me for the last couple of years.

It's just not fair to punish the hard-working people in our province with this carbon tax. Life has only become more challenging for individuals and families in both rural and northern Ontario, who end up relying exclusively on their vehicles for transportation. They are being hit hardest at the gas pumps and at the grocery stores. And what's worse is that Bonnie Crombie, the queen of the carbon tax, and her Liberal cohort, want to keep on increasing your gas prices and bring back the cap-and-trade system. They're just like the federal Liberals, who take every opportunity to add more costs to Ontarians' bills. They've never met a tax they wouldn't raise.

Can the minister please explain what our government is doing to make life more affordable for the people of rural and northern Ontario and all across this province?

Hon. Graydon Smith: What we're doing is exactly what the Liberals aren't doing, which is supporting the people of Ontario every day—supporting them with the actions of the Minister of Finance and the Premier of Ontario, reducing the cost of gas in this province so people can get up in the morning, take their kids to school.

Let's think about the life of a northern Ontario person. They're going to get up in the morning. They're going to take their kid to school. They're going to fill up their truck and pay a bunch of carbon tax, go to the grocery store and pay a bunch of carbon tax on the food that got shipped there, go to work for a while, go home, pick those kids up again—all of this carbon tax baked into it. They're going to want to go out for a little bit of fun afterwards, maybe take the kids to the arena or get on that off-road vehicle and enjoy it—carbon tax, carbon tax, carbon tax.

Mr. Speaker, the madness has to stop. I know April 1 has come and gone, but it's never too late to do the right thing, as somebody once said, right on the other side of the aisle one time. Let's get rid of that carbon tax. Our friends across the aisle know that it's the wrong thing for Ontarians. Tell your—

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

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Mr. Joel Harden: My question is to the Premier.

Anne-Marie and Jasmine Ready were killed in their family home almost two years ago by a young man with a history of assault and sexual harassment. Their father, Raphael Ready, has now devoted his life to ending violence against women, and he wants this House to act on recommendations 32 and 33 of the Renfrew county inquest report so we can reach perpetrators of violence against

women and people who are likely perpetrators of violence against women.

Is the government committed to implementing those recommendations today?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The associate minister with responsibility for women's social and economic opportunity.

Hon. Charmaine A. Williams: I want to thank the member for the question, and I want to just commend that man for the work he's doing to make sure that the tragedies that have happened have not happened in vain.

I want to make it very clear that no woman should ever be subjected to violence. No woman should ever have to live in fear, be intimidated, and that's why I know we are working really hard in our government to put strategies in place to ensure that we're looking to community and organizations.

I want to encourage everybody to take a look at Ontario-STANDS. The minister responsible for community, children and social services—we went and brought this to Ontario, and we said, "We want to hear from you." Ontario-STANDS, in their second goal, calls for community organizations to bring us the proposals so that we can fund and close the gaps to keep women safe in Ontario. So, please, if community members don't know about it, share Ontario-STANDS, because we believe every woman has the right to be safe in Ontario.

1130

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): And the supplementary question? The member for Niagara Falls.

Mr. Wayne Gates: My question is to the Premier. Just last year, a Niagara woman, a first responder, was murdered in what police called an act of intimate partner violence. The family is devastated, navigating a broken and difficult system to find justice for their loved one who was so cruelly taken from this world. One of the most heartbreaking realities for a family is the knowledge that this type of violence is far too common.

Nearly 100 municipalities have declared IPV an epidemic, including Niagara. Will the government do the right thing today and support my colleague's bill to declare IPV an epidemic immediately? A study is not needed. The recommendations are clear. Declare it an epidemic today.

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

Hon. Michael Parsa: Again, I thank the honourable member for the question. As the government House leader indicated already, we are looking at passing this and, as he mentioned, taking it a step further to make sure all members of this committee have the opportunity to contribute to the solution. All partners, who are doing great work on the ground, are contributing to this. That is what our government has said from day one.

I have said this on many occasions: This is an issue that affects every single person in every community of our province. We need to work together, which is why we signed the national action plan, an agreement with the federal government for us to be able to work together, because this is not a partisan issue. We will work with municipalities.

We're working with all partners on the ground to make sure that we end violence against women in all its forms in every community, and we need your help. You need to come together. We need to work on this committee to make sure that we hear from survivors, that we hear from community partners.

We invest over \$250 million annually on violence-against-women initiatives, over \$10 million on preventative measures—

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

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

The next question.

GOVERNMENT SPENDING

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: This government insists on tightening the belt for everyone but themselves. They've cut the salaries of nurses and health care workers, teachers and education workers, even air ambulance drivers, but a quick look at the Premier's office, and you will see his budget has exploded. His staff are being paid \$6.9 million, the most expensive Premier's office in history—not just in total, but 48 staffers are earning more than \$100,000 every single year.

When this Premier was running for office, he said he'd be the one to stop the fat cats, to stop the gravy train, but he's worse than any of his predecessors. Spending \$6.9 million every year, the Premier is the most expensive Premier we've ever had, more than double any other Premier. When Ontarians face austerity, how will the Premier explain his runaway and self-serving expenses to the people of Ontario?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: It's really an ironic question coming from the member opposite, who was a member of a federal government who expanded the civil service by, what, 35%, and whose federal cousins' policies are literally devastating the community that she represents.

But do you know what we're going to do? We're going to go back to the people of the province of Ontario two years from now and we're going to say to them, "Look, we have put in place the climate that has seen over 700,000 jobs created in the province of Ontario." We've cut red tape. We're building subways, Mr. Speaker. We're building hospitals. We have got over \$30 billion worth of economic development and jobs created in the province of Ontario. Do you know why, Mr. Speaker? Because we're doing the work that is necessary to make Ontario the engine of the economy of the country.

Interjections.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Now, I know the Liberals opposite are hooting and hollering and screaming, because for them, what they like is when Canada and Ontario don't work—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'm going to ask the member for Ottawa South to come to order and the member for Mississauga Centre to come to order.

Supplementary question.

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: This government is wasting time and money by continually needing a do-over, implementing disastrous legislation only to repeal it months later—the greenbelt, urban boundaries, Bill 124 and now development charges.

Now, it's not a bad thing to reverse a bad decision, but you need to learn from your mistakes rather than continuing to follow an unintelligible ideology. "Measure twice, cut once" was my dad's advice.

Why is the Premier okay with wastefully burning through Ontarians' hard-earned tax dollars while expecting Ontarians to scrimp and save?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Well, let's be clear, Mr. Speaker: What we're doing is putting more money back in the pockets of the people of the province of Ontario. It is actually the Liberals who have said that they will reverse the tax cuts that we have made, right? The Liberal leader actually said that cutting taxes for people is a gimmick, that when we put more money back in the pockets of hard-working Ontarians, it's a gimmick—because what they want to do, again, is increase taxes for the people of the province of Ontario. They want to drive away jobs—because we know what the Liberal plan always is. It is to make people responsible to government. It is not to help people. They want people to rely exclusively on government.

What we want to do is build an economy where all Ontarians can thrive. We don't want a carbon tax. They do. We've cut gas taxes. They'll increase them. The taxes that we reduced, they want to increase. The very first job of the leader of the Liberal Party was to beg for a million dollars to—

Interjections.

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

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Ottawa South will come to order. The Minister of Energy will come to order.

The next question.

TAXATION

Ms. Laura Smith: My question is for the Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade. There are plenty of countries around this world who have proven you can take climate change seriously without an inflationary carbon tax. Unfortunately, Trudeau's Liberal government has chosen to implement a carbon tax that punishes the hard-working people of this province by driving up prices across the board. You don't fight climate change by taxing citizens until they can't afford to heat their homes, drive their cars and put food on their tables. Just look south of the border, where politicians of all political stripes are vehemently against the idea of a carbon tax.

Speaker, can the minister please highlight how, since we took office, we've strengthened our trade relationships with the US, who doesn't have a carbon tax?

Hon. Victor Fedeli: When we are in the US, companies tell us they cannot comprehend this carbon tax. They know any additional taxes are harmful.

Now, Ontario is the US's third-largest trading partner after Mexico and China: \$494 billion in two-way trade between Ontario and the US. That's up more than \$100 billion since we took office. But all the products that these companies buy from us are now more expensive because of this carbon tax. We are putting our trade at risk with our largest partner because of these rising prices. Mexico does not have a carbon tax. The US has alternatives than buying from Ontario. Scrap the tax.

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

Ms. Laura Smith: Thank you to the minister for his globe-trotting and tireless efforts for the people of Ontario.

The federal Liberal government always touts how well the US is doing on climate change, but what they don't mention is that the US does not have a carbon tax that raises the cost of everything.

The Trudeau Liberals continue to hike their carbon tax. All the while, their friend Bonnie Crombie says nothing. If the Liberals listened to the businesses and workers of this province, they would understand that no one supports their carbon tax. In 2019, they told everyone the carbon tax wouldn't increase, but it's now costing people an extra 18 cents a litre at the pump while it drives up the prices of everything.

Speaker, we know where the US stands on carbon tax, but can the minister talk about what Ontario's other trading partners think about the Liberals' carbon tax?

1140

Hon. Victor Fedeli: Speaker, companies always ask us to explain the federal government's carbon tax, and it is a difficult answer, because one in five jobs in Ontario depends on trade. Ontario has tariff-free markets in over 50 countries around the world. Adding a carbon tax is adding a cost to everything we sell globally. The federal Liberal carbon tax is putting companies' sales at risk. It's putting our economy at risk. It's putting Ontario jobs at risk.

Ontario—we've lowered taxes. We're showing the Liberals that there is a path. Scrap the tax today.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Ms. Catherine Fife: My question is to the Premier. I want to acknowledge that today is a very emotional day for many of us, including the survivors who are here with us today. I'm thinking of Latonya Anderson from Whitby, Angie Sweeney from Sault Ste. Marie and Argentina Fuentes from Mississauga. They lost their lives to intimate partner violence. Their families do not need to go through another retraumatizing committee work. We have the answers to address intimate partner violence. We need to apply them.

Money, Speaker—or, rather, lack of it—has always been a major hurdle for those trying to escape intimate partner violence and abuse. Poverty often keeps women and children in unsafe situations, and without access to supportive funds, survivors face the impossible choice of living under ever-present threats of death or fleeing into poverty, homelessness and endless uncertainty. That's why it's more urgent than ever that we fund and build supportive housing options.

To the Premier: Why was dedicated funding for supportive housing for victims of intimate partner violence left out of this year's budget again?

Interjections.

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

The Minister of Children, Community and Social Services.

Hon. Michael Parsa: I thank the honourable member for the question. Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned, through Ontario-STANDS, we have a proposal in place where in every single community, they can put forward proposals for support during the duration of the national action plan, of which we're in the second year now. That is backed by investments. As I mentioned to you, there are localized solutions that community partners are aware of. We want to hear from them. We want partners on the ground to come forward with ideas and submissions for us to be able to support. That is what the call for proposals is about.

We invested in our partners in the first year. In the second year, we are looking at working with them on localized supports—supports that in rural, northern communities might be different than it is in downtown Toronto. We want to hear from the partners on the ground. We're ready to work with them to make sure that we combat violence against women in all its forms, in every corner of this province.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Point of order: the member for Scarborough–Agincourt.

Mr. Aris Babikian: I would like to welcome the Tutsi community from Rwanda to Queen's Park, and also my good friend Leo Kabalisa, who are here to commemorate the 1994 genocide of Tutsis in Rwanda.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Brampton East.

Mr. Hardeep Singh Grewal: I just wanted to make a quick point of order. The Sikh Arts Council is holding a Sikh Heritage Month event on the front lawn. They've asked all members of this House that they're more than welcome to attend and join in the festivities, so that extends to all members that are in this House.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I gather another point of order? The member for Kitchener Centre.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I'd just like to welcome Women's Crisis Services of Waterloo Region, which is present in my riding.

And I want to say Eid Mubarak to all the Muslims all across Ontario who are celebrating today. I hope you have a peaceful celebration with your family, and good job with your fasting.

DEFERRED VOTES

KEEPING PEOPLE HOUSED ACT, 2024

LOI DE 2024 POUR QUE CHACUN PUISSE GARDER SON LOGEMENT

Deferred vote on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 170, An Act to amend the Residential Tenancies Act, 2006, the City of Toronto Act, 2006 and the Municipal Act, 2001 to implement various measures respecting rental accommodation / Projet de loi 170, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2006 sur la location à usage d'habitation, la Loi de 2006 sur la cité de Toronto et la Loi de 2001 sur les municipalités pour mettre en oeuvre diverses mesures relatives aux logements locatifs.

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

The division bells rang from 1145 to 1150.

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

On April 9, 2024, Ms. Clancy moved second reading of Bill 170, An Act to amend the Residential Tenancies Act, 2006, the City of Toronto Act, 2006 and the Municipal Act, 2001 to implement various measures respecting rental accommodation.

All those in favour, please rise and remain standing until recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Andrew, Jill	Gates, Wayne	Rakocevic, Tom
Armstrong, Teresa J.	Gélinas, France	Sattler, Peggy
Blais, Stephen	Glover, Chris	Schreiner, Mike
Bourgouin, Guy	Gretzky, Lisa	Shamji, Adil
Bowman, Stephanie	Harden, Joel	Shaw, Sandy
Brady, Bobbi Ann	Hsu, Ted	Stiles, Marit
Burch, Jeff	Karpoche, Bhutila	Tabuns, Peter
Clancy, Aislinn	Kernaghan, Terence	Taylor, Monique
Collard, Lucille	Mamakwa, Sol	Vanthof, John
Fife, Catherine	Mantha, Michael	Vaugeois, Lise
Fraser, John	McCrimmon, Karen	West, Jamie
French, Jennifer K.	Pasma, Chandra	Wong-Tam, Kristyn

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): All those opposed will please rise and remain standing until recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Anand, Deepak	Harris, Mike	Pirie, George
Babikian, Aris	Hogarth, Christine	Quinn, Nolan
Barnes, Patrice	Holland, Kevin	Rae, Matthew
Bresee, Ric	Jones, Sylvia	Rickford, Greg
Byers, Rick	Jones, Trevor	Riddell, Brian

Calandra, Paul	Jordan, John	Sandhu, Amarjot
Cho, Stan	Kanapathi, Logan	Sarkaria, Prabmeet Singh
Clark, Steve	Kerzner, Michael S.	Sarrazin, Stéphane
Coe, Lorne	Khanjin, Andrea	Saunderson, Brian
Crawford, Stephen	Kusendova-Bashta, Natalia	Scott, Laurie
Cuzzetto, Rudy	Leardi, Anthony	Smith, Dave
Dixon, Jess	Lecce, Stephen	Smith, Graydon
Dowie, Andrew	Lumsden, Neil	Smith, Laura
Downey, Doug	MacLeod, Lisa	Smith, Todd
Dunlop, Jill	Martin, Robin	Surma, Kinga
Fedeli, Victor	McCarthy, Todd J.	Tangri, Nina
Flack, Rob	McGregor, Graham	Thompson, Lisa M.
Ford, Michael D.	Mulroney, Caroline	Tibollo, Michael A.
Gallagher Murphy, Dawn	Pang, Billy	Triantafilopoulos, Effie J.
Ghamari, Goldie	Parsa, Michael	Wai, Daisy
Grewal, Hardeep Singh	Piccini, David	Williams, Charmaine A.
Hardeman, Ernie	Pierre, Natalie	Yakubuski, John

Flack, Rob	McGregor, Graham	Thompson, Lisa M.
Ford, Michael D.	Mulroney, Caroline	Tibollo, Michael A.
Gallagher Murphy, Dawn	Pang, Billy	Triantafilopoulos, Effie J.
Ghamari, Goldie	Parsa, Michael	Wai, Daisy
Grewal, Hardeep Singh	Piccini, David	Williams, Charmaine A.
Hardeman, Ernie	Pierre, Natalie	Yakubuski, John

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

Nays

Andrew, Jill	Gates, Wayne	Rakocevic, Tom
Armstrong, Teresa J.	Gélinas, France	Sattler, Peggy
Blais, Stephen	Glover, Chris	Schreiner, Mike
Bourgouin, Guy	Gretzky, Lisa	Shamji, Adil
Bowman, Stephanie	Harden, Joel	Shaw, Sandy
Brady, Bobbi Ann	Hsu, Ted	Stiles, Marit
Burch, Jeff	Karpoche, Bhutla	Tabuns, Peter
Clancy, Aislinn	Kernaghan, Terence	Taylor, Monique
Collard, Lucille	Mamakwa, Sol	Vanthof, John
Fife, Catherine	Mantha, Michael	Vaugeois, Lise
Fraser, John	McCrimmon, Karen	West, Jamie
French, Jennifer K.	Pasma, Chandra	Wong-Tam, Kristyn

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Trevor Day): The ayes are 36; the nays are 66.

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

Second reading negatived.

BUILDING A BETTER ONTARIO ACT (BUDGET MEASURES), 2024 LOI DE 2024 VISANT À BÂTIR UN ONTARIO MEILLEUR (MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES)

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

Bill 180, An Act to implement Budget measures and to enact and amend various statutes / Projet de loi 180, Loi visant à mettre en oeuvre les mesures budgétaires et à édicter et à modifier diverses lois.

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

The division bells rang from 1154 to 1155.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): On April 8, Mr. Bethlenfalvy moved second reading of Bill 180, An Act to implement Budget measures and to enact and amend various statutes.

