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Mercredi
17 avril 2024

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 17 April 2024

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 17 avril 2024

The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PREVENTING UNETHICAL PUPPY SALES ACT, 2024

LOI DE 2024 SUR LA PRÉVENTION DE LA VENTE DE CHIOTS CONTRAIRE À L'ÉTHIQUE

Mr. Kerzner moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 159, An Act to amend the Provincial Animal Welfare Services Act, 2019 / Projet de loi 159, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2019 sur les services provinciaux visant le bien-être des animaux.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'll look to the Solicitor General to lead off the debate.

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Before I start today, I'd like to acknowledge that I will be sharing my time with my parliamentary assistant the MPP for Brampton North and the MPP for Etobicoke–Lakeshore.

It's an honour to rise in the Legislature this morning to kick off second reading of Bill 159. Bill 159 is an act that brings forward thoughtful and specific amendments that, if passed, will enhance the Provincial Animal Welfare Services Act and, in short, this bill is titled the Preventing Unethical Puppy Sales Act, or what we like to call the PUPS Act.

Because our government of Ontario stands as a national leader in the protection of animals, today we're taking a stand against unethical dog breeding practices. This act seeks to crack down on puppy mill operations and the horrific distress and harm that results from them across the province.

As I begin to talk about why we're here today and why we're debating this today, I want to go back to public safety, because public safety is our government's priority—to ensure that we all have a right, just like we did today, to leave for this Legislature safely and, for those who still have kids at home, to make sure that they got off to school, and to check in on our parents as well. At the end of today, we all want to go home safely, we want to be able to shop and we want to be able to pray safely. For us and our commitment to public safety, nothing is more important,

and animal welfare is just that. It's a serious part of our government's priority of public safety.

Monsieur le Président, rien pour moi, en tant que solliciteur général, n'est plus important que la sécurité de notre province. Nous vivons une époque sans précédent, mais nous avons des opportunités toutes aussi uniques. Nous continuerons de faire ce qui est difficile, et nous continuerons de réaliser ce qui est difficile, pour assurer la sécurité de notre province. Et, je tiens à rendre hommage à toutes celles et à tous ceux qui assurent la sécurité de nos collectivités.

Monsieur le Président, pour moi, c'est l'honneur de servir, l'honneur d'apprendre et l'honneur d'écouter.

Qui dit Ontario sécuritaire dit Ontario fort.

A safe Ontario is a strong Ontario. This includes why we're here today. We're here today to talk about a government that has prioritized the seriousness of animal welfare. We've prioritized a seriousness in conversation on the expectation that we have of Ontarians and everyone coming into Ontario to understand where we stand and how we stand when it comes to caring for our animals and our pets and considering them loved ones and our own families. This is important.

But Mr. Speaker, you won't find the term "puppy mill" in the law or on the books, neither in Canada nor in the US. But the horrors these types of operations inflict on dogs are well known, and it's not right. A puppy mill is a general term used to describe a dog breeder that engages in overbreeding of dogs, neglect and the absence of proper care and attention, causing immense suffering to innocent creatures, to innocent animals.

Puppy mills are a world apart from the thousands of responsible dog breeders who put a great amount of time and care and planning into breeding their dogs. They invest in quality kennels and other supports such as veterinary care. They're selective in the dogs they breed and routinely screen for potential buyers in a good way to ensure that animals are going to a good home.

While puppy mill is a colloquial term, the effects these operations have on dogs can be devastating. Dogs in puppy mills are often locked up in cages and badly treated. Sometimes they're sick and undernourished.

I'm looking around the chamber this morning. So many of my colleagues are proud owners of dogs, and they care for them like their own family because they are family. But puppy mills have a connotation—again, it is this colloquial term that these operations can be devastating to the dogs.

What makes matters worse is that every day, Ontarians are unknowingly purchasing dogs out of these facilities with intentions of adding new members to their family—

please, God, those dogs should be with the family for a very long time—only to be a victim of purchasing an unhealthy animal that may require extensive veterinary care over the course of its life.

Again, I want to draw and delineate the distinction between people who are buying dogs or acquiring dogs or adopting dogs from wonderful, wonderful people who do this legitimately. We're not talking about those people; we're talking about the people who are unethical, and that's why we're here today.

The animals themselves do not deserve to be treated as victims just because they're born. The harsh reality is that dogs in puppy mills are unlikely to experience proper animal welfare standards during their critical first few months of life, first few days of life. This can lead to extensive health issues down the road. It's time for the operators who are making huge profits off the industry to face the consequences of their abuse and shameful practices.

I think it's noteworthy that everyone here this morning takes a moment to think of their own pets. In my family, we don't have a dog. We have a rabbit that my daughter adopted when she was very young—now she's in fourth year at Queen's University—but that rabbit has become part of our family. If we had adopted a dog, we would treat it with the same degree of seriousness.

There is not a clear picture of how many puppy mills exist in the province due to the often hidden nature of these operations. These are clandestine operations, in some cases. What we do know for a fact is that puppy mills have become a growing industry in the province, and it's time to provide our authoritative body of animal welfare inspectors with the tools they need to fight back against this troubling issue.

0910

Online advertising and sale platforms make it easy for dog breeders to run unethical puppy mill operations. Whatever is driving the growth in puppy mills, it has to end.