On April 10, Mr. Leardi moved that the question be now put. All those in favour of the motion, please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Anand, Deepak	Harris, Mike	Pirie, George
Babikian, Aris	Hogarth, Christine	Quinn, Nolan
Barnes, Patrice	Holland, Kevin	Rae, Matthew
Bressee, Ric	Jones, Sylvia	Rickford, Greg
Byers, Rick	Jones, Trevor	Riddell, Brian
Calandra, Paul	Jordan, John	Sandhu, Amarjot
Cho, Stan	Kanapathi, Logan	Sarkaria, Prabmeet Singh
Clark, Steve	Kerzner, Michael S.	Sarrazin, Stéphane
Coe, Lorne	Khanjin, Andrea	Saunderson, Brian
Crawford, Stephen	Kusendova-Bashta, Natalia	Scott, Laurie
Cuzzetto, Rudy	Leardi, Anthony	Smith, Dave
Dixon, Jess	Lecce, Stephen	Smith, Graydon
Dowie, Andrew	Lumsden, Neil	Smith, Laura
Downey, Doug	MacLeod, Lisa	Smith, Todd
Dunlop, Jill	Martin, Robin	Surma, Kinga
Fedeli, Victor	McCarthy, Todd J.	Tangri, Nina

Ayes

Anand, Deepak	Harris, Mike	Pirie, George
Babikian, Aris	Hogarth, Christine	Quinn, Nolan
Barnes, Patrice	Holland, Kevin	Rae, Matthew
Bressee, Ric	Jones, Sylvia	Rickford, Greg
Byers, Rick	Jones, Trevor	Riddell, Brian
Calandra, Paul	Jordan, John	Sandhu, Amarjot
Cho, Stan	Kanapathi, Logan	Sarkaria, Prabmeet Singh
Clark, Steve	Kerzner, Michael S.	Sarrazin, Stéphane
Coe, Lorne	Khanjin, Andrea	Saunderson, Brian
Crawford, Stephen	Kusendova-Bashta, Natalia	Scott, Laurie
Cuzzetto, Rudy	Leardi, Anthony	Smith, Dave
Dixon, Jess	Lecce, Stephen	Smith, Graydon
Dowie, Andrew	Lumsden, Neil	Smith, Laura
Downey, Doug	MacLeod, Lisa	Smith, Todd
Dunlop, Jill	Martin, Robin	Surma, Kinga

Fedeli, Victor	McCarthy, Todd J.	Tangri, Nina
Flack, Rob	McGregor, Graham	Thompson, Lisa M.
Ford, Michael D.	Mulroney, Caroline	Tibollo, Michael A.
Gallagher Murphy, Dawn	Pang, Billy	Triantafilopoulos, Effie J.
Ghamari, Goldie	Parsa, Michael	Wai, Daisy
Grewal, Hardeep Singh	Piccini, David	Williams, Charmaine A.
Hardeman, Ernie	Pierre, Natalie	Yakabuski, John

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

Nays

Andrew, Jill	Gates, Wayne	Rakocevic, Tom
Armstrong, Teresa J.	Gélinas, France	Sattler, Peggy
Blais, Stephen	Glover, Chris	Schreiner, Mike
Bourgouin, Guy	Gretzky, Lisa	Shamji, Adil
Bowman, Stephanie	Harden, Joel	Shaw, Sandy
Brady, Bobbi Ann	Hsu, Ted	Stiles, Marit
Burch, Jeff	Karpoche, Bhutila	Tabuns, Peter
Clancy, Aislinn	Kernaghan, Terence	Taylor, Monique
Collard, Lucille	Mamakwa, Sol	Vanthof, John
Fife, Catherine	Mantha, Michael	Vaugeois, Lise
Fraser, John	McCrimmon, Karen	West, Jamie
French, Jennifer K.	Pasma, Chandra	Wong-Tam, Kristyn

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Trevor Day): The ayes are 66; the nays are 36.

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

Second reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Shall the bill be ordered for third reading?

I recognize the government House leader.

Hon. Paul Calandra: No, Speaker. I refer it to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The bill is therefore referred to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs.

This House stands in recess until 1 p.m.

The House recessed from 1203 to 1300.

INTRODUCTION OF GOVERNMENT BILLS

CUTTING RED TAPE TO BUILD MORE HOMES ACT, 2024 LOI DE 2024 POUR RÉDUIRE LES FORMALITÉS ADMINISTRATIVES AFIN DE CONSTRUIRE PLUS DE LOGEMENTS

Mr. Calandra moved first reading of the following bill:
Bill 185, An Act to amend various Acts / Projet de loi
185, Loi modifiant diverses lois.

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

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Would the Minister of Legislative Affairs care to briefly explain his bill?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Thank you very much, Speaker, I would. Let me just also thank the Associate Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing for the work that he has done on this bill as well.

This is, of course, a broader spring red-tape-reduction package. It continues on the government's very aggressive actions to remove red tape, cut costs for people and businesses, and it also is the next phase in targeted actions to help us get more homes built across the province of Ontario.

PETITIONS

MISSING PERSONS

Miss Monique Taylor: I have a petition that has been collected across the province and refers to over 100,000 signatures that have been collected in support of Bill 74, which is the missing persons alert. It comes on the unfortunate death of Draven Graham, a young boy with autism who went missing in his community and unfortunate circumstances left him to be gone too long and unfortunately perish; as well as the death of Shirley Love, who was a senior in the city of Hamilton who was missing with dementia.

Many organizations across the province are calling on this, as well as many municipalities, and they're asking that Bill 74, the missing persons alert, be called to committee immediately.

I wholeheartedly support this petition and will give it to page Nate to bring to the Clerk.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. Once again, I'll remind members that the standing order encourages members to make the summary of the petition as brief as possible.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Ms. Bhutila Karpoche: I have a petition here calling for the government to raise social assistance rates. Folks who are on social assistance, both Ontario Works and the Ontario Disability Support Program, are receiving amounts that are far below the poverty line. People who are on OW are receiving rates that have been frozen for over two decades, and those on ODSP have seen a very small increase to their rates and are still below the poverty line. This petition here is calling for the government to double OW and ODSP rates.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Mr. Ted Hsu: This is a petition from my constituents and the surrounding communities that calls on the government to reduce the clawback on ODSP recipients who have an income-earning partner. This is about people who are poor, who are living near the poverty line. A really

easy way to help them: Don't penalize them for having a partner who has income.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Miss Monique Taylor: Interestingly enough, I will join the other voices that have already begun today to talk about social assistance rates, as this petition does, and I want to once again thank Dr. Sally Palmer, who has literally put in years of work on this petition and continues to send them in to us, to all members, in hopes that they will read them, to know the importance of poverty, the legislated poverty that people in this province who are on social assistance are living in.

People on Ontario Works have not seen a raise in decades; they're living on a mere, measly \$733. We know that this cannot even pay for the cost of housing. People on ODSP have seen very meagre increases, but again, not enough to be able to even pay the rent and to be able to buy a meal at the end of the day. So I wholeheartedly support their petition to double the social assistance rates for both Ontario Works and ODSP, and hope that the government sees fit to do so also, with all of the hard work that has been put into ensuring that this petition is on each and every one of our desks, that we're able to read.

I support this petition. I'm going to affix my name to it and give it to page Lyra to bring to the Clerk.

TENANT PROTECTION

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: I have a petition here that is signed by my constituents from Parkdale–High Park, and it calls for the government of Ontario to bring back rent control on units in buildings that were built after November 2018.

The rent control laws did exist for all units, but under the current Conservative government, that was cancelled, and so a lot of tenants in my riding and across Ontario are currently living in apartment rental buildings that are not covered under rent control. As a result, they're seeing, year after year, their rents increase by double digits for absolutely no reason other than that the landlord can simply do it.

This is causing, of course, a tremendous amount of stress. It is a highly precarious situation for a lot of people in terms of their housing because how much rent can increase by is unpredictable. And so, in this petition, the residents are calling on the government to pass a bill that I've tabled in the House called "rent control for all units," and I fully support and will affix my signature to this petition.

NURSES

Miss Monique Taylor: I have before me a petition that has been sent in from the RNAO, which is the Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario, and would truly like to thank them for all of their hard work and dedication, not

just for this petition but for the thousands of hours that they put into keeping our community healthy.

This petition is specifically asking for the government to implement evidence-based recommendations to retain and recruit nurses, to ensure that there are enough nurses on the floor to be able to work those long hours, those long, stressful hours, and that they have the appropriate pay to go with it, because we know that they've been held back for years. Hopefully, they're starting to see the payback of Bill 124 in ensuring that those lost wages are recouped, but it's still not enough. We need to have a better position and program in ensuring that we're retaining and recruiting into fair and equitable compensation for the nurses of Ontario.

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

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Can we stop the clock for a second, please?

So we're in petitions. As members know, the standing orders were recently amended, and just for the benefit of the House, I'm going to, once again, remind members of the standing order: "A member may present a petition in the House during the afternoon routine 'petitions'. The member may make a brief statement summarizing the contents of the petition and indicating the number of signatures attached thereto," but shall not read the text of the petition.

No member so far has read the text of the petition. I appreciate that. I would continue to ask members to keep their explanations of the petition as brief as possible.

Start the clock. Petitions?

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: I have a petition here signed by many residents from Parkdale–High Park. They are calling on the government to pass a bill that is entitled Making Psychotherapy Services Tax-Free Act, 2023.

1310

Speaker, health care services are exempt from the HST—including many health care services; however, psychotherapists are still required to charge HST. It makes no sense, for such an important health care service like psychotherapy, that Ontarians should be taxed on it. So this petition simply asks that the government of Ontario take that first step in removing the HST.

TAXATION

Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady: Speaker, I have several names here on a petition that calls on the government to provide relief to families from the federal carbon tax. The petition asks for the government to stop collecting the carbon tax on home heating by following Saskatchewan Premier Scott Moe's lead.

I fully support this petition and thank all those who signed it. I will affix my name to it and send it to the table with page Jerome.

ONTARIO PLACE

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: I have a petition here entitled “Save Ontario Place,” again, signed by residents of Parkdale–High Park and, of course, supported by residents from across the province, not just in Toronto.

Speaker, this petition basically calls on the government to halt any further redevelopment plans when it comes to Ontario Place. It also calls on the government to engage in meaningful public consultation, which has not been done for the current redevelopment plan, and to conduct a comprehensive, sustainable environmental assessment for Ontario Place, and for it to be carried out in a manner that values public space, that has proper oversight and public input, and that respects the democratic process.

I fully support this petition.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE OF ONTARIO AMENDMENT ACT, 2024

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

Mr. Leardi, on behalf of Ms. Thompson, moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill 155, An Act to amend the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario Act / Projet de loi 155, Loi modifiant la Loi sur l’Institut de recherche agricole de l’Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Would the member for Essex care to lead off the debate?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: This afternoon, I will be sharing my time with the MPP from Lanark–Frontenac–Kingston and the Minister of Agriculture.

This will be the first time that I address the assembly as the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Agriculture. As I said this morning, I don’t think we take enough opportunities in the assembly to recognize the talents of the members who serve here. So, before I start off, I would like to recognize the Minister of Agriculture. She’s a graduate of the University of Guelph, an alumnus of the Advanced Agricultural Leadership Program, an alumnus of the George Morris executive leadership program, a former chair of the Ontario 4-H Foundation, a former vice-chair of Ontario Agri-Food Education Inc., and a former general manager of the Ontario Dairy Goat Co-operative. Based on these achievements in agriculture and based on her former role as the general manager of the Ontario Dairy Goat Co-operative, you might say she’s the greatest of all time.

I want to take this moment now to recognize the contributions of the two previous parliamentary assistants to myself in this role. First, my neighbour here, the member from Chatham–Kent–Leamington—not only my close seatmate, but also my geographical neighbour—is a former OPP officer, a former agricultural executive, a former town councillor, and a model father and husband. I’m proud to call him my friend.

I’d also like to recognize the MPP from Elgin–Middlesex–London, now the Associate Minister of Housing, who started his career at Masterfeeds. He worked his way up and became the president and CEO in 1993. He won the golden award from the Animal Nutrition Association of Canada. He served with the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair board and the Canadian Hereford Association, and he’s the owner and operator of Flack Farms. I’m proud to call him my friend.

And I’m lucky to share my responsibilities with another parliamentary assistant in the Ministry of Agriculture. He’s the honourable member from Lanark–Frontenac–Kingston, born and raised in Lanark county, where he and his family still own and operate a small farm in the beautiful Montague township. I’m happy to call him my friend.

What you’ve noticed, after hearing about all of these individuals, is that they all seem to be a natural fit in agriculture, these folks: the members from Chatham–Kent–Leamington and Lanark–Frontenac–Kingston and the gentleman who owns Flack Farms and the Minister of Agriculture. You might be asking yourself, well, they seem to be a natural fit, but the member from Essex, who has a background in 24 years of law and previous to that being a teacher, doesn’t seem to be a natural fit, so how did the member from Essex find himself to become the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Agriculture? Well, this is how it happens, and it all started on the second concession of Anderton township, where I grew up.

My parents owned a big one-acre lot on the second concession, and at the back of that one-acre lot, we had an old shed that my dad had built with his own hands. Every springtime, my dad would go into the shed and pull out the old rototiller. For those of you who don’t know what that is, it’s a rototiller; it has wheels on the back and a mechanism on the front, like a pair of claws, that grabs the dirt and tills the dirt, turns up the dirt. And that old rototiller was as big as a dinosaur and was probably that old, too. My dad would put gas into that rototiller, and then he would start it up and it would roar to life. He would take the rototiller to the back of the lot and he would turn up the soil—I think about a sixth of the lot.

My parents would plant a huge garden, and my parents’ garden had everything in it. It had corn and tomatoes and peppers and onions and garlic, but mostly we grew tomatoes. But my dad always reserved a spot for me and my pumpkin patch. As a child, I would take my little pack of seeds which I had saved from the previous year, and I would dig a hole just like my dad taught me and I would put the seeds in a circle, just like my dad taught me, and I would cover it up and water it, and then I would wait for

the miracle to happen. I didn't understand it fully back then, but I think I understand it better now: that if a seed does not fall to the ground and die, then it remains a seed, but if a seed falls to the ground and dies, it brings new life.

Over the course of the summertime, my pumpkin plants would sprout, grow and bear fruit. And the pumpkins would appear. They would be green and then they would ripen and ripen into orange, and the oranger they got, the happier I would be until the end of the summertime when I would find my little wooden wagon, pull it out of its storage and take my little wooden wagon and bring it to the back of our lot. I would pick up my pumpkins and put them into my little wooden wagon and then carry the pumpkins to the front lawn where I hosed them off with a garden hose. And then I arranged them from the largest to the smallest and put them up for sale. I would call my friends and relatives to come to buy my pumpkins for harvest and for Halloween. And that, Speaker, was a child's introduction to the business of agriculture, and that brings me to the importance of today's bill.

You see, the bill that's before us today is Bill 155, the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario Amendment Act. That's a mouthful, and given that it's a bill about agriculture, it should be a mouthful.

1320

The function of this bill is to update the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario, which it does, update what it does, because agriculture isn't what it was 50 years ago or even just a short while ago, when I was a child. It's very impressive, the amount of research and the innovation that goes into agriculture in Ontario today. I'm going to illustrate my point by talking about one incredible and impressive operation that's located right in my riding, the riding of Essex.

You might know a few things about the riding of Essex: We have 20 wineries. We produce great wine. We have craft breweries. We produce great brew. We have craft whisky. We produce tons and tons of cucumbers and tomatoes. We produce grains: corn, soybean, wheat. We have a great organization called Upper Canada Growers. Upper Canada Growers is owned and operated by the Haynes family. The Haynes family came to Upper Canada in 1784—and I could tell a long story about that, but today, I'm just going to stick with agriculture.

The Haynes family started growing fruit and grapes, and they've been in agriculture and production for over 200 years. Today, the operation is run by Robert Haynes, his daughter Megan Haynes and his son Jason Haynes.

Upper Canada Growers doesn't just produce fruit; they do much more than that. They actually grow 80%, or approximately 80%, of all of the fruit trees that are in Canada. You have to visit their operation to really appreciate what they do. If you're lucky, you'll get to see the laboratory. Inside this climate-controlled, highly protected area, they are producing disease-free and disease-resistant fruit trees. The product of Upper Canada Growers is in high demand because they are recognized for their excellent product, produced right here in Ontario.

But of course, they cannot rely merely on one stock of trees, because diseases mutate, and a disease will mutate and find a new way of attacking fruit and fruit trees. So Upper Canada Growers has to stay on top of all this. They're supplying 80% of all of the fruit trees in Canada, and they have a reputation to uphold. So this is a highly scientific and technical operation.

They bring in scientific talent from all over the world. When I visited their operation, I met one scientist from Iran, another scientist from India, another scientist from Egypt. These people came from all over the world, and they're all working on a quiet, rural back road in Essex county, Ontario, and helping supply Canada and the world with the most nutritious and safest food in all the world.

And that's what we're known for, Madam Speaker: Good things grow in Ontario. We live in Foodland Ontario, and Foodland Ontario means the most nutritious food in the world and the safest food supply chain in the world. That's why, when you go to a grocery store and you see the Foodland Ontario label, you know it's nutritious and you know it's safe. You don't have to think twice about where your food is coming from or whether it's good for your family. You know it's good for your family if it comes from Ontario. You know it's good for your family if it bears the Foodland Ontario symbol, because Ontario produces the best.

And that's why we need the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario. That's why we need to keep researching and innovating and experimenting and sharing our knowledge with fruit producers and food producers in the province of Ontario: because when we do that, we continue to guarantee that people in Ontario and in all of Canada and even in the rest of the world will continue receiving the most nutritious food and the safest food in all the world.

Let me give you another example from my riding. We have marvellous greenhouse growers in Essex county. One of those greenhouse growers is Cielo Vista Farms. At Cielo Vista Farms, they are inventing new ways of harvesting high-quality and highly nutritious plant products. In partnership with Nature Fresh Farms, they're now getting into the strawberry business.

Now, you might think, "Isn't the strawberry business dominated by California? Doesn't California produce just about everything that's consumed in North America when it comes to berries?" Well, you know what? You might think that nobody can compete with California, but now, Ontario is competing with California for the strawberry business.

Let me read the latest news about strawberries in Ontario. I promise you, this is going to be a "berry" interesting story. I don't know if other members of the House will be able to judge this the way my excellent colleague the member from Chatham-Kent-Leamington could do so because of his remarkable experience in the industry. But if anybody has any doubts, I encourage them to please ask my colleague from Chatham-Kent-Leamington about the remarkable strawberry growth happening in Ontario. He'll be happy to share it with you.

Here's the latest news: "Nature Fresh Farms is moving forward in expanding its commodities into the berry category with more acreage dedicated to a strawberry program. With help from its long-standing growing partner Cielo Vista, the greenhouse grower will be expanding its strawberry farm from one to 16 acres, planned to be completed this fall.

"With strawberries being one of the top fruit imports in Canada, the expansion would help reduce food miles through increased local production, shortening transportation routes and offering quality product. This is an opportunity to drive this rapidly expanding category by delivering consistently flavourful, high-quality berries to North American markets that were previously out of reach due to lengthy food mile barriers.

"Nature Fresh Farms continues to focus on research and development, discovering new products and opportunities that support its commitment to sustainability while delivering quality produce to customers throughout the year. Its main objective of all its trial programs, including the strawberry program, is to learn how to grow more consistent and flavorful product."

That is great news for all of us. It's great news for us in Foodland Ontario. So I say: Let's keep innovating. Let's keep researching. Let's keep producing nutritious food from the safest supply chain in the entire world. That is what this bill is all about. It's all happening now. It's happening now here in Ontario. It's happening in Foodland Ontario, the place where we produce the most nutritious food in the world with the safest food supply chain in the world.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further debate?

Mr. John Jordan: Thank you to the member from Essex for sharing his time and sharing his youth with us—much appreciated. I'm honoured, as well, to stand here for the first time as the PA to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs to speak in support of Bill 155, the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario Amendment Act.

The Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario—ARIO—the University of Guelph and OMAFRA work together to oversee 14 research stations across Ontario. These stations play a valuable role in building and strengthening our agricultural industry. The research is around aquaculture, equine, poultry, swine, horticulture, beef production, dairy production, field crops, sheep.

One example is the Ontario Dairy Research Centre, where research has been conducted on better pain management for young dairy calves. This and other research leads to improved calf health, overall better herd health and productivity. One close to my riding is in Winchester; my colleague and friend from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry's riding, it is in his riding—another PA who has a new position with the Minister of Health. I think we'd all agree he's been thrown into the fire and doing a great job, so thanks to that member.

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I want to take a moment to acknowledge that, in 2019, our government opened this new facility in Winchester, the Winchester research station, which allows for greater research into soil and water quality, climate change, nutrient availability and weed control. The scientific research that is being done into agriculture and food production across all 14 ARIO sites leads to discoveries that strengthen our supply of healthy, safe food and provides Ontario farmers and businesses with the information they need.

During the hearing at the Standing Committee on the Interior, various presenters spoke about the importance and impacts of the agricultural research taking place at these research stations. I want to spend some time sharing what the presenters told the committee.

Brian Lewis is a chicken farmer from Denfield, north of London, and a board member of the Chicken Farmers of Ontario. He says, "ARIO plays a critical role in supporting livestock research that advances farm practices for farmers in Ontario, Canada and beyond. All Canadian chicken farmers follow ... on-farm food safety and animal care programs. These standards are based on the best available science and research, and the chicken industry is continuously looking to improve animal welfare, food safety, biosecurity and efficiency in farm practices."

He went on to say, "ARIO's oversight in Ontario research programs, innovation, infrastructure and promotion is critical to supporting the chicken industry's advancement, helping us to meet the evolving demands of Ontario's consumers. To advance research and innovation priorities, the Ontario poultry industry requires in-barn research facilities that are modern and aligned with today's strict on-farm infrastructure and production standards.

"That's why Chicken Farmers of Ontario applauds the Ontario government for continuing to support Ontario's agriculture and agri-food sector with the announced Grow Ontario Strategy. The Grow Ontario Strategy sets an ambitious and necessary goal to build and maintain world-class research infrastructure, including the announced poultry research centre.

"In April of 2023, Chicken Farmers of Ontario, along with our other board members—the Egg Farmers of Ontario, Turkey Farmers of Ontario and the Ontario Broiler Hatching Egg and Chick Commission—formalized an agreement with the Ontario government through ARIO and the University of Guelph to build a new poultry research centre. Following the establishment of" a memorandum of understanding, "Ontario's four feather boards and ARIO began work on the planning and design of the new Ontario Poultry Research Centre in Elora. This research barn will not only support risk management and disease prevention but will also provide opportunities to improve on-farm efficiencies, enhance sustainable practices and introduce new, innovative technologies to Ontario's farmers." This is particularly relevant right now after Ontario has seen cases of avian influenza over the past couple of years.

Tom Heeman, a berry farmer and research chair of the Berry Growers of Ontario, came from his farm just east of London and told the committee: “I believe that we’re at a very pivotal moment today in agriculture. We’re at the precipice of a number of new emerging technologies. I think it’s important to highlight that ARIO is the very foundation upon which all innovation and research is conducted in this province.”

Later in his remarks, Tom went on to explain: “When I talked about this being a pivotal moment, we’re looking at emerging technologies such as autonomous vehicles, electronic tractors, drones, all those things that, through OMAFRA and private sector partnerships, are being” developed and tested “not only on growers’ fields but also on ARIO sites.

“An additional area of investigation is mRNA vaccines applied to pest-control, so you have highly, highly selective genetic mechanisms to silence pests, with almost no environmental impact. That’s work that is being done at Guelph and at ARIO facilities.”

Dr. Shayan Sharif, who is a professor at the Ontario Veterinary College and associate vice president of research at the University of Guelph, explained how research has improved agricultural output in Ontario:

“Let’s put this into some plain terms: The average dairy cow is producing three times more milk now than 50 years ago. The advances to make production more efficient are because of research—research into breeding, feeding, genetics, welfare and animal health.

“Another example is that major agricultural crops are now 50% more productive, meaning higher yields and more Ontario-grown food for everyone in Ontario and for export.

“That, too, is because of research—breeding research to develop new, better-performing varieties of crops like wheat, corn and soybeans, with higher yields and better traits, like disease and pest resistance.”

The agricultural research happening across Ontario is good for farmers, it is good for consumers and it is good for our society as a whole.

Later on during the question-and-answer part of the hearing, the doctor gave an interesting example. He told us, “One of my other colleagues, Dr. Christine Baes, is working on creating better solutions for genetic selection of dairy cows to produce less methane.

“My colleague here, my counterpart, who is talking about methane production and so forth—it’s still in the primordial stages of development, but I can tell you that within the next few years, we are going to see a made-in-Ontario, made-in-Canada solution that would be in the form of dairy cows that have less methane production.

“I think without ARIO facilities, this would not be ever possible.”

I’ve been learning more about the research happening at the various ARIO research stations and elsewhere across the province, and it is fascinating. It is an interesting ministry. This Friday, I’m planning to visit the Earlton Farm Show in the riding of the member of Timiskaming–

Cochrane, and while I’m in the area I am planning to visit the SPUD unit to learn about the work that they do.

We have spoken a great deal about research and modernizing the definition of it in the proposed changes to the ARIO Act. Another important aspect of our proposed changes is about governance structure. The ARIO Act was created many years before directives governing provincial agencies were developed; I believe it first came in 1962. The current governance structure allows for well-considered financial and property decisions that enable the agency to provide long-term funding for agricultural research. The governance structure also addresses immediate or short-term financial and property needs and investments.

Several updates to the governance structure of the ARIO are being proposed in the modernization of the ARIO Act. These are updates that are just good governance and bring the ARIO up to speed with the governance and public appointment requirements that exist today and didn’t exist in 1962. Examples include:

The managing director would be appointed by the Public Service Commission under part 3 of the Public Service of Ontario Act, 2006, and not by the minister, as is the current case.

The board of directors’ composition would be clarified such that the minimum number of appointees would be seven and the maximum 15. Currently there is no minimum stipulated.

The crown agency status of the agency would be clearly specified, and the amended act would address matters such as liability and corporate governance.

The proposed updates would also include clear rules for making of bylaws, including financial bylaws, and set out the requirements for borrowing, temporary investment of funds and financial risk management activities undertaken by ARIO. Further bylaws pertaining to borrowing, temporary investing or managing financial risk would be approved by both the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs and the Minister of Finance.

Put simply, the proposed changes would address current and future operational needs and streamline processes.

Consultations: The minister has informed me of the rigorous process of consultation with stakeholders and the ARIO board members that has taken place to gain their insights into current and future needs. Their insights directly shaped the proposed changes, and we appreciate everyone’s time and commitment in collaborating with us on this work.

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There was strong interest among stakeholders in seeing the legislation modernized and made more relevant going forward. And as was seen at committee, the stakeholder response to this proposed bill was very positive. The ministry incorporated stakeholders’ feedback into proposed amendments to the legislation. We are also incorporating those ideas into the ARIO strategic plan, the ARIO infrastructure plan, and even into the agency’s memorandum of understanding.

The Grow Ontario Strategy: All of this work is in support of growing our agriculture and food industry and achieving the ambitious goals of the Grow Ontario Strategy—goals like increasing the production and consumption of Ontario-grown food by 30% by 2032, and increasing Ontario’s agri-food exports by 8% annually.

I’m going to share one last quote. This one is from Jennifer Doelman, a farmer from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke and a member of the board of ARIO. Jennifer told the committee, “Modernization of the act will broaden the mandate of ARIO to allow the agency to build and maintain world-class agri-food research facilities, develop innovative technologies and ensure the translation and transfer of research into practical solutions for Ontario farmers. Those actions are reflected in the government’s Grow Ontario strategy, which outlines a vision for increasing agri-food innovation and adoption, and the ARIO plays a key role.”

Living in a farming community and operating a small farm—by the way, I don’t necessarily call myself a farmer; just a guy who farms, because the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane has that experience of relying on farming, and I have not—I’m proud to be part of an agency that strengthens the agri-food sector and that is taking action to be a world leader in agri-food research and innovation. And the changes that we’re proposing will accomplish that.

That is a great note to wrap up on.

As has been said during second reading and at committee, the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs and her ministry did their homework before proposing Bill 155. As a result, I understand that no one spoke against this bill in committee, and the clause-by-clause hearing at the committee of the interior took a total of four minutes, thanks to the great work of the minister and the ministry staff.

I appreciate the opportunity to speak to Bill 155, and I am proud to speak in support of this bill.

Also, in closing, I’d just like to identify a few of the sites that are available, and to give you a perspective that it is across Ontario that these research centres exist—just a few examples: Cedar Springs, where they do horticulture research; Huron, another field crops research station in the south end of Guelph; Ridgetown, with more field crops research. Like I said before, there’s horticulture, beef, sheep—all kinds of research being done, and all to improve agriculture in Ontario.

With that, Speaker, I’ll turn it over to the great Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): I recognize the Minister of Agriculture.

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: It’s my pleasure to rise today and join two amazing parliamentary assistants who have jumped right in because they understand the importance of Ontario’s agri-food industry, not only throughout the province, but across Canada and North America and around the world.

Before I get really deep into my remarks, I’d be remiss if I didn’t give a shout-out to the amazing member from

Chatham-Kent–Leamington as well as the Associate Minister of Housing. I want to share my appreciation and actually give virtual hugs to both of them for the amazing work that they have done, proudly carrying on the responsibilities bestowed to them as parliamentary assistants to agriculture, food and rural affairs.

You’ve done a great job, and I trust that you always will be champions for this industry that I know you love, so thank you so much for all you do.

With that, I also want to recognize that I have two amazing PAs that I have the pleasure of working with now. All I can say is, look out; we’re just going to continue to build on where we left off, and I just can’t wait to continue to demonstrate how we not only understand the agri-food industry in Ontario, but we care. We care enough to listen, to understand and, most importantly, take action where action is needed. And Speaker, I can confidently tell you that we heard loud and clear that, when it comes to the agri-food industry, research and innovation has to be a priority.

With that said, the member from Chatham-Kent–Leamington facilitated and led a number of consultations across the province and people were earnest in their remarks, humbled by the chance to have their voice heard because they trusted it would make a difference. Because adopting new technology and research is absolutely critical to not only maintaining our net exporter position around the world, but we need to make sure that Ontarians understand as well what’s truly needed to ensure that not only primary production on farm continues to prosper and thrive, but our related industries throughout the value chain also continue to thrive and be prosperous.

Through this proposed modernization of legislation, we also are marrying what we heard through consultation when we landed the Grow Ontario Strategy. Grow Ontario is a first. It was an initiative that, again, had robust consultation and in partnership with the industry, we identified three key priority areas that everyone collectively said, “If we’re going to continue to lead by example, we’re going to continue to increase production around this province and we’re going to continue to be a net exporter of food, we need to make sure we have three key pillars.”

First and foremost, one pillar is all about making sure that we have a secure and stable supply chain. A second pillar is making sure we attract the very best talent. The third pillar is all about making sure that we create a climate that enables every single player in our industry to have the ability and the capacity to embrace new technologies and new innovations. That’s why we’re proposing to amend the ARIO Act through Bill 155, if it’s supported.

It’s interesting. This particular piece of legislation came together in 1962 and, quite frankly, it hasn’t been looked at for 60 years. I would dare anyone in this House today to say that it doesn’t need to be modernized, because the fact of the matter is, farming today is very different from farming yesterday and, as we look ahead to tomorrow, we need to make sure we’ve got our cornerstones set so we can continue to grow and continue to build. The fact of the matter is, these updates better reflect the current and future

needs that we have and the legislation, if, again, passed as proposed and presented, will serve to meet the industry's needs today and for years to come.

This is where I'd like to pause for a moment and give a shout-out to the board and the people who invest their time, give their time to advise and lead priorities for ARIO. In particular, I want to give a shout-out to Lorne Hepworth, chair of the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario, as it's known today. Lorne has a vast foundation in agriculture and his experience and his passion have led him to so many opportunities to make a difference, not only in Ontario but in his home province and across Canada. I was never more happy for him than when, earlier this year, I learned that he will be recognized for his passion, for his leadership, by receiving the Order of Canada. That's huge, and I'd like everyone to join me in congratulating him for that.

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Again, we have a wonderful breadth of experience around that board table. They understand where we need to go and how we need to update. And so the proposed updates that we've suggested to go into this legislation will support innovative activities, commercialization—which is so, so important—new solutions, new relationships and, most importantly, always looking to how our farmers, and our food and beverage industries in this province can continue to increase productivity so that we can continue to compete globally.

We have to do everything we can in this province, quite frankly, Speaker, because at the federal level, they're doing nothing but handcuffing our farmers and our processing manufacturing industry due to the carbon tax. It's just a tax on top of a tax. Actually, that's one thing that hasn't been talked about in this House much. If you were to look at the propane bills that we receive on a monthly basis—

Interjections.

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: You know, the chuckling that I'm hearing coming from the opposition really points to the fact that they are completely disconnected, so I so look forward to sharing my next comment.

Interjection.

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: If this particular individual would stop chirping and listen to the facts, on our farm our propane bill has a line item for carbon tax and then—get this, ladies and gentlemen and everyone—

Mr. John Yakabuski: Sales tax on top of it.

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: Yes. Then we realize a tax on top of the tax. The HST gets applied on top of the HST. You did not know that, and so you'd best be respectful to all of us in this House.

With that said, I want to continue talking specifically as to why we need to continue to do everything we can to advance the agri-food industry in Ontario, because we're getting handcuffed by federal and provincial Liberals on carbon tax. Clearly, the NDP have no clue what it's really like to actually produce quality crops on farms, and they don't understand the costs of production. That was just proven moments ago.

The fact of the matter is, when we developed our Grow Ontario Strategy, we made a commitment to listen to everyone, and I'm so proud of the feedback that was facilitated, not only by fellow MPPs in government but also by the team at OMAFRA, because they too understand that for a prosperous overall industry we needed to get out, hit the road and seek input, so that the proposed changes in Bill 155 are well informed. And we've done just that.

Some industry organizations that have participated—I know that my colleagues mentioned some of them, but I want to give a shout-out and give you a sampling of the individuals and organizations, commodity organizations and businesses that have participated: the Beef Farmers of Ontario, Dairy Farmers of Ontario, Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers, Livestock Research Innovation Corp., Ontario Apple Growers and Ontario Tender Fruit Growers. That's just a handful of everyone who gave of their time to make sure we got it right. And as we heard from my colleagues, we did get it right, Madam Speaker, because we took time to be informed. Everyone has supported this, and we have moved through in a very thoughtful manner.

During our extensive stakeholder engagement, it was clear that the industry was aligned for the need of research that is forward-thinking, forward-looking, all the while addressing the realities and the goals that we have today. Again, it makes me so incredibly proud of how far we've come with this particular piece of legislation, and just like my colleagues, I want to share some experts' written feedback that we received.

The Ontario Federation of Agriculture, the province's largest general farm organization with 38,000 members, said this, and I'm quoting President Drew Spoelstra. He said, "OFA supports the updated language in Bill 155. The modernized definition of research removes the previous narrow focus and provides scope. The addition of innovation in the ARIO name, and as a defined team, is reflective of current research and innovation initiatives and aligns with the focus of the Grow Ontario Strategy to strengthen the agri-food sector."

In addition to this, during our committee hearings OFA had a deputation and OFA's very own and ARIO board member, Jennifer Doelman, comes from eastern Ontario, and we're so lucky to have her around.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Jennifer Doelman. My riding.

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: She's awesome, right?

Interjections.

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: Yes, she is. The passion she has for the industry is second to none, and I'm glad that our parliamentary assistant shared her comments earlier.

The Beef Farmers of Ontario also supported written feedback. Executive director Richard Horne wrote, "With respect to Bill 155, BFO is broadly supportive of the proposed modernization of the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario Act, and would like to commend the government of Ontario for initiating this long-overdue process."

As you can hear, Speaker—and our committee heard this loud and clear as well, I would dare say. Thank you to

the members who are here today who participated on that committee. I appreciated it very much.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Great bill, Minister. Great job.

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: I appreciate that.

At the end of the day, what the committee members heard was enthusiasm about modernizing the ARIO Act. All in all, stakeholder reaction has been very positive to the modernization effort that we've facilitated, and again, it's a demonstration and a proof point that our government takes time to consult and to listen, because we need to get it right.

As we did that, industry stakeholders relayed that they see the proposed modernization of the ARIO Act as an opportunity for the organization itself, ARIO, to play a larger, more high-profile role in the advancement of agri-food research in Ontario. We heard about the 14 research stations we have across Ontario moments ago, and I'm really proud of the corridor of excellence that we're growing and fostering near Elora. I would dare say, not only are we going to be setting the tone in terms of advanced research and innovation for Ontario, but the rest of Canada and jurisdictions around the world will be looking to what we're doing in Ontario when it comes to thoughtfully growing our agri-food industry.

Stakeholders also expressed that ARIO can help to shape a stronger industry and, more importantly, supply chain. If ever before, and on the heels of the pandemic, did we come to realize how important a robust, secure supply chain is, and I would dare say—and I think the farmers across the province, our commodity organizations, and our food and beverage organization would echo this—our sector worked so incredibly hard to ensure that the pandemic had minimal impact on the production of good-quality, safe food, not only grown but processed and manufactured right here in Ontario. That speaks to our Grow Ontario Strategy as well, because it's our plan to strengthen the agri-food industry and ensure an efficient, reliable and responsive food supply chain to address ongoing vulnerabilities through new innovations.

Just yesterday, I visited the port of Hamilton, and it's amazing what's happening there. Overall, HOPA understands and values the prominent role that agriculture has in that particular port. There are hundreds of value-added businesses that are processing in the Hamilton area.

We visited Bunge in particular. They take truckloads of soybeans from across Ontario and a little bit of canola, but they also, by boat and truck and rail, bring in canola from western Canada. At that port, right on site, to minimize the cost of production, Bunge receives the raw commodity and processes it so that, ultimately, not only oil for livestock feed but edible oil is processed right there in the port lands. That's a thriving, prosperous, thoughtful connection within the supply chain. Then, once it's processed, that oil makes its way to Oakville and makes its way into what has been deemed the food and beverage manufacturing hub of all of Canada, which is the GTHA. I would dare say—I'll give a plug, because they deserve it. How many people enjoy a nice, crispy French fry from McDonald's? Okay, there are hands going up.