Our government is introducing amendments to the Provincial Animal Welfare Services Act, a piece of legislation that I'm proud of. I'm proud that we have something on our books called the PAWS Act. I'm proud that our government stands up every day for the people, for our animal welfare inspectors, who get dressed in the morning, go to work and help ensure that our animals are treated fairly. When we look at the numbers of what they've done just in the last few years, it's astounding, and they will continue to ensure that the standard, the expectation, the message of how we must treat our animals is adhered to.

The proposed bill will create new definitions of "dog" and "transfer," and provide greater clarity in the legislation. If passed, this bill will create more tools—this Provincial Animal Welfare Services Act—and the amendments will create more tools to stop harmful practices associated with puppy mills and penalize those who are abusing dogs in this regard, and make sure that dogs across the province receive the proper care and attention they deserve.

Let me give some context and some background to the Provincial Animal Welfare Services Act or the PAWS

Act. Before I outline in greater detail the proposed Preventing Unethical Puppy Sales Act, or the PUPS Act, I'd like to provide a bit of background and clarity to this House.

Our government was the first in Canada—and I spoke about this a few minutes ago—to create a full provincially run, government-based animal welfare enforcement system. And I want to give a shout-out to our Premier because he made it happen. He's a dog owner himself.

Specifically, the government's Provincial Animal Welfare Services—PAWS—Act came into force on January 1, 2020. I want to also acknowledge my predecessor, our Deputy Premier, for her commitment to bringing that act to life. Without her personal involvement and her interest, this would have never happened. So I want to thank the member from Dufferin—Caledon, our Deputy Premier, for her work on that.

This act implemented a new enforcement model with inspectors that provide province-wide coverage, including those with specialized expertise in livestock, equines and more, and today, across the province, as I've already said, Ontario's animal welfare inspectors enforce the PAWS Act.

The PAWS Act also enabled courts to impose the highest financial penalties for offenders of any Canadian province or territory. We also updated prohibitions and obligations, such as inhibiting the return of dogfighting equipment to a person who has been convicted of an offence, and we made it an offence to harm or attempt to harm a service animal or one that works with peace officers, such as a police horse or police dog.

PAWS also increased the public trust in the system by establishing new oversight of inspectors that have increased the transparency and accountability of the system, as well as one-window complaints mechanisms for the public.

The legislation has established a multidisciplinary advisory table made up of a wide range of experts, including veterinarians, agriculture representatives, academics, animal advocates and others who provide advice to the ministry on a continuing basis. That was just the start. We remain committed to creating and maintaining and enhancing a strong animal welfare system that protects animals. We appreciate the work that they do every day. I want to highlight that again: We appreciate the work that our animal welfare inspectors do every day.

In June of last year, we passed the Strengthening Safety and Modernizing Justice Act that included amendments to build on the Provincial Animal Welfare Services Act and enhance its capabilities. This act clarified Animal Care Review Board processes and permits the immediate removal of an animal by an animal welfare inspector if it is in critical distress. It also creates a requirement for animal owners and custodians to inform animal welfare services when ownership of an animal changes and provide contact information for the new caretaker in cases where there is a compliance order outstanding. This helps ensure that animal welfare issues are addressed. Owners cannot shirk their responsibilities simply by changing the name of an owner of an animal.

Further, the act improves the recovery costs incurred to provide care for animals in distress that have been removed by animal welfare services by providing greater specificity on the types of costs that go into removing an animal. And I'll add that the proposed PUPS Act also contains clarifying amendments to the PAWS Act that build on the changes from last June and enable the use of the Ministry of Finance's enhanced debt collection tools. People that need to pay a fine must pay that fine, and this will help animal welfare services recover unpaid debts to the crown such as animal care costs itemized in statements of account that are issued to an accused.

Owners of dogs are subject to all measures in the PAWS Act, including general prohibition against causing distress. Now, through this proposed new legislation, Ontario would become the first jurisdiction in Canada to insert the term "puppy mill" into the legislation.

You know what, Madam Speaker? I think this is really historic but let me tell you why it's so important. Let me tell you about the landscape of dog breeding, which we know is complex. The member from Timiskaming-Cochrane will know, as a member in rural Ontario, why this is important. As I've previously mentioned, many kennels that could be characterized as puppy mills do not operate as a registered business, and large volumes of dog sales occur online. This is a problem—I've said it before; I'll repeat it again. Potential owners may never meet a puppy's biological parents or tour the facility where they were born or raised, and this is through no fault of their own.

I want to give a special mention to my colleague and friend from Etobicoke-Lakeshore. For many years as the parliamentary assistant to the Solicitor General, both to myself and to my predecessor, the Deputy Premier, she paid special attention and she had a surgical focus of wanting to see this PUPS Act come alive. I want to thank her so much today.

Proper dog breeding is expensive. As I noted earlier, responsible breeders often, and I might add likely always, treat their dogs like their family—ensuring that they're housed in a comfortable, proper kennel with all the necessary conditions for them to grow and succeed. Sometimes these facilities are even located within a breeder's home, and dogs are fed and cared for. A good dog breeder does not overbreed and will spend many hours with the new mothers and pups, making sure that they're in good health, especially in those critical early days of life.