Mr. John Yakabuski: From time to time.

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: Sometimes. I'm sure they're really good at Dairy Queen as well.

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That said, I can tell you that I learned that edible oil that Bunge produces right there, after receiving the raw commodity in the port lands in Hamilton, actually is used by McDonald's across Canada to fry those french fries. That's something that soybean producers in Bruce county and Huron county and counties all over Ontario can be really proud of.

That's why we work 365 days a year to produce raw commodities that can be realized, and that realization is something we can all be so incredibly proud of.

Interjections.

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: Thank you for that.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I'll applaud food any time.

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: Right on.

We have very aggressive goals in our Grow Ontario Strategy, and we're not going to apologize for it; we're not going to make any excuses. We're going to continue to keep our foot on the accelerator to make sure that we meet these goals by 2032, because not only do farmers, food processors, beverage manufacturers and processors need us to continue to increase our production, but the rest of the world is looking to us, as well.

It's interesting. I visited another company in Port Colborne yesterday. They're right along the canal: London Agricultural Commodities. They have the old Robin Hood facility. They receive and move tens of thousands of metric tonnes of crop every year. Historically, though, that particular elevator was set up by Robin Hood in 1939, where they received locally grown grains and, again, immediately milled it into flour that could be used not only to feed Ontario and other jurisdictions, but—did you notice the year I used? 1939. A lot of that flour was geared toward going over the Atlantic to support our troops. Being there was somewhat surreal, given that it was Vimy Ridge Day. I know that Vimy Ridge represents the Great War, but knowing how the agri-food industry, throughout the years, throughout the decades, has stood tall and supported really important efforts made by Canadians is just remarkable.

Interjections.

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: Thank you. And I will fight for Ontario farmers each and every day because of that.

I jump around in my remarks—and I just saw, “Oh, talk about your farm here.” Well, I already did a bit.

It's interesting—

Mr. Anthony Leardi: Tell us more.

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: Talk more? Okay.

I grew up on a cash crop, beef feedlot operation. My husband grew up—and it's the farm I'm proud to call home now—on a cash crop, dairy hog operation. We work really hard.

I have to give a shout-out—

Interjections.

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: Thank you. I'm a crier, so get that out of the way.

My husband has not been well for a number of months, and many of you know that in this House. He grew up in a family of seven. We could not have operated—oh, dear. They're going to owe me a beer, because I'm going to bring them up in topic. We couldn't keep doing what we're doing. We were ready to disperse our herd, because we knew Dennis would be spending a lot of time in the hospital, but my brother-in-law and sister-in-law took our animals in. The animals spoke loud and clear, because clearly, by their progeny that they produced this winter, they're saying, "You're not getting out of the business anytime soon, because we just gave you a whole lot of young stock that you need to bring back to the farm."

I can tell you, my husband is rehabilitating in London right now, and he's starting to get really itchy—because people are going to want to get on the land. That's who we are. You feel the need to be on the land. You want to get home. You want to get into that barn and see that young stock thriving. Again, you work together to get it done.

My example that I just shared with you is indicative of the type of spirit that we have throughout all of Ontario, and I'm sure the member from Temiskaming Shores can speak to his own examples of how farmers help farmers. Why? Because we love what we do, we're proud of what we do, but we never, ever take for granted the responsibility we have and the honour we have to be producing good-quality food 365 days of the year.

So that's why, as Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, I am absolutely committed to working as closely as we can with industry to make sure we get things right and that we're looking ahead and that we're laying down the cornerstones for the next generation of farmers who want to carry on a family legacy, to do what they can to continue to move that ball down the field.

We're going to really, as I said, be aggressive in our strategy. We want to increase our exports of Ontario grown and manufactured processed food and beverage 8% year over year through to the year 2032. And, ladies and gentlemen, just by taking a look at some data that's come in, looking at the year 2022-23 already, we're already at 20%.

Again, I want to give kudos where it's due. I want to give a shout-out to Premier Ford and our entire team at this government because we're setting the climate, we're creating the environment for which business can excel. We're getting government out of their way as well.

Can we do more, faster? Absolutely we can, but what we've done to date is really making a difference for all of our sectors throughout this province, and just this case alone—I'm talking about the agri-food one but, again, I want to repeat: We're increasing our exports and we've surpassed our initial goal, but that gives me every confidence that we will, by 2032, be in a position to not only celebrate a little bit but look ahead again and say, "Okay, how can we continue to increase exports?" Because, ladies and gentlemen, countries around the world are looking for food, beverage and primary commodities and, you know, I hear about it day in and day out.

I had the honour of taking some people to Mexico to see what kind of interest we could drum up in our grain industry as well as our value-added chain leading right to bakeries. The team that we took was amazing: grain farmers, millers, commodity traders, bakers and even the port of Hamilton was represented. We told such an amazing, solid story—

Interjections.

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: HOPA. Okay: Hamilton-Oshawa Port Authority. You know we're talking about the same thing. Let's not get caught up in semantics, for goodness' sake.

With all that said, I can tell you the port is ready to grow with us as well. Ladies and gentlemen, the fact of the matter is, people look to Ontario because they trust the quality and they trust the standard that goes into food production that happens here. And with that—I can tell.

We were just at Restaurants Canada, which was hosted here in Toronto over the last three days, and one of the exhibitors was a participant in our trade mission to Mexico. And she's continuing to build relationships, to secure more sales because, again, that particular bakery is diversifying: Not only are they looking at food service but they're looking at the opportunity to export their baked goods as well. That's just one of so many examples, you know.

The other thing is, I was at LAC yesterday in Port Colborne. We're in their facility and they were talking about the relationships that they've realized as a result of participating in that trade mission. That's what we need to be doing as a government: opening the window and letting business dive through to take up every opportunity that they can realize. All of that is for naught if we don't have the right foundation. And that foundation is based on research and, more importantly, innovation, to make sure that we are driving efficiencies, driving increased yields and, more importantly, driving good-quality, nutritious production of food.

I think it's safe to say that this particular legislation has really hit the mark. You know, I enjoy hearing and listening to everyone with regard to their comments.

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I just realized I talked about my brother and sister-in-law to make sure that their name gets into Hansard. I want to give a shout-out to Teresa and Al Detzler, there. Thank you for all that you have done, and all the rest of Dennis's family as well. You guys have been amazing. I can give a shout-out to my own immediate family, too.

But moving on, because it's important that people hear this, I want to note that everybody has been supportive of updating this important piece of legislation. It's forward- and thoughtful-thinking, and I want to give a little nod to the member from Temiskaming Shores. I enjoy his comments and his approach to things.

He was talking about a research station in the north, Emo. He's going, "Maybe people don't even know where it is," but I can tell you, one of the first trips I took as Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs was to northwestern Ontario with the Minister of Northern

Development, and we went to that research station at Emo. It was in the fall, and to give you an idea of how important research is, they were harvesting hops.

Who would have thought even three or four years ago that hops could grow in northwestern Ontario? That's why research matters, because ladies and gentlemen, not only do we want to focus research on increasing production, introducing more efficiencies, introducing innovations that will help offset the lack of labour that we have, quite frankly, not only in processing manufacturing but on the farm as well, and further to that, I think it's very important that we also recognize that there's so much opportunity in northern Ontario.

I'm so glad that our member is visiting the Earlton Farm Show and our station in New Liskeard in the next couple of days. I appreciate that so very much because the fact of the matter is, there is so much more we can do when we all collaborate, identify what's working and what's not, how we can improve, why research matters, and then we filter that all down and take it back to the board at ARIO so that we can identify priorities.

I'm so proud of the team at OMAFRA for absolutely being dedicated to making sure that these research priorities are heard loud and clear, and I'd be remiss though—I'd like to give a call-out to the federal government as well, to make sure that they understand the importance of investing, not only in certain agricultural commodities, but the pork industry in Ontario just asked for a meagre \$2 million of investment in their research centre in Elora and, unfortunately, they haven't had a positive response yet from the federal government.

So I would like to say to the Liberal government in Ottawa: Please, I hope you embrace the importance of research and innovation as much as our government has, here in Ontario.

We all should be investing in forwarding our food industry here, not only in this province, but it benefits all of Canada as well.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Questions?

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Thank you to the Minister of Agriculture. You talked about farmers being handcuffed, so I'm sure you'll be sympathetic to the farmers of Wilmot. Those farmers, who are now facing forced expropriation of their farms—770 acres of class 1 farmland. So we met—the official opposition NDP—with these farmers who were here at Queen's Park yesterday, looking for answers from you, Minister.

They still don't know why they are being threatened with expropriation. Some of these people have been farming these lands since 1880. The Christian farmers' federation said, "It is shameful that our farmers, stewards of our land, are left vulnerable to such injustice. Our government should protect them...."

The Ontario Federation of Agriculture has called for a pause. Your Get It Done bill, schedule 1, fast-tracks expropriation of farmland without an environment assessment, and certainly, the question is: Are you using this bill to fast-track this expropriation?

Finally, Minister, my question to you is: why is there such secrecy and why are you allowing farmers to be left in the dark when they are being forced to sell their land?

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: Leave it to the NDP to never leave a chance to absolutely go off the page and talk about something that is not being debated today in Bill 155. What the member opposite was referencing was actually a decision that needs to be made at the regional level.

But let me tell you, as we continue to move forward, we're going to continue to be dedicated to modernizing everything that we do in support of Ontario farmers right across this province. With Bill 155, we're going to continue to drive innovation—innovation based on solid research—because that, at the end of the day, is going to generate a return on investment for all of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Mr. John Yakabuski: I want to thank the minister not only for speaking on the bill today, but also, I had the opportunity at committee to hear what you had to say as well. What was really remarkable about this bill—as you say, it's something that hasn't been addressed since 1962. The opposition are bringing up something that has nothing to do with this bill. They actually support this bill, and it essentially went through committee without amendment as well, which is really remarkable in this House, so I want to say what a great job of the preparation, the consultation, going to the people across the board in Ontario to see what will work as we update this act. Maybe you could expand a little bit on some of those consultations that took place so that we could bring a bill that everybody supports without amendment—great job.

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: To start off my response, I'd be remiss if I didn't give a shout-out to our team in the minister's office: our people committed to policy and getting it right, with an amazing leader, and the people who complement the policy development through communications and stakeholder relations. They have worked on this non-stop and, again, supported the member from Chatham-Kent-Leamington as he did the initial consultations 18 months ago or more. This has not been an overnight piece of legislation.

With that, I'd also like to give a shout-out—and why we've landed it well—to the officials at the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. They too see the opportunities that this industry has when it's supported by a government that understands, listens and gets the job done on their behalf.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: I want to thank the members for their contribution to the debate this afternoon, third reading of this bill. Actually, I want to commend the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, as well as her parliamentary assistants the members from Elgin-Middlesex-London and Chatham-Kent-Leamington. I think that it is unfortunately rare when a bill comes forward that has all-party support.

We have seen through committee work and, of course, through the advice of our in-house expert on rural and agriculture issues, the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane, who is part of our caucus, and everything I've heard, everything I've read and learned—this is a piece of legislation where I believe the process of good, solid public consultation was done before bringing the bill. I think that's very important. I want to thank you for doing that.

I was wondering if you would share with the House a little bit more about that process, how much work went into the consultation. I ask this because it is so important—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Thank you to the member.

I recognize the Minister of Agriculture.

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: Well, here's a fun fact about Lisa Thompson: When I graduated from Guelph, my very first job, my employer was the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. I learned from some of the very best in the role of being a rural organization specialist and essentially a rural community adviser.

At this time, I'd like to give a shout-out to Christine Dukelow, Carm Hamilton and an amazing agricultural representative from the Lindsay area, Don Pullen, my home agricultural representative as well. They demonstrated to me time and again how important it is to take time to meet with people, to really clearly research and understand an issue or a situation. I think it was inherent when I had this opportunity—it was almost surreal in one way—to come into this chair as Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, to be able to, on their shoulders, effect change. We're doing it with a team from across Ontario. We have a tremendous number of MPPs from rural Ontario who themselves take time to understand, because they meet with constituents and—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Thank you.

I recognize the member from Kitchener–Conestoga.

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Mr. Mike Harris: I've had the pleasure of knowing the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs for many years now, pre-politics. I just wanted to thank her for her continued advocacy for rural Ontario, because she truly embodies it, lives and breathes it every day, and is a huge champion.

I know that one of the things that we've talked about a little bit—and I know the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane, in second reading, was very much in favour of the new veterinary pieces that are in this bill and looking at some of the ways that we can incentivize new vets to get involved and serve underserved communities, like parts of northern Ontario and, certainly, more rural areas near yourself and myself as well, eastern Ontario. I wondered if you could talk a little bit more about what those grants look like and how you think that they'll impact the industry and communities.

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: Absolutely. I appreciate that question from the amazing member who's working so hard in the Kitchener–Conestoga area. When we were in consultation around ARIO, we also heard about the need

to increase the number of, particularly, large animal vets in areas of Ontario that were underserved. Because of that, we spun off an entirely different act, Bill 171, to address that very thing. So again, to the member opposite, thank you for recognizing that.

During consultation, we also heard about the need to make sure that rural communities, remote communities were well served.

Interjection.

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: We had a great meeting in Renfrew county as well.

But long story short, by being out there and consulting with ARIO, the agricultural research innovation, if it should pass, has led us to introducing and debating and going to committee very soon with another act, Bill 171, and that's—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Thank you. Further questions?

Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady: I too grew up on a farm where I saw miracles grow before my eyes and learned the appreciation for new life. I grew pumpkins as well. I grew cucumbers and flowers. I think that the member for Essex painted us a very nice picture in that regard. That's why we should be most proud of those who work the fields every day, in various weather, various storms, to produce the very best food for us—the very best food in the world.

I do support this bill, modernizing ARIO to reflect the current agri-food research environment as well as the research and innovation needs of the agri-food sector. My question, however, is to the minister. I just would like to know how Bill 155 will ensure farmers are recognized and included as key participants and not merely as stakeholders.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Quick response.

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: Yes, very good. In the limited time we have left, I want to give a shout-out to my former PAs but say watch what we do with the member from Essex and the member from Lanark–Frontenac–Kingston, because look out. We're going to continue to build on the success that I had with my other team.

In short, I think this particular bill demonstrates that farmers are more than—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Thank you to the minister.

Further debate?

Mr. John Vanthof: It's always an honour to be able to speak in the House on behalf of the residents of Timiskaming–Cochrane and on behalf of my colleagues in the NDP, and today on the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario Act. Before I get into the remarks too far, I'd like to congratulate the member from Lanark–Frontenac–Kingston and the member from Essex on their new roles as parliamentary assistants.

I'd like recognize the minister and her remarks, and I'd like to extend our heartfelt appreciation for her talking about the challenges in her personal life. It's never easy. We all know what it takes to give up what you give up. I felt it too, the pain. What I was thinking about as the

minister was speaking was the last time I drove out the driveway of my dairy farm, the last time I milked the cows. I know that feeling.

We wish your husband well. We certainly hope that your herd comes back. Goats—are they are herd or a flock?

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: They're a herd.

Mr. John Vanthof: A herd. Okay. I should know that. Anyway, in your personal endeavours, we wish you well.

Actually, politically, agriculturally, we usually work together very well. There are issues that we disagree on vehemently, but there's a way to work in the country, and I think we exemplify that in the House as well. We can agree to disagree vehemently, but still, at the end of the day, we can also agree to work together where we can work together.

I heard a couple of mentions of the Earlton Farm Show. I'm glad that the member from Lanark–Frontenac–Kingston is coming.

I have to relay a personal story. As most of us are aware, the one event that the Legislature stops for is the International Plowing Match. We all have history with the International Plowing Match; I know the minister does. The minister and I have some shared history with the International Plowing Match. One day, I was in the cafeteria—I love the cafeteria in this place, by the way; everybody knows that it's my favourite spot—and one of the cafeteria staff members asked me, "Mr. Vanthof, I know you go to this International Plowing Match every year and the Legislature stops, but what exactly happens there? Should I be interested in going there?" He had worked here a long time, and he didn't have a clue. My explanation for the International Plowing Match is that it's a plowing competition, something that has historical and current importance to agriculture, but it's also a celebration of the rural lifestyle—and that's what it has become. I said, "Do you live in a city?" He said, "No, I've got a couple of acres." I said, "You will love the International Plowing Match."

The member from Lanark–Frontenac–Kingston and I know exactly what a farm show is, but a lot of other people might not—millions of people in Ontario. They're open farm shows—the one I know the best. There are 60 exhibitors, and they exhibit their wares, so, basically, their tools or seed or—the tools of the trade for agriculture, and always the most advanced ones, because as we all know, agriculture is advancing rapidly. Just as an example, there will be a booth with guidance systems. When I started farming, you would start your tractor and you would drive the tractor. Now, tractors—they're not autonomous yet, but you're sitting there as a troubleshooter, not necessarily as an operator. Soon, they will be autonomous. It's things like that that you see at farm shows.

What makes the Earlton Farm Show incredible is—it's not the biggest farm show in the province. It's a long way away from here, and a lot of people—I see the Minister of Northern Development and Mines is here too. He's very interested in agriculture, as well. A lot of people don't realize how advanced agriculture is in the north. Their own

farm show is an eye-opener. To anyone who is thinking about maybe looking at agriculture in northern Ontario, maybe expanding into northern Ontario: I couldn't think of a better time to come than this weekend, this Friday and Saturday, to the Earlton Farm Show.

Not everyone may know how to get to the Earlton Farm Show, so I'll give you a few directions. I'm hoping that everyone across Ontario, whoever is watching, can find their way to Highway 400. Ontario is a big province, but you take 400 and you go as far as 400 goes, and you take 11 and you keep going, and in the city in North Bay you take a right and you keep going up 11. That's where 11 goes to two lanes, but you keep going. You will go through—before you get to North Bay and for about an hour, hour and a half after, you will go through Canadian Shield: old growth white pine, beautiful lakes and a lot of rock. If you're an agri-farmer, anyone in agriculture, you are going to wonder what you are doing there. You really are.