0920

The term "puppy mill"—and again we have to differentiate what is an ethical breeder from an unethical breeder—is largely associated with high-volume breeders, or unethical breeders, turning out hundreds of puppies a year in substandard dog-breeding operations. Whether it's high volume or not, whether a breeder is turning out dogs for profit or not, whether they're enabling poor sanitary conditions and spreading of disease, as we say, the proof is in the pudding; you know when an actor is a bad actor and they need to be called out, and that's why we're here today.

As I've mentioned, all dog owners are subject to the measures outlined in the PAWS Act, and these include prohibitions against causing distress, as well as ensuring that the general standards of care are being met. In fact, this is something that applies, and I've said it before, to all animals that are covered by the PAWS Act, but currently there is no prohibition in the act that relates to practices that are found in a puppy mill.

For example, puppy mills are known to overbreed female dogs. Some Ontario municipalities, and even other Canadian provinces, set limits on the number of litters that an unsterilized female can have within a set time period. As an example, in 2011, the city of Toronto banned pet stores from selling puppies from puppy mills, and good for them. Responsible breeders do not sell their puppies to pet stores. But this is an Ontario-wide issue, and a patchwork of municipal bylaws is not going to solve it alone. Our government understands this. Our government takes it seriously. Our government is acting, and it's time for our government to step in again when others have not.

The proposed Preventing Unethical Puppy Sales Act—or again, the PUPS Act—if passed, will stop harmful dog-breeding practices associated with puppy mills, impose new legislated minimum penalties and make sure that dogs across Ontario receive the care and attention they deserve.

There are so many examples that we can talk about, about what makes an unethical breeder be an unethical breeder. It's so obvious, and yet it happens, and it's so unfair to the animals and it's unfair to the families who feel that they want to love that dog, but don't know the story behind it.

Continuous breeding without appropriate breaks can also result in too many litters and overcrowding, creating unsanitary conditions and health issues for puppies that are not good. Dogs need to be psychologically capable of breeding and raising a litter. Some pre-breeding health tests, such as hip screening, can only be done once a dog is 12 months old. Giving dogs the time to mature prior to breeding allows a breeder to get to know the temperament and behavioural traits of the animal that will help make strategic and educated breeding decisions. In some circumstances, it is an industry best practice to wait until the second or even third cycle of a female dog before breeding.

This proposed act would also prohibit separating a puppy from its mother at too young of an age, and this is important. In the early weeks of a puppy's life, they are fully dependent on their mom and will begin to learn the social skills from their mother. Experts advise that puppies should not be separated from their mother until they're at least eight weeks old.

There are so many things that are so important that this government recognizes in animal welfare, but I think it's the tone and it's building on the foundation that we've set in place. Wherever we go in Ontario, people love their pets. This is something that we cherish. Ontario already has one of the strongest penalties of any Canadian province or territory for animal welfare violations. To encourage compliance with the proposed Bill 159, our legislation includes minimum penalties of \$10,000 for violating any

of the new puppy mill prohibitions and \$25,000 if a violation causes a dog's death or euthanization.

I cannot emphasize this strongly enough: The proposed legislation does not target responsible dog breeders. It targets the bad actors. Just like we say, as a government that takes public safety very seriously, if people, as an example, feel it's all right to destabilize our community, to be a violent and repeat offender, to steal our cars, to knock in a door at 5 in the morning, to cause havoc, we know where they belong. They belong in one place. They belong in jail. We will do that, and we will throw away the key.

It's no different for someone who can't comply with good breeding practices. That's why there have to be penalties. That's why there have to be consequences. That's why we're here today. This proposed Preventing Unethical Puppy Sales Act, or the PUPS Act, will address this issue at the root cause of unethical dog breeding practice.

Madam Speaker, it is an important issue. Animal welfare is an important priority for this government. I'm honoured not only to serve as Solicitor General, not only to recognize how important public safety is but to acknowledge how important animal welfare is. That's why this government, under the leadership of Premier Ford, will always look for additional ways to strengthen the animal welfare system in Ontario and to ensure that appropriate and effective measures are in place to provide animals with the protection they deserve.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Further debate? I recognize the member for Brampton North.

Mr. Graham McGregor: Madam Speaker, it's great to see you this morning.

It's an honour to rise for the first time in this House in my new official government role as the PA to the Solicitor General. I want to thank my colleagues and thank the Premier for their trust. I hope I don't screw this speech up too much.

I'm glad to be here on time. Madam Speaker, if you know, it was raining cats and dogs last night and into the morning, so the roads were a little slippery, but we're glad to be here—and pack it in, guys, this is going to be a long 20 minutes.

As the Solicitor General has said, Bill 159 is a crucial example of our government taking strategic action to enhance the welfare and the well-being and the safety of animals all across the province. Ensuring animal welfare standards are upheld is critical to not only protecting our pets but also protecting our livestock and more. It's essential to ensure that all animals are receiving the adequate standards of care that they deserve.

Before I begin, I want to make note for this House and all Ontarians to stay vigilant and be aware of puppy mills around their community. If you suspect a puppy mill operating in your community or somebody who has been trying to sell you a sick puppy, or even if you suspect that an animal is being abused, please call and report it to animal welfare services.

Ontario is a national leader in the protection of animals. We currently have the strongest animal welfare legislation

in the country. While we have already made significant strides in ensuring the protection of animals across the province, we understand that this is not a static issue. It is this government that understands that the care and consideration of animals is a fluid subject and that more needs to be done. That is exactly why our government is taking action with the PUPS Act here today.

Through the tabling of the proposed Preventing Unethical Puppy Sales Act, otherwise known as the PUPS Act, Ontario introduced amendments to the Provincial Animal Welfare Services Act, the PAWS Act, that if passed, will create more tools to help stop the harmful practices specifically associated with the operation of puppy mills. The strategic measures outlined in this bill will assist our animal welfare services in their efforts to make sure that dogs across the province receive the care and the attention that they deserve.

0930

Since 2020, animal welfare services have governed the province under the PAWS Act, ensuring a robust and comprehensive standard is adhered to, but currently the breeding and sale of dogs is not properly provincially regulated in Ontario, which leaves room for bad actors to take advantage of and exploit dogs for profit in conditions of neglect. While all dog breeders, along with dog owners and custodians, are subject to the current requirements in the PAWS Act, including prohibitions on causing animal distress and requirements to meet basic standards of care, there are individuals out there who have no problem abusing them for their own financial gain.

Through this bill, we have a plan to counteract this horrendous behaviour. If you've seen some of the conditions that you can find dogs in in puppy mills—I've got to tell you, Madam Speaker, the people who run these things are some pretty sick pups. We're standing here today because we're bringing light to an important issue. Puppy mill operations are guilty of often having significant animal welfare violations, often including but not limited to overbreeding, crowded and unsanitary conditions, lack of veterinary care and posing significant risks to the welfare of dogs living in these deplorable conditions.

We've all seen the images, Speaker. When an operation suspected of being a puppy mill is investigated, severely emaciated, crated dogs are often found living in their own filth conditions and in the presence of feces. It's disgusting. There's nothing about these conditions that indicates that these are safe places for a dog. That is something that every member of this House should agree on.

We are proposing new prohibitions that will help crack down on puppy mills to stop some of the worst practices out there, and that includes overbreeding, that includes keeping sick dogs away from other animals and that includes ensuring that dogs in custody receive the proper medical care.

As the Solicitor General just said in his speech, this government takes public safety seriously. I want to echo that statement here. But public safety doesn't only just mean taking care of the people in this province, it also means taking care of the animals in this province, and

frankly, that's why it's time that we make it harder for those in this province who want to abuse animals and who don't provide animals with the proper care.

One of the proposed inclusions in the PUPS Act is a clarifying change related to enhanced debt collection tools. One of the roles animal welfare services takes on is the removal of animals when necessary. This is often seen when an animal is found in a distress situation. When an animal is removed from a distress situation by animal welfare services or at the recommendation of a veterinarian, the province ensures that they receive proper veterinary care. This results in a statement of account being issued to the owner of the animal to cover the costs.

This amendment will enhance the province's ability to collect on those statements of account. If the province has to step in because you're not doing your job and you're not taking responsibility on behalf of an animal in your care, the province and the taxpayer shouldn't be stuck with the bill. The bad owner should be stuck with the bill. This bill helps us collect on those debts.

But allow me to provide a little backstory, Speaker. As the Solicitor General pointed out, the Strengthening Safety and Modernizing Justice Act, which was passed by this House in June, included amendments to bolster the PAWS Act. One of those amendments enhanced the criteria of costs that are incurred by animal welfare services. By identifying these costs and by providing greater specificity on the types of costs incurred, these are costs that can now be recovered. You can't collect what you can't measure. This means animal owners of any animal will be responsible for paying the costs their actions have caused. These costs are itemized in a statement of account which is served to an animal owner or a custodian.

Under the current law, the Ministry of the Solicitor General can only enforce the collection of debt using standard collection tools such as callouts and follow-up letters. If passed, this amendment to the PAWS Act would authorize the use of enhanced debt collection tools under the Ministry of Revenue Act.

Those who abuse animals need to understand that there are consequences for their actions. These tools would not only support the collection of debts owed, but it will help enforce the government's position that no animal deserves to be mistreated. This means animal owners of any animal will be responsible for paying the cost their actions have caused. For the bad actors out there, we are coming for you. Enough is enough.

While we're on the topic of money, Speaker, let's dive into this. I alluded earlier that financial gain is one of the main drivers of these horrific operations. It is also what keeps puppy mills in business. Unfortunately, these operators are turning enormous profits in the process, at the expense of the welfare of dogs.

The PUPS Act, if passed, will amend the PAWS Act and increase the minimum penalties for those accused of harming dogs and ensure that they receive fines that are worth their crimes. For those accused of operating a puppy mill contrary to subsection 23.2(1), they will receive a \$10,000 fine if convicted—minimum. And for those found

guilty of causing distress to a dog where the animal dies or a veterinarian determines that euthanasia is the most humane course of action, well, Madam Speaker, we're implementing a minimum fine of \$25,000 for that incident. Again, this is a prime example of our government's efforts to hold people accountable. If you break these laws and you harm a dog, you will be held to account.

Dog owners and custodians of animals across the province are subject to the measures outlined in the PAWS Act, and that includes prohibitions against causing distress, as well as ensuring that the general standards of care are being met. But the way the legislation sits currently, Speaker, nowhere does it specifically call out the functions that we are seeing in puppy mill operations. For example, puppy mills are known to breed female dogs over and over again. While there have been efforts at the local level to contain and control this issue, we know that it's time for us to step in.