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Then you will crest a hill by the town of New Liskeard and you will see a couple of hundred thousand acres of farmland open before you. If you know where to look, you'll see the Sollio feed mill; on the other side, you'll see Pederson Construction. You keep going, you'll go to the little town of Earlton, and Koch Farms is on one side, Earlton is on the other side, and there's kind of a competition which one's bigger. I think on certain days, Koch Farms looks a little bigger than the town of Earlton. Norm and his kids will have a big sign pointing to the farm show. It's in the arena. The arena was recently dedicated to Wilfred and Rosaire Paiement, two very famous hockey players who were born and raised in Earlton and played in northern Ontario. That's where the farm show will be.

Please, if you're thinking about—that's why I'm so glad that members from the government side come, because if you're thinking about farming in northern Ontario or wondering what it's like to farm in northern Ontario, and if you've got the itch and if you're not quite ready to seed your own fields yet, we've got a couple of weeks yet in northern Ontario. Please come to the Earlton Farm Show. We will welcome you with open arms. We're there for the whole time. We will welcome you with open arms. Thank you very much for saying you're going to come. Thank you very much.

The Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario Act, I don't think this act has been changed for years and years and years—60 years. Basically, the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario controls 14 sites. There are about 200 buildings, in a partnership with the University of Guelph, in most cases, and the Ontario government, where research is critical to keeping agriculture current and keeping Ontario as a leader. That's where it's conducted.

This is one of the few acts—it has sailed through the Legislature. For good reason. I give credit where credit's due. I said this at the second reading, but it's worth saying again: This act is singularly focused. There's no poison pill in that, there's no wedge issue in it. It's focused. It's well consulted. I think that showed at the committee

hearings. It was well consulted. As a result, we're having good debates. We're actually talking about—I will bring up a couple of issues that came up in the committee. I'm not opposed to rancorous debate, but I think the debate here is constructive. We're talking together to move an industry forward.

I would like to quote the minister, and I agree, "Consultation equals results." This act is an example. I hope that the government uses this as a template, because I've got to say that not all of the government's legislation, even regarding agriculture, has been like that. I don't think that during the greenbelt fiasco—that bill had to be rescinded—I don't think that anyone in agriculture is going to say that they were consulted. When it was proposed to subdivide agricultural properties into three, that never made it to the House, but no one is going to—that was not consulted well at all. As a result, I think everybody paid a price. So this is an example of: The government of the day knows how to do it, but sometimes whoever's running the show chooses not to do it.

I commend the minister on this act. I do. I give credit where credit is due, and the Minister of Agriculture—you know how to do it. On this one, you did it, and as a result, we're having a good conversation about it.

So, in Ontario, there are 14 sites, and I remember in my second reading debate, I did a whole tour of Ontario, where all these sites were. I don't think I'm going to make people suffer through that again, but there's a few sites that are special to us all.

I'll get it yet without having to read, but the member from Lanark-Frontenac-Kingston mentioned one that was close to his riding, and I'm going to mention one that's very close to my riding—not close to my riding; it's in the centre of my riding. The member from Lanark-Frontenac-Kingston—I'm going to get it yet—is actually going to go visit that site and specifically the SPUD unit at that site, right? And I commend him for that.

The SPUD unit is—we just say it's the SPUD unit and then people go, "What is the SPUD unit?" It's a tissue—and I have no science background—a tissue propagation facility. Basically, they take in seeds of plants, not just potatoes, but strawberries, garlic, asparagus. They actually create a very prolific and very popular type of asparagus at the SPUD unit, and it's grown in many places.

An example is—so there's something called a—and anyone scientific is going to think, "Oh, man, Vanthof, what are you talking about?" but I try to explain things in lay terms, the way I understand them. So, you take a potato and there are—in Prince Edward Island, they recently had something called potato scab, a disease on potatoes. You don't want to grow potatoes that have potato scab. The SPUD unit can take those potatoes and somehow go down to the genetic material and the resulting seed will be virus-free, so you're starting with pure, clean stock. That's really important—incredibly important.

Now, the SPUD unit has been operating for 40 years in New Liskeard, and New Liskeard is very close to where—I just told you where the farm show is. I forgot to tell you that the farm show, from here, if Toronto traffic is good,

is about seven hours. The SPUD unit is about six and a half hours, right? And the reason it's so far away: Because of prevailing winds and because of—the area itself is relatively clean as well, like, the air. There's not a lot of other things being grown around it. It's easier to keep it sterile when the outside air isn't full of virus, full of disease. It's not without challenge, but it's easier. It's really important.

So what happened to the SPUD unit—I'm going to have to back up for a second. At one point, the research farm in New Liskeard, which is an ARIO site—it was about 10 years ago, when I was first elected. I guess it was maybe my first or second year. There was a very strong direction from the University of Guelph to close the site in northern Ontario. They were hoping to focus everything closer to Guelph, and we fought back because—and I talked about this at the committee—conditions are different in different parts of the province, and so it's relevant to do research in an area that, in northern Ontario, is growing in importance and in size in agriculture. It's relevant to do research there.

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So we fought back, and we cut a deal with the then Minister of Agriculture—at the time, it was Ted McMeekin—to hold on that decision and give us some breathing room to come up with a solution. As a result, we cut a deal to sell half of the research stations and build new research facilities on the other side of the road.

The problem is, the SPUD unit is on the half that was sold. That's, quite frankly, what happened. The SPUD unit is a rented facility, and it's worn out. Quite frankly, it's worn out. It needs to be rebuilt, and we've been pushing to have it rebuilt for quite a while.

Last year, at the estimates for agriculture, it came up. I brought it up to the minister, and to her credit, the minister, I believe last year, toured the SPUD unit when she came to the farm show. Everyone's welcome at the farm show. We would love it if you came to the farm show, Speaker. We'd give you the royal treatment.

So this year at the hearings, the berry growers came to hearings on the ARIO bill. The SPUD unit is an ARIO facility. I'm going to quote directly from the representative from the Ontario berry growers. His name is Mr. Tom Heeman. I'm going to talk about what he said about the SPUD unit:

"It breaks my heart that this past fall we had to stop shipments of genetic material from New Liskeard because the HEPA filter was not replaced and there wasn't a budget to do so." Like, they didn't have the budget to change the HEPA filter. "So our samples got contaminated with mould. I know that sounds like a small thing—a couple of plants had to be thrown out and started over again"—that's what people on the outside world think—"but it takes over three years to replace those dozens of plants into millions and millions of plants. Those plants go throughout the country. They go throughout the United States. You may not buy Ontario berries all the time, but the technology in New Liskeard helps create those Florida berries that get imported during the winter as well.

“I just want you to” know “about these changes. Adding intellectual property I think would be a benefit so that you can work with the university and have a clear guideline on intellectual property.”

But the main problem here is that this facility is worn out. I’m very proud of agriculture in Ontario—extremely proud. I made my living at it most of my life. I am much more qualified as a farmer than I ever will be as a parliamentarian, I guarantee you that. But this facility is worn out. Everyone knows it, and we waited until nothing—now we’re having to import that genetic material. We can’t say we’re leaders and we can’t say we’re research leaders when facilities are breaking down.

So I asked Mr. Heeman about the challenges that we’ve had trying to get the SPUD unit rebuilt. We have a perfect site for it on the ARIO research land across the road, where the provincial government helped build a brand new research station for field crops. That is the perfect spot for it. Everyone agrees that that’s a perfect spot.

I’m not going to read my whole question; it’s not about me. So to Mr. Heeman: “You mentioned some frustration, but just how important is the tissue culture centre and where are you in the process?” And I’m going to quote exactly what he said:

“Thank you. I don’t think anything has changed. I was at this 10 years ago because we had a hard time getting contracts renewed. We’d call and call because we’re a client and we didn’t know who to talk to, and we’ve been able to expand that process up to the minister’s level.

“Again, these facilities are good but we need to have stakeholder dialogue. That whole mandate on technology transfer and expansion—OMAFRA does a tremendous job”—give credit where credit is due, “but they need to have the people in place. It all started when we lost the faculty member”—so when Guelph kind of didn’t pay attention to the SPUD unit. “The faculty member retired and was never replaced. Now we just have a technician with an overseer in Guelph, so there’s not active research being advanced at that facility” today.

“I brought an example today of what it means. I don’t know if you’ve all heard about the Ontario hazelnut story,”—so we’re going to talk about the hazelnut story, a direct quote—“but this is something that is a homegrown success story. It required the tissue culture in the New Liskeard plant in order to make sure that the varieties they were breeding and bringing into nurseries were clean of virus. Now we have delicious Ontario hazelnuts ... something we never had before.” Something we wouldn’t have had without the SPUD unit in New Liskeard.

He goes on to say, “What has been communicated to me is that the challenge is the funding for the joint partnership agreement.” And that is a challenge for this act. This act is good. We have supported this act from day one. But you also have to have funding to actually replace some of these facilities, have the funding to manage these facilities. And it was identified in there that that is not the case—so now I lost my place—“where you can have funding for the facilities, but if you don’t have the funding for the faculty to operate the facilities, then you get a

shortfall. Again, you don’t have a lab director for that facility. They’re under another individual out of Guelph who doesn’t physically visit that spot, and you have a technician who is very skilled but close to retirement. She communicates with us, because she’s very exasperated at times for not being listened to. I think it’s a very difficult position, where she has all these plants to keep alive and she knows that growers are counting on her, but I don’t think that—because it’s basically an orphaned facility.”

That’s why I’m bringing it up today: because this is an ARIO facility, and someone who depends on it. We’ve all been talking about research, and someone, a group who depends on this facility is basically saying, “It’s orphaned.” And that came up at committee.

There was also, at the same committee, a representative from the University of Guelph. In response to the same question—and it’s the first time I’ve been at committee that someone answered a question that I didn’t ask—he was obviously very impacted. I give credit where credit is due. I respect, by Mr. Heeman’s comments, when he said that that facility was orphaned. It was Dr. Shayan Sharif—he was the representative from the University of Guelph. He said, “If I may just to diverge here and just point out one big important thing in regard to the SPUD unit, because it has been discussed quite significantly and very extensively: I just wanted to tell MPP Vanthof that I don’t really think that that SPUD is orphaned.... We hope to lease out to industry to have a sustainable plan for the operations of SPUD. SPUD is not forgotten; it will never be forgotten. It is really critical for the industry and for the north. We recognize that, but we need to have a sustainable plan that would ensure its viability for the future.”

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I couldn’t agree more. We’re just getting frustrated. And the member from Essex—where are you from, then?

Interjection: Kent.

Mr. John Vanthof: Kent. He agrees, and he knows more about strawberries than me.

When you get to the point that your tissue cultures facility is falling apart and we’re still talking about that it’s time for a plan—we’ve been talking about this for a long time. We’ve known this issue, and we get it, and you get it. That’s one of the reasons I’m glad that this bill is at the table right now. I’m focusing on this because this needs to be settled. It needs to be settled.

Forty years ago, I am sure that this facility was groundbreaking, breathtaking in what it could do. Now it’s worn out. And when the minister said—and we are: in some areas, we are way ahead. We are world leaders in research. But in tissue propagation for commercial breeders? Not right now. And even the one thing we’ve learned—we’ve learned a lot of lessons from COVID, and the one thing we have also learned from COVID is that you need to be able to rely on your own facilities when things go wrong in the world. I think this is a case where, for 40 years, we’ve had that facility, and now we didn’t have the money to change the HEPA filter. Like, what is that?

I'm from northern Ontario, and I'm a bit jaded, because 10 years ago, we had to fight to keep the research station, period. We saved the research station with the University of Guelph and with the government. But this feels eerily similar. It just does.

So when you're at the Earlton Farm Show, see the potential—and there's way more potential in northern Ontario—but also recognize what's there and what needs to be changed. Because if there's one thing that needs to be changed, and actually, there's not a lot of—there's starting to be more potatoes and there's a few strawberries, but most of it isn't for local. That one—and I take the rep from the University of Guelph at his word. I take the minister at her word last year at committee when she said that there was a plan in place to rebuild it and to rebuild it in New Liskeard. She specifically said in New Liskeard. I take everyone at their word. The question is, "When?" and "How many more?" The berry growers are now—they were hurt, and for no reason. So if the act is updated, hopefully that will help speed up the decision-making process too.

I know I'm dwelling on this issue for a long time, Speaker, but it's an issue I likely won't get to talk about again very much. And I don't think anyone's specifically out to hurt the SPUD unit. We all want the industries to flourish. This is one that I hope we can get some action on as soon as possible. I think all members who have any agriculture in their heart, because it is something that's in—and I don't think it's just agriculture but, for me, it's just agriculture. There's something about agriculture.

So with that, I'm going to switch gears. I think I've made my point in that. I was listening intently to the minister when she was talking about their herd. I like personal stories.

My wife hates this time of year. It's not so much—she likes the spring, but the spring is when I start looking for tractors. Farmers love tractors. My problem is, I spend all my time here driving around the riding. I still have a farm. I sharecrop my farm with someone else—actually, with Koch Farms—and I have no real need for another tractor, but man, the pull is there.

Just one other personal: This year it's going to be a different year for farming in northern Ontario, for a lot of things. Because we didn't have any snow, right? So with wildfires, it could be a very different year. But most years—I'm going to give you my experience of the springtime, coming to the Legislature. Around, oh—when is the snow usually gone here? Around the end of March?

Ms. Sandy Shaw: March or April.

Mr. John Vanthof: Yes, the end of March. There will be this much—I'm still an imperial guy, but what's that? Three feet? A metre? There will be a metre of snow at home, and I'll drive down here. It's six hours. I'll park my car. I don't like driving in Toronto, so I just park my car and I walk to work.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Do you drive your truck?

Mr. John Vanthof: No, I can't afford to drive the truck from Toronto to there.

It's warm here, and there's no snow, and you can smell the ground. Farmers, gardeners—there's something about it. There's something about fresh soil. You can smell it. So you're here for a whole week, and then you forget, so when I drive home, there's still three feet of snow.

Week two, I drive down here. The grass is growing. It's springtime. I'm sitting here in my seat thinking, "Oh, I'll get home and do stuff." I'm not selling northern Ontario now. I drive home and there is still three feet of snow.

Week three, I drive down here. I don't know if they've started yet, but there's a nice sidewalk that goes up University here, and there's a bunch of flowerbeds. The flowers will start coming out, and then it's really, "Oh, man. We're going to get home and start planting." You go home and, Speaker, in week three, there is still snow. It's so frustrating.

Week four, I drive down here, and people are mowing their lawns. Everybody's in shorts. It's just beautiful down here, right? Week four, you drive home, and the grass is this tall, because your spring lasts a month; our spring is a week. So it's hotter at home than it is here. The dust is flying off the fields. There might still be a bit of snow in the bush. But week four, I'm behind, because, I was, "Oh, there's still snow." The moral to the story is, that's why it's so important to do research in different places, because of just the difference in the physical conditions.

The fall is not quite so bad. Your falls here are a little bit—

Interjection.

Mr. John Vanthof: Yes, the cold moves in a little bit slower. There are some years that it's beautiful until the end of October, sometimes a little bit longer. But when it hits, it hits, you know? Our weather is actually nicer—maybe not nicer than here, but certainly—and no offence to anybody from the Barrie area; Barrie is a great place but the worst weather in Ontario. I believe the President of the Treasury Board is from that area—bad weather in your part of the world. We get snow and it stays, and it's kind of calm. I drive through there every week, and man, it's the worst.

1500

Now I'm going to get back to the bill, but an hour is a long time to fill, Speaker.

The worst weather I've driven through since I have been elected was in London, Ontario. The Heinz plant in Leamington closed, and I had to drive down there for a presser or something. I always listen to classic rock stations. I'm driving, and the DJ goes, "Yeah, the weather is a bit gloomy." It was in November, so fine, a little bit gloomy. "The weather is a bit gloomy and there's a streamer coming down Commissioner Street."

I'm from northern Ontario, used to 40 below. I'm just driving along, wondering what a streamer is. A streamer is a snowstorm, an instant snowstorm, that would shut northern Ontario down for three days. It's just cars in the ditch on both sides, and then you go for about a kilometre or a kilometre and a half, and it's all gone again. That's not weather that we—our weather is much more stable. It gets cold; it snows. This year is different. This year, it's

almost like southern Ontario weather. And that's something you have to get used to, too, when you're overwintering crops. So some years winter wheat works great in our area, but not every year. Those are all things that make a difference, why research should be regional.

There's a couple of other quotes here I want to read before I tell too many personal stories; just give me a second, Speaker. I want to read something that I found from the Ontario Federation of Agriculture. They made a written submission, but they also came to the board. Mr. Mark Reusser came to the board, or came to the committee. The OFA was in favour of the bill. We're all in agreement of that; that's why we support it. But they did have some—and I'd like to put them into the record, into the Hansard, as well—Mark called them concerns. I would call them more constructive suggestions. I would like to read some of them into the record.

From Mr. Mark Reusser: "We do have some concerns and some suggestions with regard to the bill, and I will focus on those, if I may.

"The first one has to do with the mandate. The proposed updates to the mandate or objects of the ARIO are a significant expansion of the objectives," which is true. "The core function of providing advice to the minister remains, and OFA supports that a key objective for ARIO is to advise the minister on high-impact, transformational agri-food research and innovation....

"OFA appreciates that the mandate expansion will increase collaboration, and we support increased engagement of the agri-food sector. Engagement with agriculture organizations, industry and researchers is key for the sector to reach its full potential, and ARIO will be more effective in its role with cross-collaboration." So that's the purpose of the bill.

"However, to be successful in determining research needs and promoting research opportunities, farmers must be recognized and included as key participants, not merely consulted stakeholders. So OFA recommends that ARIO engage directly with farmers and producer organizations on research needs and objectives as a key priority...."

That struck me, because when we ran into the issue where ARIO and the University of Guelph were thinking about divesting the New Liskeard Agricultural Research Station, there was a breakdown between the farm community and the research done there, because farmers, agricultural stakeholders, need to see some relevance in the research to really buy into it, and that was lacking. There was very little reporting of what research was being done. There wasn't really a connection. I think that's what OFA is—I don't want to put words into OFA's—they spoke for themselves; they're on the record. But my interpretation was that there needs to be a connection between the agriculture community and ARIO, the research organization. That connection needs to be there, and if that connection isn't there, then not only will the agriculture community lose, but Ontario as a whole will lose. Although we may not agree with everything that the government talks about—their goals in agriculture. Where we profoundly disagree is about the importance of saving

farmland. So you need to have that connection. The agriculture community in Timiskaming didn't have that connection with the ARIO site in New Liskeard and, quite frankly, the University of Guelph didn't either, or they wouldn't have thought about closing. That's why it's so important that we need that connection.

The minister, in her comments, talked about Emo, and I think the quote she was referring to—many people can find Nemo, but not too many people could find Emo. That was my quote.

Interjection.