This is an Ontario-wide issue. Operators of these facilities are operating in plain sight while strategically defrauding innocent members of the public. We will not accept that innocent individuals or families looking to add a furry friend family member have the potential to buy a sick dog that has lived a life subject to these conditions that may impact the quality of that animal's life. The PUPS Act would, if passed, as mentioned, impose legislated minimum penalties and get to the root cause of harmful dog-breeding practices associated with puppy mills. We're looking to close the valve that gives puppy mills the oxygen to survive.

Speaker, breeding, pregnancy, labour and delivery can all be very hard on a dog, and inhumane breeding practices can make that process even harder. Female dogs should not be breeding too early in their life and, once bred, they need time to physically and psychologically recover from the experience. The changes being proposed in the PUPS Act will prohibit harmful dog-breeding practices common in puppy mills, including restricting inbreeding, which is a practice that can be common in puppy mills, especially where breeding is largely unsupervised. This results in puppies that can suffer their entire life due to inherited health problems.

We are limiting the number of times a female dog can be bred within a certain time frame. As I mentioned, continuous breeding without appropriate breaks can result in too many litters and overcrowding, creating unsanitary conditions and health issues for puppies and for the breeding females.

We're prohibiting the breeding of a female dog at too young of an age. Dogs need to be physiologically capable of breeding and raising puppies, and some pre-breeding health tests actually can only be completed after they turn a certain age. Giving dogs the time to mature prior to breeding allows a breeder to get to know the behavioural traits of the animal that will help make strategic and educated breeding decisions.

This act will also prohibit breeding a female dog too early on in its reproductive cycle. Many dogs' first estrous, or heat cycle, is unlikely to allow successful breeding. In

most circumstances, it's industry best practice to wait until the second or even third heat cycle before breeding.

The proposed act will also prohibit separating a puppy from its mother at too young an age. As is the case with most mammals, in the early weeks of a puppy's life they are fully dependent on their mother and will begin to learn social skills from their mother and from their littermates.

We will also be prohibiting allowing a dog with a contagious disease to interact with other dogs or animals or use the same objects, such as food or water containers. Isolation of dogs with suspected or confirmed contagious diseases is critical to prevent the spread of illnesses that can be fatal, such as parvovirus.

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The proposed legislation also provides new regulation-making authorities to enable the ministry to set conditions and future regulations specific to the sale and transfer of dogs, as well as introduce record-keeping requirements. These future conditions could, for example, help stop the sale of sick puppies and the sale of puppies at too early of an age.

Now, on those specific items that I spoke about that this act would be introducing, I think most members of this House—certainly I would hope—would think these are all pretty basic things, that it's not too much for us to ask for basic decency and living conditions for dogs in Ontario. We would hope that people would be conducting themselves ethically of their own accord, but we know there are bad actors. We know there are people who are financially benefiting off of cutting corners at the expense of the welfare of animals, and I believe, Madam Speaker, as does the Solicitor General, that it is the government's duty and responsibility to step in to protect those dogs and those animals that aren't able to protect themselves.

To assist with the enforceability of the new provisions, regulation-making authorities and offences, the PUPS Act proposes new definitions for the terms "dog" and "transfer." If passed, "dog" would be defined as any dog, specifically "Canis lupus familiaris," and would include an animal which is a cross between a dog and another member of the Canis genus group, including but not limited to a wolf or coyote. "Transfer," for the purposes of future conditions related to the sale or transfer of a dog, would be defined as including offer for transfer and expose for transfer, such as trading or bartering a dog, but it would not include gifting.

These changes, to some, may seem like they aren't enough, but this act will open the door to a new standard of care for dogs in Ontario on top of our already renowned animal welfare legislative standards. Until now, no Canadian province has had specific prohibitions on operating a puppy mill. As mentioned, Ontario is a leader in the animal welfare space, and we're going to continue these efforts. It's high time to set tougher rules to hold those who abuse dogs to account. If passed, the PUPS Act will make the necessary changes to the PAWS Act to help stop harmful dog-breeding practices associated with puppy mills, with proposed legislated minimum penalties

that will start hitting the accused where it hurts: directly in their pocketbook.

Speaker, while I'm at it, I'd like to highlight a couple of other pieces of this legislation that will help keep dogs safe across the province. Under the PUPS Act, inbreeding and overbreeding, snatching puppies from their mothers too early in their development—breeders will need to clean up their act. Unsanitary kennels will be prohibited, and that means cracking down on kennels rotting with feces and other waste.

This bill will also allow the province to establish record-keeping regulations that will help animal welfare inspectors investigate potential puppy mills and to establish conditions that must be met to sell or transfer a dog in Ontario to help stop unethical sales practices and expose bad actors.

Speaker, I don't need to paint pictures of the situation for any member of this House, but I'd like to switch gears for a moment and share a personal story about what really drives home why this bill is important.

Georgia, a sweet dog rescued from a puppy mill in Wallenstein, Ontario, was one of eight newborn puppies found in deplorable conditions. Their mother, trapped in a tiny cage surround by filth and fed cat food, was unable to provide them with the care they needed. Thanks to the efforts of a local organization, Georgia and her siblings were rescued and rehomed into loving environments. Today, Georgia is spending her days surrounded by a wonderful, loving family in my riding of Brampton North.

Speaker, when we investigate these puppy mills, what we find is nothing short of disgusting. We find dogs clinging to life, trapped in crates that are dirty and covered in their own excrement, which is why it's crucial that we need to take action. The welfare of these animals is at stake. We need to put an end to these deplorable practices, starting with cracking down on overbreeding.

Speaker, I want to appeal to members of this House, and specifically the opposition. We passed Bill 102, which was a larger justice act—it was opposed by the NDP—where we made some of the amendments to the PAWS Act. I really hope members of the opposition will consider voting in favour of this bill. The animals in our province deserve it. They can't protect themselves, and they need Parliament—they need parliamentarians to stand up for them and to protect them.

And I've got to tell you, Speaker, I will be a dog with a bone on this issue and hounding the opposition, and I would just request them to—please don't let the opposition House leader muzzle you on this; speak up for your constituents. Vote in favour of this bill.

Speaker, I'll end how I started, by recounting how this government is renowned for its work on animal welfare. Ontario has the strongest animal welfare legislation in the country, and under this Premier, Premier Doug Ford, our government is taking these concerns very seriously. We've heard from families across Ontario, from organizations across Ontario. Passing this bill is an opportunity for members of this House to show that we are listening,

we hear you and we're here with you, to stand with you every step of the way.

We're going to continue to take strong action to build and maintain a modern animal welfare enforcement system to keep animals safe. That includes starting with practices that cause significant distress to the animals. That starts with the passage of the Preventing Unethical Puppy Sales Act, the PUPS Act.

I can only hope that all members of this House can see the light and stand up for animal welfare in this province. I hope that the members opposite and the independent members will take this issue seriously, and I hope that they support the passage of Bill 159 as it proceeds through second reading this week. And if they don't, well then at least Ontarians can be confident they elected a Progressive Conservative government that will do whatever it takes to better protect animals from negligent care and abuse.

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

Ms. Christine Hogarth: Since we're talking about pets, I have to mention Louie, who is one of the hardest-working French bulldogs, owned by the Speaker herself. I saw a video last week of him working on—I think it was National Dog Day, so a shout-out to Louie.

Today I'm really excited speak on the PUPS Act, Bill 159, Preventing Unethical Puppy Sales Act, 2024, to amend the Provincial Animal Welfare Services Act, 2019.

I know there are so many people watching or who will listen or read this debate who have been working tirelessly for years and years and years to make these changes. So, for all the people, the volunteers at humane societies, to all the animal advocates out there, to Lynn Perrier—I know you're watching, and I know you have a smile on your face—today is a good day for animal welfare in our province.

I used to always say that my mother was watching, but I have some pets at home, Bruce and Edward. They don't watch TV during the day—and they have a houseguest named Baxster, so they're all going to get in Hansard. Although they're not watching TV, I always have to give a shout-out to my fur babies and our houseguest, Baxster, who is visiting for the next month.

Animal welfare: Where do we start? The PUPS Act addresses the important policy issue spotlighted in my very first private member's bill here in this House, called Protecting Our Pets Act. My private member's bill was put forward in this House in December 2018, and it received unanimous consent from this Legislature on second reading in March 2019. Due to my introduction of that bill, I received thousands of correspondence, including letters, emails, phone calls and had direct conversations from my own constituents and constituents not just in Ontario but all around the world, from animal advocates. It was clear that animal welfare was front of mind for the people in Ontario. It warms my heart to continue this debate today and continue on this important work of animal welfare.

I do want to thank our Premier, Doug Ford, who is an animal lover, and his family are animal lovers themselves, because it takes leadership to change these laws. Some of

these laws haven't been touched for over 100 years. So this government and the opposition as well because it was unanimous—we all in this House made a difference in animal welfare in our province. So I thank everybody in this House for their work.

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The legislation we're talking about today shows that as a team we are committed to a more compassionate world for our companion animals. I'd like to first quote one of the staff from the Canadian Kennel Club from when we introduced the PUPS Act back in December 2023. Jeff Cornett, who is the executive director of the Canadian Kennel Club, said that they support the “well-crafted legislation that is fair, non-discriminatory, and enforceable to target producers of unhealthy puppies, without unduly burdening responsible breeders. We look forward to working with the government to address the puppy mill issue and ensure that new legislation will consider the interests of responsible breeders who prioritize the health and well-being of dogs.”

That being said, we have to give a shout-out to breeders. There are good breeders out there. They are the ones who care for their pets, make sure they sell their pets to appropriate people. They do interviews. Anybody out there who is looking to buy a pet, if you go online, if someone is not interviewing you and asking questions of what kind of household you have, maybe that's not the puppy or the pet you should be purchasing, because when you buy these pets, you have to make them their forever home. You certainly don't want to take that forever-home pet to your home and have it be sick. So please do your homework before you go out and purchase your pets.

If passed, this bill will do exactly what the kennel club had suggested. It's going to promote fair and ethical competition that values the welfare of animals over profit. In 2019, our government passed the PAWS Act, which I also had the opportunity to speak on.

Going back to the day I bought Bruce, I actually bought Bruce, which is my dog, from a volunteer—he was a rescue. He wasn't a puppy mill dog, but he was a rescue dog. I was interviewed, and I actually knew the woman who was selling me the dog. It wasn't really a sale, it was more to pay for some of his vet bills to get him to that point. She interviewed me. She interviewed my family. She interviewed my friends. I had to give a couple of references to make sure that we were going to make sure that that dog was looked after, and I'm okay with that.