Mr. John Vanthof: Everybody knows what Finding Nemo is.

Ms. Catherine Fife: He's here all week.

Mr. John Vanthof: Speaking of Finding Nemo, something I learned while doing my research, or just doing my job—I know a fair bit about agriculture, but certainly not everything. I know the language. I know the people. I don't pretend to know everything, and I don't. I didn't know that ARIO had a site in Alma where they did aquaculture research.

Interjection.

Mr. John Vanthof: Agriculture and aquaculture aren't quite the same.

I didn't know that. So that points to something else: that perhaps we need to do, together, as the agriculture sector—again, agriculture and aquaculture aren't exactly the same thing. But as a research sector, we need to do a better job of making sure that everybody else knows what we're doing—because unless the general population knows, then you have a chance of losing it. One of the great things about this job is that we can bring this forward and, hopefully, spark someone's attention.

Someone the members on the government side didn't mention, who came to committee, who I thought was very interesting, and I'll just find his—I don't quote people very often, and that's why I have such a hard time finding the quotes when I want to find them. Mr. Gerald Schipper chaired a dairy advisory committee at Ridgetown college. Ridgetown is also an ARIO site. In Elora, they've got new dairy facilities, and they are state-of-the-art, and that is where very critical research is being done. Someone on the government side, I believe, the minister or—I can't remember which one of you said it, but it was a very good point, about methane, about where the research—so that there will be less methane coming from cattle; specifically, dairy cattle. What Mr. Schipper brought forward was also a good point. In agriculture, we are also facing a big labour shortage. So not everyone who is going to end up working in the dairy sector, in production, as an example, is going to be destined to do research at that high-end facility. Like Ridgetown also was beneficial for someone who wants to learn how to be a better herd manager, or to be—right? That not necessarily, but right now, Ridgetown is an outdated facility that, quite frankly, is pretty close to not passing for standards of care of dairy cattle. It's an old tie-stall facility.

1510

And he brought forward a good point. That's something we need to look at too: So where are we going train the dairy managers? Because they are not always going to be—not everyone is destined to do high-end genetic research—it's very important—or high-end feed research. It's incredibly important. Right? But where are we going train the people who are going to manage herds?

And I'm focusing on dairy. I know dairy pretty well, so I'm not going to focus on the strawberry end as much. But there is a need because to be a manager of a dairy herd, it's a very—as an example, it is not an easy job. You need a specific skill set. It's a very skilled job and it's a very good job.

Hon. Rob Flack: Great job.

Mr. John Vanthof: It's a great job, right? But you might not need to go to the best research facility in Ontario to learn how to do that. So he brought up a very good point. It didn't 100% fit into the bill. I get that, I get that, but one of the things I miss about—and I appreciate this afternoon, because we can actually listen to each other and what we got out of the committee, because we're actually talking about what came out of the committee.

He did that; that stuck with me. Because a lot of the people I know, if you want to learn to manage dairy, the only one left really is Ridgeway, right? Well, if Ridgeway isn't there anymore, and okay, we've got this great facility in Elora, great, but not everyone is going to learn how to manage cows in Elora. That's the point he brought forward, and it's a good point. It's a good point.

If you look at a modern dairy farm, a modern robotic dairy farm, it's totally different than tie-stall. Tie-stall technology 20 years ago was even prevalent. No one builds a tie-stall now; very few build parlours now. It's all robotic. So if you're going to work on a robotic farm, where are you going to learn that, unless you come from that type of facility? I appreciated that he brought that forward.

I can't be so complimentary. I can't be complimentary all the time, so I'm going to take my last 10 minutes and not be so complimentary. I did take polite exception to the minister's comment that the NDP doesn't understand the cost of production. Certainly, we understand; those of us whose job it is to understand the cost of production certainly do understand the cost of production.

I hesitate to go here, but as everyone knows, the NDP are against the individual carbon tax because we think it's regressive.

Mr. Mike Harris: So we should just have cap-and-trade?

Mr. John Vanthof: The member from Kitchener–Conestoga said we just want cap-and-trade. Well, actually, what confuses me is, yes, this government did cancel cap-and-trade, because they conflate it into one, okay, but then they introduced the industrial compliance fee for carbon, which is basically cap-and-trade.

Mr. Mike Harris: Not on the individual person.

Mr. John Vanthof: We agree on that. Cap-and-trade wasn't either.

So the member from—where is it? Kitchener–Conestoga? We agree that neither one of us nor our parties agree with the individual carbon tax. We believe it's regressive; you guys are just talking about politics. Because actually, do you know who invented it? It was actually the federal Conservatives who invented the carbon tax. That's actually a Conservative policy.

Mr. Mike Harris: Not progressive.

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's when they believed that polluters should pay.

Mr. John Vanthof: Yes, yes.

So, they said, "Okay, cap-and-trade and the carbon tax are the same thing." They're actually not the same thing. But you never hear them talk about their industrial compliance fee on carbon. They never talk about that, and I believe they pulled in, what, \$147 million, \$150 million?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Where does that go?

Mr. John Vanthof: Not only where did it go—that's a very good question from the member from Oshawa—but also, if you believe their narrative that whenever you add a cost, that filters through the system and makes everything higher, well, if you're going to charge industrial users of energy or whatever and you charge them \$150 million, that is going to also filter through the system. It just is.

That's one of the things, Speaker, that drives me crazy about this place. It drives me crazy. So let's actually, you know, talk about what the province can do, talk about what you're doing. Yes, the Conservative government, the Ford government, has got a compliance fee for carbon, basically an industrial carbon tax—not an individual one, an industrial carbon—

Mr. Mike Harris: Tell us what you're going to do.

Mr. John Vanthof: Very similar to cap-and-trade. What you've got is Conservative cap-and-trade. That's what you've got, though, and we agreed with cap-and-trade. We would make some changes to cap-and-trade. There need to be some changes because some industries can't compete under cap-and-trade, and that needs to be accounted for. That needs to be accounted for, and we would do this in an open, consultative way, as opposed to the current government, who talks about carbon tax, carbon tax, carbon tax, but doesn't—and perhaps the member from Kitchener–Conestoga or other members could explain.

We all disagree with the carbon tax—at least two sides.

Mr. Mike Harris: When you say, "we all," can we take a vote?

Mr. John Vanthof: There's some people who agree with the carbon tax, but the carbon tax is a backstop, right? You pay the carbon tax if you don't have your own system. So Quebec doesn't pay the carbon tax. They don't. They have the cap-and-trade system.

What I really want to know is, if we have an industrial system in Ontario—which we do; the Ford government instituted it—what can we do to make sure that the system that you have complies so people don't have to pay the carbon tax? Because actually, we're paying double because of the Conservative government. We're paying

the backstop carbon tax and, indirectly, people are paying the compliance fee.

Interjections.

Miss Monique Taylor: What is going on?

Mr. John Vanthof: I don't know. Anyway, back to the—okay, so it's obvious the member from Kitchener–Conestoga doesn't want to go down that road because they just like arguing about the carbon tax; they don't like talking about reality.

Yes, let's talk about reality. The Conservative industrial compliance fee for carbon—you charge it. You charge it. That's reality. So what can you do so people don't have to pay the carbon tax? Is there something you can do with that fee, or is it just because you don't want to talk about that you're forcing Ontarians to pay it, to pay the individual carbon tax? I don't know. I'm asking the question.

1520

Anyway, getting back to the bill, this bill is an example of, if you consult extensively, you consult carefully, legislation will go through the House, it won't be held back and the opposition won't do deleterious things. Good legislation, if it's consulted on, will pass through the House very quickly, as opposed to legislation like the greenbelt legislation, which didn't pass very easily through the House—but because of the rules, it did. What happened is, the government ended up—actually, no, the people of Ontario ended up paying the price, because the government had to end up rescinding the bill and now are mired in investigations. That's the example of legislation that isn't consulted on at all, isn't for the benefit of Ontarians, and Ontarians lose. This is an example of a bill that was done for Ontarians, for people in agriculture and for people who eat the wonderful food that's grown in Ontario.

And my last minute: There is a reception tonight for Farm Fresh Ontario starting at 4 o'clock. I believe it's in the—just wait a sec.

Interjections: Dining room.

Mr. John Vanthof: The dining room. Where better to have a reception for Farm Fresh Ontario than in the dining room?

I brought this up earlier, right? When you don't consult—again, when this government proposed to allow the division of farms into up to three without any consultation, they didn't know, didn't realize the havoc they were going to cause because they never asked anybody, or they just decided to help out one group. So many members on the government side came over to me and said, "You know, John, we were about to stop that." No, no, no; it never would have become public if that had been the case.

But this is an example that it can be done well, and you have done it well on this bill, and we commend you for it. As a result, this bill's going to pass this afternoon, I hope.

So with that, I'm going to leave a minute on the clock, because I could see people—even the Speaker's eyes are starting to—I'm getting a bit worried.

Interjections.

Mr. John Vanthof: I've been talking for an hour. I definitely have to answer questions. Thank you very much, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Questions?

Hon. Greg Rickford: A pretty informal question: You'll speak again—it's a vote-in-favour speech; I really appreciate it. But the member and I have had some great conversations over the past five or six years about the exciting opportunity for agriculture in northern Ontario. In fact, I think we have consensus around the notion that northern Ontario may actually be the biggest and best play for the future of agriculture in Ontario, and the Clay Belt in the Thunder Bay region and, of course, the beginning of the Prairies, official, in the southern part of my riding are extraordinary examples of what we can accomplish.

We still have barriers, and I've appreciated the member's counsel on addressing some of those barriers: for example, the supply chain, grain elevators, the distances that are travelled, arable land and tile drainage. I just wonder if the member opposite would reflect on some of the conversations that we've had and perhaps share his appreciation for some of the things that the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund in particular has been able to do to support that—

Mr. Steve Clark: Great fund.

Hon. Greg Rickford: Don't get any ideas—and how we can do better. He knows where the puck is headed when it comes to—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Response?

Mr. John Vanthof: I'd like to thank the Minister of Northern Development for that question. The one caveat: Northern Ontario is a great place to farm, there are all kinds of opportunity in northern Ontario, but we can't simply think that we can replace an acre in southern Ontario with an acre in northern Ontario. That doesn't work.

I have said this publicly: I have family in Oxford county. If I could trade my land acre for acre for land in Oxford county, for its productive capacity, I would do it in a minute—or even two to one.

But having said that, there is incredible opportunity in northern Ontario—tile drainage, specifically, from the heritage fund. The minister may not know, but the original application for tile drainage to the heritage fund—I wrote it before I was a politician. Anyway, without tile drainage, agriculture will never truly flourish in Ontario. It is one of the best infrastructure investments that can be made. It's long-term. My dad tiled a farm in 1971 in Earlton with cement tiles—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Thank you to the member. My apologies.

Further questions?

Mr. Chris Glover: I want to thank the member from Timiskaming for the comments today. It's kind of nice, on this afternoon, to have a conversational debate rather than a head-to-head debate.

I remember the first time I was working at—I had a job in Geraldton. I was driving up Highway 11, and you get to about Barrie and then the farms disappear and it all becomes bush. You keep driving and driving for another—

I don't know—five or six hours, and then somewhere north of Timmins, the land opens up. There's this huge valley and there's all this farmland there. It's the Clay Belt, and it was the first time I had ever learned about the Clay Belt.

You're obviously a farmer from the Clay Belt. You've got a lot of experience there, and you said that climate change is actually impacting the Clay Belt, as well, and that you were able to grow, I think you said, canola for the first time, which you weren't able to before, but it's also having an impact on winter wheat. Can you talk about some of the impacts on Clay Belt farming of climate change?

Mr. John Vanthof: Thank you very much to my colleague. Yes, I've farmed the Clay Belt most of my life.

It's not canola; canola has always done very well in the Clay Belt, because canola is actually a cool-weather crop. It's soybeans. We're starting to be able to grow soybeans—or we grow a lot of soybeans, not starting. And grain corn: I've always grown silage corn to feed cattle, but grain corn is starting to be profitable.

But our weather—and again, I'm not a climatologist—is becoming a bit more extreme, less predictable. Overall, likely, in the Clay Belt, in northern Ontario, we will be winners in the climate change draw, but we're a very small place compared to the rest of the world.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: I'll just offer the member from Timiskaming a quote and ask him to offer his observations on it. This comes from Aaron Cristine of the OGVG, Ontario Greenhouse Vegetable Growers. He says:

“For greenhouses, there's a well-known piece of infrastructure that falls under the ARIO Act, and that is the Vineland Research and Innovation Centre. In partnership with Vineland, every year we work together to create novel projects and deliverables for our growers that can assist them in their efforts in integrated pest management, production capacity and innovative approaches to working under different climatic conditions to optimize growth.

“With the support that the greenhouse sector has of ARIO, we're excited for what the future can bring and the collaborations with academic and institutional stakeholders so that we can continue to expand our production capacity.”

I simply invite the member to offer his comments and observations.

Mr. John Vanthof: I'd like to thank the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Agriculture for that question, and I'd also like to thank Dr. Ian Potter, who presented on behalf of the Vineland research station at the committee hearings, and I agree with the statement totally.

1530

Actually, when ARIO and the University of Guelph were thinking about shutting our research station down, we struck a committee, and one of the first places we went to look at was Vineland, to see how they were structured, because they're structured slightly differently than many of the other sites. It was very informative, and many of the

ideas that we got to try to save our research station, although our conditions are completely different—completely, totally different. But the way they look at the situation—we were very impressed. And I agree with everything that was in that statement.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

MPP Lise Vaugeois: Thank you to the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane. I always learn a lot about farming and agriculture when you speak. I wonder if you can talk about how the frequent closures of Highways 11 and 17 affect farmers and their products.

Mr. John Vanthof: It comes up a lot, the closures of Highways 11 and 17. The most direct impact: If you think about it, there is a lot of—or one, but it's a pretty important one that a lot of people don't think of. There are a lot of cattle that cross Highways 11 and 17. When the highway is closed for hours, not only are people stranded, but often, transport loads of cattle or hogs are stranded on the highway. And there are rules in Canada and in Ontario as well for how long an animal can be transported before it has to be unloaded so it has access to water, to feed, to bedding. If the highway is closed for 10 hours, you can have all the rules you want, but it does result in mistreatment of animals.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Mr. John Jordan: I want to thank the member opposite for his speech today and taking the time to speak and bringing my interest up on going to Earlton. I look forward to it. I look forward to seeing him there and the SPUD facility as well. The great thing about these jobs is, you go to places that you may not otherwise have had the opportunity or the need to go to. So I thank him for that.

One of the things that he spoke about was Elora, the research going on there, the dairy research, in particular, and how producers have access to those facilities. I'm wondering how he feels on how we can increase the dissemination of that information and the access to the findings and the development of particularly for the north and seed development and increasing the cash crop because of the research going on.

Mr. John Vanthof: Thank you for that question. I would say, on the dairy side, the dairy side is doing a very good job already of disseminating the research. My comments weren't on the research so much; they were on developing the practical knowledge of actually operating a dairy facility. Things can always be improved, but as far as disseminating research, particularly on dairy, I think what's being done is a pretty good job already.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further debate?

Mr. Dave Smith: This is a rather interesting bill for me. I've thought a lot about how I was going to start off talking about it. But when the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane was standing up talking so much about the SPUD unit, I had to come along with this, because as he kept talking about SPUD, SPUD, SPUD, all I could think of was Stompin' Tom Connors and his song Bud the Spud

“from the big red mud,” going “down the highway smilin’ / The spuds are big on the back of Bud’s rig” because they come from New Liskeard island.

Interjections.

Mr. Dave Smith: Yes, I know; it was bad, but a lot of times I do quote lyrics in my speeches, so that was one of those ones I thought I’d throw in there.

But what I wanted to point out about it was that the SPUD unit—because he went on a fair bit about the SPUD unit—is actually part of the University of Guelph; it’s not part of ARIO. So I get that it’s in the same location now. There’s some technical differences on it, but to kind of point the finger at the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs for that one I don’t think was really to them. That’s the University of Guelph on that.

This bill—actually, there are a whole bunch of things that for me are kind of fun with it. The longest petition in our legislative history was about this legislation, and there’s some good stuff, actually, in that petition, on how modernizing the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario Act is a key component of the Grow Ontario Strategy, that aims to strengthen Ontario’s agriculture and food supply chain. We go on to talk about all of the different institutes and what they do and how this legislation will help on that.

Again, I know the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane talked about how it was good legislation because we took our time with it. There was a lot of consultation that was involved in it, and I think we have to point out a lot of the staff members and people who were involved in that consultation, and I want to get some names out on the record.

In particular, Dr. Hepworth; he’s the chair of ARIO. He’s done a fair bit of work on this, and what’s interesting about it is, when we talk about collaboration, yes, we’re collaborating with the agriculture industry here in Ontario. We’re collaborating with stakeholders here in Ontario on this, but the kind of cool part about this is that Dr. Hepworth was actually the Minister of Agriculture in another provincial legislature. So it’s not just collaboration here in Ontario, it’s not just collaboration with our own stakeholders; it’s getting information from other provinces as well, and how other groups were doing this and incorporating that into it.

The original legislation that created this was written in 1962. Now, what I’ll say on that is that it predates the last time the Maple Leafs won the Stanley Cup, and the Stanley Cup has never been won by the Maple Leafs in my lifetime, so that’s legislation that has been around for a long time

In the petition, we point this out a number of times, that there’s things that have happened in agriculture research that were never envisioned when the research institutes were first put into place. Robotics was not something you ever considered for agriculture. Genomics was something that was never considered for agriculture, back when that was first written.

So it really did need to have an update done to it, and I think that with the amount of work that was done by parliamentary assistants, the minister and ministry staff does make a big difference. And there’s a couple other

people that I should give shout-outs too as well who were involved in this, some of the unsung heroes in the background: Kelli Rice and Tanya Marissen, both very heavily involved in the development of this.

I have said a few times that I’m going to embarrass somebody on this as well. And I have to say that with the amount of research, there’s a lot of work that goes out to stakeholders on it. You’re constantly working with stakeholders on this. This bill has more meaning for me than probably anyone else here because the director of stakeholder relations for OMAFRA is my daughter, and this is the first piece of legislation that she shepherded through the process.

That probably doesn’t mean a whole lot to a lot of other people, but if we think back to something from just a couple of weeks ago, I passed third reading of my first PMB, and if this passes third reading in a short period of time, there’s an opportunity for royal assent to be given on the same day for my legislation and my daughter’s, and I would hazard to guess, it’s probably the first time in our history that a father and daughter had their legislation given royal assent at the same time.

So, to me, that’s a historic moment for my family. Obviously as a father, I’m very proud of the work that my daughter did on that. So I think that, as I said, I have a very personal interest in this.

1540

I mentioned that the original legislation was written in 1962. There was a minor update done to it around board governance back in the 1990s. But this is something that needed to happen. When you look at the amount of work that has gone into it, the amount of research done, the amount of stakeholder engagement that was done on it—it took about 18 months from start to finish for this to come through the process. And I think, selfishly, it was a very well-written piece of legislation because we saw almost unanimous consent or unanimous approval from everybody. There were some minor adjustments that were brought up during committee work, but for the most part, no one had anything negative to say, just a couple of very minor tweaks that people thought should happen from it.

And because of the amount of research, the amount of background work that was done, it spawned off another piece of legislation, Bill 171, specifically about the Veterinarians Act and the changes that need to be made to that. So kudos to everyone that was involved in it because they did a great job in looking at one of the challenges we were facing and how do we move forward with it.

When we look at the agricultural industry in Ontario, there’s a lot of people who don’t truly appreciate what agri-business means for the province. It’s one of the largest employers in the province. I’ve heard it said before; I’ll kind of repeat it: One in 10 people work in agri-business in this province. Ten out of 10 consume the products that the agri-business does here in this province. So it is something that’s very, very important.

When we look at the advancements that have come because of the research that’s been done—when we look at dairy farming, again, the member from Timiskaming–

Cochrane has repeatedly told us that he was a dairy farmer. The robotics in dairy farming has made a massive difference to how we do things. It's enabled farmers to reduce the size of their herds. We've got one in my riding, in particular—he has 50% less cows today, but he produces more milk with them because it's an automated process. It's a robotic system. The cows are happier. The cows get a little treat when they go in to get milked. They have brushing devices—I guess would be the best way to describe it—so that when the cow wants to have its back rubbed, it can get it. The one farmer said to me that happy cows produce more milk. That's exactly what we're seeing from it.

When the conversation was happening about the SPUD unit—being able to get rid of viruses, having a clean slate with your crop when you first plant it is something that's very valuable. The genomics that happen—it doesn't happen by surprise. It happens because of the amount of research. We're seeing that with so many different parts of the agriculture industry. It is not just in plants; it's chickens, it's pork, it's beef. All of the livestock, we're seeing improvements in that, in the genetics of those animals because of the research that's being done. And what we're changing now with the updates to this is, we're ensuring that that research that's being done can get to the farm faster so that farmers can actually make those decisions at the speed of business. They can make the pivots and adjustments that they need to because Ontario is doing that research, that R&D, and giving, then, the opportunities for a better product.

We've seen here in Ontario that there are agricultural products that we're now producing here that were never thought of being produced in this environment because of the research, because of some of the changes that have been made to the genetics of it so that you can have plants that are not necessarily native, or not native at all, to this region of the world thriving in this area. In my own backyard, we have a couple of vineyards now in Peterborough. There was a time when no one would have thought that you're going to grow grapes in Peterborough county, and yet we have that.

Prince Edward county is another great example of that. For those who don't know, I grew up in Wellington. We moved from Wellington in the mid-1980s. But Wellington was a farm community when I was there. Grapes were not part of the farm product. It was all cash crops. I worked on a tomato farm. I worked on a dairy farm when I was a kid. That tomato farm doesn't exist anymore as a tomato farm. One of the largest pea farms was in Prince Edward county. They grow grapes now on that farmland. And all of this is because of research that has been done.

By Ontario making these changes, by investing in our research institutes and by updating them and bringing the legislation up to today's standard and focusing on the things that we need to for today, it puts us in that better position to be the worldwide leader and supply the world in agriculture.

It's been said by the minister a number of times that Ontario is a net exporter of our produce. When we look at

the greenhouse industry, the vast majority of the product from our greenhouses is exported to the United States. And it's all because of good stewardship, because we have been able to demonstrate to farmers ways that they can improve. That is one of the true benefits of the ARIO network that we have, the 14 institutes across all of Ontario.

With that, Speaker, I know I still have a little bit of time left, but really, what I wanted to get on the record was how proud I was of my daughter. This is the first piece of legislation she has completed that has come through this whole process. I'm looking forward to the opportunity for everyone to get behind it, support it, pass it at third reading so that we have an opportunity for both her legislation and my legislation to receive royal assent on the same day.

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

Mr. Joel Harden: I enjoyed the presentation. I'm wondering if the member can elaborate a little bit, based upon research he's done or done in conjunction with his daughter, about food waste—big subject, and it's what I plan to talk about this afternoon. It's a very important debate. Food waste is something that is top of mind for growers in our region. They're trying to think about more of a circular approach to how they deal with produce that's not possible to sell on the marketplace for use in animals. I'm just wondering if the member has any thoughts on that.

Mr. Dave Smith: Thank you to the member for that. Actually, one of the things that I did this past weekend was, I was with a group called Kids Against Hunger. I talked about it in my statement this morning. Most of the product that they use is actually stuff that would have gone as food waste. When you're looking at dehydrated vegetables, for example, it doesn't matter whether the pepper looks like that great-looking thing with four little bumps on the bottom or three little bumps on the bottom that are all uniform. When we're getting into the food products like that, there is a fantastic opportunity for using those less-than-beautiful types of vegetables. I think that the more opportunities that we have, then, to look at the ways of being more creative in how we use it, the better it will be.

When we also take a look at some of the other industries that we have that are emerging in Ontario—I'll talk about the ethanol industry, for example. At the moment, they're using corn—to convert corn into ethanol. But here's another great opportunity, with some research, where we may find that it's very beneficial to be pulling ethanol out of other types of vegetables that we wouldn't normally be selling to market.

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

Mr. Deepak Anand: I was listening to the member from God's country. It was really good to hear.

Madam Speaker, every time I go and I look, there is a big sign I see: "Farmers feed cities." They're not just feeding us; they are being partners in the prosperity of Ontario as well. In Ontario, the agri-food sector is a pillar of economic growth that contributes over \$48 billion to Ontario's GDP and employs one in 10 people in the

province's labour force. We have wonderful PAs to the ministry as well, who are doing an incredible job.

So to the member, I want to ask: Can you help us to understand how this bill will encourage continued growth of this vital industry?

Mr. Dave Smith: When the original legislation was put in place, when the institutes were first created, it was 1962, and what we were looking at for technology for agriculture was vastly different than what we're looking at today. We know, as the member said, that one in 10 people work in the agri-food industry right now. This is one of the biggest drivers of our economy. When we have those investments into research, when we find better ways to be more productive with our farmers, when we find more efficient ways of doing it, when we find ways that we can reduce the carbon footprint from it, all of that is leading back to having a better product, more productivity.

The Grow Ontario Strategy is looking forward to increasing our export production by 30% in less than a decade. All of that is going to come to fruition because of the amount of research that we're putting into it. Modernizing this act this way is going to put us that one step forward so that we do reach that goal of a 30% increase in our product exports.

1550

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

Ms. Catherine Fife: I think it's great that the member from Peterborough-Kawartha mentioned his daughter's connection to the legislation. It shows that farming is a family business and it's something that we should be protecting.

What's happening in Wilmot township, actually, right now, though, is the forced expropriation of 770 acres of prime agricultural land for industrial use. We will never be able to foster the \$48 billion in economic development in the farming sector if we lose farmland, so I really wanted to give him an opportunity to talk about how we should be respecting farmers in Ontario, protecting the land and fostering that stewardship of prime agricultural land which right now is being forced through expropriation by the region of Waterloo in our community.

Mr. Dave Smith: I think the key point to it is that it's the region of Waterloo that's doing it. This is not something that's a provincial strategy that is doing it.

And when we take a look at what the research institutes are talking about, this is how we're going to get to those goals that we're talking about of increasing our exports by 30%. When we invest in research, when we do the things that we need to do to make sure that we're increasing capacity on all of those different areas of agriculture, that is what is going to get us there. Those are the things that are going to help Ontario grow that way.

It has been said multiple times: "Good things grow in Ontario." And the reason that good things grow in Ontario is because we've got some of the brightest minds doing the research that we need to do to increase that capacity, to increase the capabilities. With the changes in this legislation, we're making sure that all of that good research is

coming to those farmers who want it at their fingertips, at the speed of business itself.

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

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: Thank you to the member, my colleague from Peterborough, for the wonderful presentation. I'd like to thank the minister and the wonderful parliamentary assistant and the minister for your hard work on this bill.

Madam Speaker, when I look at the presentation, I hear the presentation's passion for the agri-food industry and also the real motivation why we are doing this bill, why we have to strengthen the agri-food industry in Ontario. We are facing a food price crisis, not only in Ontario but in the world; also food scarcity and food inflation. Food inflation went up three or four times prior to COVID, and even post-COVID food inflation went higher. You could see starvation in some of the continents, and this bill—

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

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): You've spent all the time for the question.

I'm going to ask the member to respond.

Mr. Dave Smith: I think I know where he was going with that. There are a number of different things we can talk about on that. Obviously, the cost of food is something that we're seeing a significant rise on, and I know that the opposition is going to boo and hiss on me on that. One of the biggest challenges that we face with it is the carbon tax. It doesn't matter how you spin it; every time you add an additional input cost to it, you're going to add an additional output cost on that. We can get rid of some of those cost factors into it by getting rid of the carbon tax.

But what specifically this bill is going to do for us is find efficiencies in how we can do things in agriculture. It means that crop of land, that acre of land, will be more productive than it was. And when we look at how farms have changed over history since Canada's inception, the 40-acre, 50-acre farm that was producing a small amount that was good for a family or two—we've seen a significant change in the amount of products that can come from that single acre, and that is all because of the research that has happened.

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

Ms. Catherine Fife: I know the member from Peterborough-Kawartha is not going to be surprised by me pushing back on the region of Waterloo and that narrative. In fact, what's happening in Wilmot township right now, when 770 acres of prime agricultural land are being forced-expropriated away from six very productive farmers—this is happening because the government has the get it done wrong act, schedule 1, which streamlines expropriation of farmland and lowers the standards of environmental assessments.

So you have a good piece of legislation before the House, which we are supporting, which is focusing on research and modernizing and building on that \$48 billion

of economic development in the farming sector, and yet you have another piece of legislation which makes it a bit easier to add to those 319 acres of prime farmland that we lose every single day in Ontario.

So I ask the member: How committed, truly, is the Ford government to farmers in Ontario when you have a piece of legislation which is undermining the farming sector?

Mr. Dave Smith: Speaker, I'm going to end up leaving about four or five seconds left on the clock at the end of this answer, but I find it very rich and interesting that the member from Waterloo on one hand is saying that the province should not be interfering with what municipalities are doing and to let the municipalities manage their own affairs, and then on the other hand the member is saying that the province of Ontario should step in and stop those municipalities from doing things because "they're not doing what I want them to do." So really, she needs to pick a lane on where she's going with it.

Either municipalities have the autonomy to do the things that they should do or should not do, make the decisions themselves, have the people who live in those regions then talk to others within the region and make the decision on whether or not the people who they elected actually are representing them or not, and move forward with it—but instead, she wants to suck and blow at the same time. You can't have a vacuum that sucks and blows. I'm sorry. It doesn't work that way. You have to have—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): I'm sorry. Excuse me. I hear the complaint. The language has been elevated to something that is not normally accepted, so I will ask the member to withdraw that comment, please.

Mr. Dave Smith: I withdraw.

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

That concludes the time that we have for questions and answers on this round. We're going to move to further debate.

M^{me} France Gélinas: It's my pleasure to add a few words on the record about Bill 155, An Act to amend the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario Act, and I would like to make it clear that I will be sharing my time with the MPP from Ottawa Centre.

The bill is rather simple. The Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario has played a valuable role in furthering the agricultural industry in Ontario. The act is being amended so that it will be renamed from Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario to Agricultural Research and Innovation Ontario, so that it will further Ontario's commitment to excellence in agriculture, food processing and the development of agricultural and food technology.

If you go to some of the amendments, they "will facilitate the pursuit and commercialization of high-impact research and innovation, the management of properties for agriculture and food research, the cultivation of strategic relationships and the support of the growth of the agriculture and food sectors. Emerging crop and livestock sectors and new technologies stand to benefit from such areas of research."

To prepare for my few minutes of talk, I thought I would go through the different research institutes that exist

that are part of agricultural research in Ontario. The first one that I wanted to talk about is the one located in Alma, about aquaculture.

You may be wondering why I want to talk about aquaculture, Chair. Well, it's because, in my riding of Nickel Belt, we had a farm in Estaire, which is part of my riding, that was offering fresh northern Ontario—get this, Speaker—shrimp. We were growing shrimp in Nickel Belt. It was Kerry LeBreton, a resident of Nickel Belt, who had brought it. The farm was called Good4UShrimp, and what they were doing is growing Pacific white shrimp from its post-larval stage until it was ready to sell. The shrimp came from the US; I forget exactly where. They were the size of an eyelash, like, really just a tiny weeny little thing, and they would be hatched at this farm.

I went and visited the farm. I had never seen anything like this in my life. It was really, really interesting. They would move the larvae through the different tanks, through the different growing process until the shrimp were ready for market, which takes between three and four months. Some of the shrimp were like scampi. They were really big. He would bring them to the market at the Four Corners in Sudbury, and there were lineups of people who bought the local shrimp. They were really, really good. They were trying to bring high-quality food to the people of northern Ontario who are health-conscious about what they eat—right from the table, right fresh. Unfortunately, he ran into many different problems and had to close. I am sort of hopeful that if the aquaculture research could help, we would be able to reopen this shrimp farm in northeastern Ontario. I can tell you that all of the restaurants wanted to buy his shrimp. They just did not compare with anything else that I have ever tasted. Not only did I see the tiny little shrimp, but I also ate some of them. They were very, very tasty. So this is one of the research institutes that is in Ontario that will be affected by the change in this bill.

1600

The second one that I want to talk about is the one in Elora. The one in Elora, everybody will know, used to be in New Liskeard. It got transferred to Elora.

As our agriculture critic says it so good, the future of the beef industry is in northern Ontario—so we sure hope that the research, going forward, will look.

I want to again share some of the reality of beef farming in my riding. We have a farm called Triple Star Acre Farm—it is a family who raises quality, natural, healthy meat year-round. In the summer, they also have seasonal vegetables. They also sell deli products. They are committed to continuing a holistic practice and method of farming that was established by the Labine family. It is now the Dube family who runs the farm. They believe in raising animals in a clean and natural environment. They feed them only healthy, non-GMO grain—they allow for full pasture, free-range, and treating them with the care and respect that animals deserve. All of this contributes to great-tasting nutrition and naturally pure food. The family vision is to raise the highest-quality meat and vegetables for our community, and they hope to be able to preserve

that for years to come. I can tell you that this farm is very successful in my riding. A lot of local people buy from it.

I agree with our agriculture critic that the future of the beef industry is in northern Ontario.

When our critic talked about this bill—when you talk about northern Ontario, you can't help but talk about the Internet. If you want to be able to do agriculture research, even if you want to be able to farm, you need to have access to stable Internet, and I can tell you that in the vast majority of my riding, we do not. If it's in the summer—I live on the lake—and I'm at the end of the dock, it's pretty good; in the winter, not so much. Actually, if the lake is all iced over and we get a little bit of wind, it sucks. Am I allowed to say that? It's really bad. It's the same thing throughout my riding.

The government has millions of dollars—but with only one strategy, and the strategy is that the for-profit companies get big money from the government to set up their infrastructure and all of this and run the Internet. There is no money to be made in Nickel Belt. You can give them all of the infrastructure you want; they do not want to set up. You have to look at other ways to make sure that we have access to the Internet because, right now, we do not.

But coming back to the bill, I want to talk a little bit about another research facility, and this is the one in Huron that concentrates on weed control. This is a big issue in my riding.

I want to quote Joël Thériault from Foleyet in my riding. He basically collected the petitions. He is a third-generation float plane pilot and outfitter, and a professional fishing and hunting guide. His interests in this matter are truly to protect and preserve the natural environment for future generations, a goal that all of us should be striving toward.

In his work as a float plane pilot, he flies over thousands of acres daily that have been sprayed with chemicals, and he has noticed a massive decrease in the big game population over his lifetime.

Ontario is spraying about 60,000 to 70,000 hectares with chemical herbicides per year, which equates to Algonquin park after a decade. Similar chemicals are banned in the city of Toronto for health and environment reasons, but we continue to allow them to be sprayed in the backyards of northerners.

It's the same thing with Wahnapiatae First Nation, which is trying to get this government to engage on the issue of chemical defoliant. They are being used without the consent of the First Nation.

I could go on, but I'm running out of time. In my 20 seconds, I wanted to talk about the SPUD unit, which Mr. Vanthof talked about. I am proud to say that the biggest potato producer is in my riding, Poulin potatoes—Poulin potatoes. He farms on 400 acres of farms in Chelmsford. Look for the "Pride of Azilda" potatoes. This is the name, and if you go to a chip truck anywhere in northern Ontario, I guarantee you that you are eating Poulin potatoes. They are delicious and I encourage everybody to buy them.

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

Mr. Joel Harden: Thanks to my friend from Nickel Belt. I want to add to this debate by focusing on an issue that's really important to growers and residents where I live, in Ottawa Centre, and that is the issue of food waste.

It was alarming when I did the rounds back home the first time and started checking in with farmers' market vendors, family farms around the greater Ottawa area and experts on the issue of residential and commercial food waste to learn some of the following things that I'm going to share with this House that I think are very appropriate to the mandate of the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario, because after all, we are talking about what are the ideas that drive the bread basket, of, I believe, a lot of our country, but certainly of the jurisdiction for which we're responsible.

So let's just go over some numbers when we think about food waste in Ontario and in Canada. Surprisingly for me, I learned Canada has one of the highest food waste percentages of our output in the entire world. About 60% of all the food produced in this country ends up in waste. In Ontario, the 805 landfills we have in the province are expected to reach capacity by 2041, and a while ago, nine years ago, in 2015, the province estimated that approximately 32% of the landfill waste is food waste. So that accounts for 3.7 million tonnes of food that is thrown out every year. In a context we talk about all the time of hardship and affordability and poverty, 3.7 million tonnes of food is thrown out in Ontario every year.

The vast majority of this organic matter is sealed in plastic bags, which is serious because what that means is, when it decomposes, it doesn't decompose properly and it emits methane—methane, of course, being a gas that is 80 times more potent than carbon dioxide. It traps heat and is exactly opposite to what we should be working towards as a province.