Bruce has a good life. He has his issues, and he eats everything in sight, but we still love him. They knew he was going to a good home. Now, maybe I come home a little late, as we all do, especially now that the Gardiner is under construction. It takes that extra half an hour to get home, so it's an hour-and-a-half drive. Thank you, city of Toronto. But when we are purchasing our animals, as I said, we have to make sure that we go through the proper process, because if we don't, you've got to watch for that breeder. I think this legislation is going to make that difference.

There are over 7.9 million dogs in Canada, and that number is growing. I'm sure none of us walk down the street in our communities and we don't see another pet, another dog on a leash. That number is growing, especially through COVID. During COVID, we saw a lot of people purchase animals. The sad thing with COVID was people purchased animals, and then they went back to work, and they realized, "Hmm, maybe I don't have the time for an animal." That was sad. You see a lot of these COVID animals back in humane societies. Before you purchase an animal, maybe you want to stop by your local humane society to see who they have that can add joy to your family.

We are very lucky in Canada to have so many people who serve in the best interests of our animals, including our veterinarians. I have an amazing veterinarian. I probably go there far too often, including on Christmas Eve when my dog decided to open all the presents, including all the chocolate, and have a little feast. They tend to do that in the evenings on Christmas Eve, so I was at the emergency vet all Christmas Eve with a nice bill to end the year with. So thank you to our veterinarians, especially our emergency vets, our humane societies, our dog walkers, our pet sitters and just those who love our animals and go out to rescue those animals who are in need or trying to find their forever homes.

I know in my riding of Etobicoke–Lakeshore, we have the Etobicoke Humane Society. I want to give them a shout-out and thank them and their volunteers for the tremendous work they do. I know that they have a lot of cats. I visited them about three weeks ago to say hello and just to see how they were doing, and there were a lot of cats. So if you're looking for a cat, you can check the humane society, but make sure if you want an animal, it is their forever home, and please do not declaw those cats.

I'm trying to get all my speeches out in one speech, all my animal advocacy work that I want to see happen.

Our volunteers, they do tremendous work in helping animals transition from the streets and out of bad situations. They rehabilitate and they work to find suitable forever homes for our furry friends. These organizations usually operate entirely on donations and their fundraising efforts, and I would like to encourage anyone in this House to find more information on their website to see how they can help their causes. We all have humane societies in our community, and they do amazing work.

As much as there are good causes and organizations in Ontario helping animals, there's also the reality that there are still people and systems out there that take advantage of and exploit animals, and that's really what we're talking about today: To fight that exploitation and put an end to unjust practices that are forced upon our vulnerable pets.

Puppy mills: What is a puppy mill? We've all heard about them. They're commercial breeding facilities that mass-produce dogs for the sole purpose of profiteering. They breed puppies as fast as they can without the proper care, and often the animals are neglected.

Puppies bred in puppy mills are sold through pet stores—not in Toronto, and I want to thank former mayor

Rob Ford. He was the one who banned selling puppies in pet stores here in Toronto. That was in 2011. That was our former mayor Rob Ford who did that, so thank you. They're also sold through classified ads. Now that we're in the age of technology, you see them online being sold through Kijiji or other forms of sales, and you've got to be careful with that, as I mentioned.

I'm going to tell you a little story about my sister's dog—she has now passed; her name was Billie. She was a bulldog. When Mary adopted Billie, she was a puppy mill dog, so she was rescued from a puppy mill through the bulldog society—I'm not sure the name, but their organization. When she received Billie, she couldn't use her back two legs because she had never walked, she was in a cage her whole life. She was three, and I don't know how many—after they turn a certain age, they can't breed anymore. She couldn't move. We grew up with pets, we always had pets, and Billie was a great dog, but it was so sad to see her. Eventually, over time, she was able to move around the house and outside, but it took time and it took love and it took care. We can help some of these animals that are in these dire situations have a good life. We shout out to all those people who save these animals and give them a good life after.

The sad part of buying some of these animals online from puppy mills is that you buy them without knowing the condition of where their new family friend—how they were born into the world. Sometimes you're often told that it was positive conditions or the dog was certainly looked after, they may say they had shots, and then their dog becomes sick because these dogs were confined to overcrowded cages with minimal shelter from extreme weather, and they have no choice but to sleep in their own waste—you see some of these horrible pictures of these matted dogs with their waste around their fur. Some of these animals suffer from malnutrition and starvation due to inadequate and unsanitary food or water. The sick or dying animals receive no veterinary care and the adults are continuously bred until they can no longer produce, and as I said, they are discarded. That's what they are. They are discarded, as you would discard your leftover sandwich.

That is why we, as a government, must continue—and I have to shout out to the member for Dufferin–Caledon, who was the former Solicitor General, who brought in the PAWS Act, and this Solicitor General who continued on her track of making sure that animal welfare is important and is at the forefront of some things that we do. Thank you to Solicitor General Kerzner for your work and for allowing me to take on some of the files. It was certainly an honour to work with you, my friend.

When we talk about puppy mills, puppies are often taken away from their mothers too early, and they suffer from serious behavioural problems and continue that into their adult life. Mill sites can lead to numerous medical issues for dogs, including diseases and also birth defects, and then also there's inbreeding.