I'm going to cite a local agency, a local community agency that has a lot of expertise, Foodsharing Ottawa. They said, in their report made available to the community, that 50% of the wasted food that they were aware of happened from farm to retailer. So it's the capacity of the retailer to utilize the food to sell the product to the consumer, as the member from Peterborough-Kawartha said earlier. The consumer has an idea of what appropriate food should look like, and when it's not appropriate, it's not bought, and when it's not bought, often it's disposed of.

In 2016—again, some time ago—the province committed to revamp its waste management strategy. They talked about moving towards a system in which we encourage what's called a circular economy, so when a grower produces food and that's brought to a retailer, if there is food waste, we find some use for that food waste.

1610

I want to salute, in the time I have left this afternoon, some people back home who are pioneers and innovators who are doing exactly that. I want to talk about Karen Plunkett from an enterprise called the Frugal Farm. Karen has relationships with 26 grocery stores in the greater Ottawa area, and she saves for her animals 10 to 12 tonnes

of food that would otherwise go wasted per month, which she uses to feed her animals. If you go on Facebook right now—and I know everybody right now is paying rapt attention to the words I'm using, but if any one of my colleagues were on Facebook right now and you were to pull up the Frugal Farm's Facebook page, you would see images of Karen's farm, of livestock eating pumpkins that were otherwise destined for the landfill, of chickens eating pieces of watermelon, all appropriate for their diets, all tested with good veterinary science, but reutilizing through a circular-economy approach food that would otherwise go wasted.

I want to salute another organization called Box of Life. Box of Life, at home, is a vermicomposting social enterprise. What they are doing is trying to find a way to partner with apartment complexes, with restaurants, with agencies responsible for the creation of food, to make sure that what otherwise might go to the landfill is used in a revitalization process where worms are put in big tubs of earth that make some of the richest soil. I know there are green thumbs in this place. If you love to garden, then the kind of gold that gets produced from these vermicomposting units is precisely what you need.

Box of Life, I'm happy to say, has added 500 new residents to my own constituency office at 109 Catherine Street. We have one of the large vermicomposting units. It does not stink up the office; the scent is fine. What we do with our office staff team is repurpose any food scraps from our own homes and feeding our family. Anything in the day ultimately gets fed to the worms, our 500 friends in the office. What we do is, we have a fantastic little garden box outside our office door at 109 Catherine Street—you're all welcome to visit any time—and we make some of the best cherry tomatoes, I believe, in Centretown. But that is all, again, part of that small version of what that circular economy should look like. And it's a lot better, quite frankly, than—let's review the statistic again—3.7 million tonnes of food being wasted in Ontario every year.

Why I'm bringing all of this up as we talk about the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario is, I would actually like to see significant provincial investment put into how we support these local champions—Frugal Farm, Box of Life, Foodsharing Ottawa—because what we know is that any time we have invested in these pioneers, we use all or most of the food that we create in this province, which is good. We repurpose and lower costs for farms who would otherwise have to buy food for their animals. It's a win-win all around.

But what we have to remember is that in the agricultural sector, we want to do everything we can to preserve arable land, to support the farmers and the growers and the agricultural workers who are doing all of that work. But once we have that bounty harvest, we've got to make sure that it's used appropriately, and that has often been part of the discussion that's not been appropriately understood.

I want to point to two jurisdictions for inspiration as I end the discussion of food waste, which I think is appropriate when we think about what this agency should

be doing for Ontario. I want to talk about the city of Vancouver. The city of Vancouver has passed a bylaw which works directly with restaurants in the greater city of Vancouver, which provides pretty steep fines after an introductory period of education—and this has been around since 2015—if there are excessive food scraps going to their landfill. What they try to do long ahead of time is partner those restaurants and large community operations, business operations that are creating and making food, to repurpose all of that food waste so it can be used to produce effective fertilizer. They have one of the best green box programs in the country. They have shown that green box opportunities are possible for multiple-dwelling homes, single-family homes, large business enterprises, and that once business was aware of the conduit with which their food could find a home, you took a burden off them, and it was embraced.

I also want to point to the country of South Korea, which, as my friends back home have indicated to me, embraced this over 20 years ago. South Korea used to have, according to the research made available to me, 97% of the food waste going straight to landfill—today, it is almost 100% efficiency of turning around that food waste and, through a circular loop, repurposing it back so it plays a productive role and not the role of waste.

This is an odd moment, in which I am appearing as a conservative as a New Democrat. I am known by my children, in my own home, as “the food police.” They hate it when I pick on them—not just for finishing their meals. I don't demand that they finish their meals, but I do hate it when food goes to waste in our own fridge. And I think that's something we all should care about.

If the people we rely upon to grow the food, to manage the animals, to manage the enterprises that produce fantastic food in this province—it is a shame that 60% of that food should end up in landfills. We need to do a lot better than that. And what I know, from the folks I've had the pleasure to work with at home, is that we can do a lot better than that, but it requires making the right investments.

So I suggest to the government, as it works with this research institute going forward, that food waste should be a priority. We should be thinking about how we utilize all the food we produce. And we should be supporting the local producers and the local innovators who are making it happen.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Questions?

Mr. Mike Schreiner: The member from Ottawa Centre just inspired to me ask a question. I'm known, in my house, as a person who takes care of most of the food waste. It is very visible, in that case, and I enjoy it.

We waste \$49 billion of food in Canada each and every year. I'm just wondering if you could elaborate on the importance, from a financial perspective, a climate perspective and a food security perspective—why it's so important that we reduce that \$49-billion number.

Mr. Joel Harden: I just want to salute the member for Guelph for playing that positive role for the economy—making sure that food goes to a good place.

But in all seriousness, let me point to his part of the province as one of the leads, actually, because—again, information made available to me from Foodsharing Ottawa—the region of Guelph-Wellington committed to a circular economy, with a \$10-million federal investment. They committed to what they called a 50-50-50 goal—50% increase in food security; 50% new, circular, collaborative businesses; and by recognizing 50% of the value of waste. That’s fantastic. I remember, when I used to be a professor in his city and I would go to the University of Guelph, I was surprised, often, to learn that they had wet and dry waste. That was done on purpose to make sure that they could actually utilize the organic waste, so they could grow their own greenhouses and use fertilizer on campus. So kudos to the member for the leadership there.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Mrs. Robin Martin: Thank you to the members opposite for their comments on the subject of food waste. It’s a very interesting topic, and I think there are a lot of things that can be done.

I wonder if the member from Ottawa Centre is aware of Leket Israel, which has a great model for recycling food and making sure food gets redistributed to those who need it—and has been studied, has a very successful model which could be implemented in other places.

Mr. Joel Harden: I would welcome the member from Eglinton–Lawrence sending me more information. If I’m not mistaken, that’s the enterprise that has the small food recycler units where you can put in the pod and you can create your own fertilizer at your own home or business. Is that—

Mrs. Robin Martin: I don’t know.

Mr. Joel Harden: Well, send me more information. If it is, there are fellow travellers of theirs in our community.

Sometimes it can be a mental leap for people. If you’ve learned your whole life to dispose of food waste in a particular way, it’s hard to grasp how you would have a worm composting facility in your own home, for example. Thanks to innovators, we have those options.

I would welcome more information from the member about what she’s talking about.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

MPP Lise Vaugeois: Thank you to the member from Ottawa Centre.

I’m also very interested in what’s possible in terms of meat. I’ve seen some of these composting things that you can buy. They’re pretty expensive. They’ll take everything and then, some time later, you’ve got your soil and so on. Can you help us out—like, can the worms do it? What are the options?

1620

Mr. Joel Harden: If I was on the right track in my previous answer, this is precisely the fix. Normally what I was told by Akil and the innovators of the Box of Life back home is that worms are vegans. You can’t give them anything other than that or you’ll make them sick. But with

these innovations, if you run them through these smaller enterprises where you can use meat and you can use other things, the worms can actually eat that, and there are industrial-scale equivalents to that. This is again how we can repurpose food to make sure we create fertilizer, which is could for future production of food.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

I recognize the member from Kitchener–Conestoga.

Mr. Mike Harris: Well, thank you very much. We have a proud history of reducing, reusing and recycling in Waterloo region as sort of the creators of the Blue Box Program, but I wanted to just touch a little bit more on the member from Ottawa South’s comments about Vancouver and hear a little bit more about what is setting them apart, with their green box program, from other parts of the country. And because we are obviously talking about research and innovation here, what research and innovation led to them being the leaders in mitigating food waste in Canada?

Mr. Joel Harden: My understanding—and it comes from a gentleman whose name is Duncan Bury, who I understood, under former environment minister Piccini, had worked with the government to try to think about the food waste strategy for the province. What Mr. Bury has told me is, when Vancouver’s ambition extended beyond the individual homes’ green boxes and the individual homes’ blue boxes and moved to entire apartment buildings and embraced that approach in the downtown and then allowed food businesses to have basically a system navigator from the city to help them find a way to deposit their food waste, it became a lot easier as opposed to just giving somebody a newsletter, shunting it onto them and having them have another issue to manage.

So Vancouver actually, as I understood it from Mr. Bury, designed a process that allowed people to adapt willingly, with consent, as opposed to just punitively saying, “This is what you’re going to do now. Here’s the newsletter; figure it out.” So that’s why I think Vancouver has had a lot more success than other places.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Mr. Chris Glover: I had no idea that my colleague from Ottawa Centre was such an expert on food waste. It’s been a fascinating conversation. The condo building that I’m living in, we just started composting about five years ago. It’s been very successful. The food program that I volunteer with, they also, you know, get a lot of recycled food and they talk about this food that would otherwise be going to waste. Some of the grocery stores are actually thankful for the food program to take it because otherwise they have to pay a disposal fee on it. So what does happen to food that is not bought from grocery stores, if it’s not repurposed?

Mr. Joel Harden: It turns into methane gas and it becomes a huge problem for us from an emissions perspective, and it’s wasteful.

What I will beg, through the Speaker, from the other members is that in the three minutes and 42 seconds, could

someone ask the member from Nickel Belt a question about Poulin potatoes?

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

M. Anthony Leardi: C'est toujours un plaisir de poser une question à la députée de Nickel Belt. J'imagine qu'elle serait très contente de recevoir une question sur le sujet que le député d'Ottawa-Centre vient de mentionner, et je pose la question.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ça me fait toujours plaisir de parler de Poulin patates. Poulin patates, c'est un fermier dans le Nickel Belt qui est le plus gros producteur de pommes de terre dans tout l'Ontario. Il est dans mon comté. C'est une famille super gentille, très impliquée dans la communauté et qui vend ses patates partout.

Je dois dire qu'on a eu beaucoup de difficulté à voir—Your Independent Grocer ne voulait pas vendre ses patates. Maintenant, ils les vendent, donc je suis très fière de ça. Elles sont vendues à la grandeur de l'Ontario, mais si tu viens dans le nord de l'Ontario, je te garantis, peu importe où est-ce que tu vas, tu vas manger des patates de Poulin patates. Il y en a de toutes les sortes. Il y a les patates blanches. Il y en a des jaunes. Il y en a des rouges. Mais elles sont toutes délicieuses et elles sont faites ici en Ontario par une famille qui est dans le nord de l'Ontario depuis des générations et des générations et qui fait la culture des pommes de terre.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Mr. Nolan Quinn: This question is for the member from Ottawa Centre. As most know, I do own a restaurant, and we have a significant amount of waste that comes through the restaurant. I actually compost everything at my restaurant through my house, so I can understand what you're saying, that black gold that comes out of what our food waste is.

I'm just curious if the member is aware of the FoodCycler system. That's something that came out of Cornwall, actually, and it's quite an interesting system that a lot of municipalities have come on board with, and they've done pilots with the residents of the municipalities. I'm just not too sure if you're aware of that or if you want to touch upon that a little bit more. It's not worm-based, but it provides compost on your countertop within 24 hours, so I'm just curious if you want to touch upon that.

Mr. Joel Harden: It's a great product. Are they from your riding?

Mr. Nolan Quinn: Yes.

Mr. Joel Harden: Ah. Okay, good. Great product. I went to an information session they held in the west end of our riding and, yes, I'm excited for people to have those opportunities—for businesses, for consumers and apartment buildings, in particular. This is what I keep hearing: We are missing huge opportunities in some of the major buildings all over Canada and giving people in their own homes this opportunity, or the whole building itself to have a larger industrial-size. So, kudos to the innovators

back in your community for providing these products to us.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further debate?

Mr. Mike Schreiner: It's a real honour to rise to speak to Bill 155, the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario Amendment Act. You don't hear this a lot, maybe, in the House, but I just want to compliment the minister for bringing forward this bill. I know it's something that people in the farm community, people in the food sector and researchers, in particular, in the food and farming sector have been asking for: modernization of the ARIO Act. A lot has changed since 1962 when the institute was founded by the three founding colleges of the University of Guelph, obviously located in my riding: the Ontario Veterinary College, the Ontario Agricultural College and the Macdonald Institute.

While I'm just on those, Speaker, I really quickly just want to say we're blessed in Ontario to have a university like the University of Guelph. OVC ranks first in Canada, third in North America and is in the top 10 worldwide for veterinary medicine and does a fantastic job. We certainly want to continue working to expand the opportunities at OVC because it's harder to get into veterinary school right now than it is to get into medical school, so we certainly need more spaces in our veterinary college. I also just want to mention that the Ontario Agricultural College ranks in the top 10 worldwide for agriculture and forestry. Then, obviously, the Macdonald Institute has been doing pioneering work over the years as well.

While I'm talking about the Macdonald Institute, I just want to give a shout-out to our former late colleague Daryl Kramp, whose bill he put forward around food literacy—

Interjections.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Please go ahead—whose bill he put forward around food literacy in our schools is so important. It really comes out of the work that the Macdonald Institute has done for years as one of the founding colleges at the University of Guelph.

The act was last updated in the 1990s, so prior to cellphones, prior to the Internet, prior to a lot of the innovations that we see in the world today, and the food and farming sector has changed. When I was a kid driving a tractor, I could drive the tractor and work on the tractor. Now you kind of drive the tractor with your phone, and I have no idea how you would ever fix the tractor if anything went down with the tractor. Things have changed a lot, and we need to make sure this institute and the 14 research locations that it represents are modernized with that change. So, I think it's a good thing that we do that.

Speaker, I wanted to mention a few things, though, and these are going to be constructive, and I hope helpful constructive criticism and is taken in that light. If we're going to modernize this act, the Ontario Federation of Agriculture—Mark Reusser from the region of Waterloo came and I think gave a fantastic presentation at committee. I've had a lot of conversations with Mark over the years, and especially recently about the importance of protecting prime farmland in this province and, in

particular, in Waterloo region, where he's very active right now. But in relation to this bill, he brought up some—and he said this in support of the bill. I'm going to be very clear: OFA called for modernization; the government has delivered on modernization. But there are some things that I think are important to put into the record.

One is that farmers have a direct involvement in the institute, especially as it modernizes, and that their voices—as the scope of the institute expands and the number of food value chain stakeholders becomes more prominent in the role that the institute plays, that farmers still have a direct role in the direction of research and in participation in research.

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The second is, if the research mandate of the institute is going to expand, which I think is a good thing, then make sure the institute has the financial resources to be able to deliver on the mandate of that expanded mandate.

That the oversight of facilities improve: There were examples, not actually brought by the OFA but by other farmers, particularly a berry farmer, who talked about the fact that some of the research that they were doing, because of inadequate maintenance of facilities, led to their berries molding, and the research was lost. So they just talked about the importance of making sure we maintain the facilities in a way that, when the farmers in particular are doing research at these 14 locations around the province, their research isn't damaged in any way due to the inadequacies of the facilities themselves. You could imagine the time, money, aggravation lost in doing that.

Concerns around making sure that industry representatives, particularly farmers but also throughout the entire value chain, serve on the board of the institute moving forward: That's not clear in the legislation. I'm assuming the minister is going to ensure that, but I think it's important to have it on the record and important to let folks know that farmers express that.

And then the final point I want to make is funding for our colleges and universities. At the same time this bill was in front of committee. The head of the faculty association at University of Guelph came and talked about how in her department they're going to lose two of the three plant scientists, and they don't have the financial resources to replace those plant scientists. That's going to hurt the ability to do this kind of research in the province of Ontario, and that's why we need to adequately fund our post-secondary universities.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Questions?

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: I'd like to thank the member from Guelph for his remarks today. As I was listening, I took note of your comment regarding veterinary capacity. As part of this proposed act, if passed, we would be investing \$14.7 million to establish a new collaborative doctor of veterinary medicine program to enrol up to 20 more veterinary students per year, as well as the Veterinary Incentive Program, which will be \$50,000 over five years for veterinarians to go to underserved communities.

Perhaps the member can speak to how that investment in those programs will help this capacity.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I appreciate the member's question. Thank you very much for it. I do want to be clear—and this is in all respect—that doesn't deal with this particular bill. But your question is very important, and so I want to say to the Minister of Agriculture the work that we did advocating for an expansion of the vet program is really important.

When I was asked in last year's budget what was the one thing I really liked about the budget, it was funding for this exact program that you're asking me about. The partnership between the University of Guelph and Lakehead University and the expansion of veterinary spaces, particularly targeting northern communities, is a step in the right direction.

We know that there's a shortage of veterinarians across the province, but there's especially an acute shortage of veterinarians, especially large animal veterinarians, in northern Ontario. This particular funding in the expansion of this program and the partnership between Lakehead and the University of Guelph is going to make a real difference.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Question?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thanks to the member from Guelph for coming to Wilmot township last week. We met with farmers who are being expropriated from their prime agricultural land, 770 acres. Developers have already gone to this land, back in January, and offered \$58,000 an acre, based on rumours that it would be rezoned for industrial land.

We can't study soil and the farming sector if the farmers aren't there. So I ask the member, what do you make of the fact that regional politicians have signed NDAs? It's silence on our democracy. This land is clearly being set for a large industrial project, and we have before us a piece of legislation which claims that we should be studying and thriving in the farming sector, and yet the Get It Done Act, schedule 1, fast-tracks expropriation and makes it more difficult for farmers to exist in Ontario.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I thank the member for the question. Also, I'll just maybe do a little cross-partisan collaboration and thank the member for also attending the event in Wilmot organized by farmers to protect prime farmland in the province.

Mark Reusser, when he came to committee, made it very clear that the OFA supports this bill. I'll be voting in favour of this bill. But in his testimony and in his broader public comments, he has indicated that, do you know what? If we don't have farmland, if we continue to lose farmland at the rate of 319 acres every day in this province, we're not going to have a food and farming sector to actually do research on. And so we have to build homes within existing urban areas. We have to look at doing industrial applications on land that's not prime farmland, because it's so critical to our economy and our ability to feed ourselves.

Report continues in volume B.

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