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I'm just looking at my time here. Somebody had suggested in a Star article that there's over 2,000 puppy mills

across Canada, and a majority of those mills are in Ontario and Quebec. Madam Speaker, I know you believe this: That is 2,000 too many. It was suggested in an article that since 2001, the amount of puppy mills has increased because of the use of the Internet in the advertising of sales. It's money. It's a way people make a living. And we are going to stop that.

These mills are increasing profits at the expense of the welfare of these animals. We don't mind people making a profit if they care for these animals, but if you're not, we don't want you to be in this business, and the Solicitor General is going to put you out of business.

If the PUPS Act is passed, we will ensure that we have the resources to set standards for breeding dogs in our province to stop these inhumane practices. While the PAWS Act scrapped and revised 100-year-old legislation, the PUPS Act offers to continue that imperative work we started six years ago.

The PAWS Act has already been successful as it has given our government the tools to finally fight against the mistreatment of animals. It came into force on January 1, 2020, enabling Canada's very first provincial animal welfare enforcement system. The PAWS Act aims to strengthen animal welfare and enable effective and efficient enforcement that is responsive and accountable to the public.

We hear a lot of people asking for some stats about what the PAWS Act has done, and I want to share those stats with you today. Since the PAWS Act came into effect in January 2020, more than 7,600 orders have been made, over 600 charges have been laid and over 5,200 animals have been removed from unsafe conditions. I think that's excellent work. I actually had the opportunity to meet some of our amazing inspectors when I was touring Aylmer, and I just want to thank those animal inspectors for the work they do. They do it in a compassionate manner. We should shout out to them.

Madam Speaker, thank you for allowing me to have the opportunity to speak on this. Let's protect our pets and pass this bill unanimously.

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

Ms. Sandy Shaw: My question is to the Solicitor General. You and I have had many conversations about your dog, Hal, and my dog, Nellie, and how this is very important to us. I also want to thank you for how you kept in touch with me during the incident that happened in Hamilton with the dog, Merlin, that was dragged.

I want you to know that we want this to be successful, 100%. We support your concern, our concern, for animal welfare. But I do have to say, I really want to know how you are going to step up enforcement. The PAWS Act has a budget of about \$21 million, compared to what the OSPCA had, which was about \$6 million. During the same period of time, the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals laid about 2,000 charges. We just heard here from the member from Etobicoke–Lakeshore that PAWS laid about 650 charges. So the charges are going down.

My dog is a rescue dog. I got her from a farm which was breeding puppies. She was really a puppy mill accident; she wasn't a purebred, and so they were going to discard her. My question to you is, how can you step up enforcement, and how do you know who the bad actors are? And the tough language—

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Thank you. Response?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: I very much appreciate the question and I appreciate the member's commitment, also, for animal welfare. The whole purpose of raising the conversation today is addressing the fact that overbreeding by bad actors, by puppy mills, is a serious issue.

Ontarians have said that the care of animals—animal welfare—is important. So when the Deputy Premier, the member from Dufferin–Caledon, brought forward the Provincial Animal Welfare Services Act, that was our commitment to have one of the strongest legislations ever anywhere, and today with the PUPS Act, we're taking it to another step. This is where we're planting our flag.

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

Mr. David Smith: My colleagues have mentioned the objectives of the PUPS Act: to regulate record-keeping, sales and transfers of dogs. Could the member explain the reason and implication of such regulation?

Mr. Graham McGregor: Thank you to my colleague for that question.

It's important that we start with the premise that we can't fix what we don't measure. Some of the specific items that were put into this bill that are to identify puppy mills are things like—I'll give you an example: breeding a female dog before the age of 12 months or the age of one year. What we've heard from animal welfare inspectors is that when they go into some of these puppy mills, especially some of the more disorganized ones—frankly, a lot of the ones that are bad actors, we think, might be intentionally not keeping records, which includes birth certificates to showcase the age of the animal. So the inspector goes in and they suspect a dog is under a year, and there's no birth certificate for them to actually identify to say this is a dog that is under a year old.

What we've done now, rather than having that onus and that work on the inspector—we're putting the onus on the breeder, on the owner-operator. If they're going to be making money off of selling dogs, they have a responsibility to keep proper records and properly maintain those records to ensure they're doing it in a humane manner. I think it makes sense. I hope all members support it.

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

Mr. Peter Tabuns: To the Solicitor General: Could you tell us the genesis of this bill? Was there a particular event or a particular organization that inspired you to bring this forward?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: In my remarks, I touched on the fact that people love their pets in Ontario. This is something that's integral to our families.

The genesis of animal welfare is something that this government said is a priority, and that's why the Deputy Premier, when she was Solicitor General, brought in the act.

I want to use this moment to also stress that the proposed amendments will hold irresponsible dog breeders accountable and deter bad actors from operating puppy mills, through strong penalties. I think this is very important.

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

Mr. Billy Pang: This question is for the member for Etobicoke–Lakeshore. We heard in the government leadoff that we must act against unethical puppy mills. Could the member please elaborate on what restrictions must be implemented to achieve this?

Ms. Christine Hogarth: Thank you very much for that question.

I would take this opportunity to start with this: If you ever see an animal in distress, we have a hotline, and you can call 1-833-9-ANIMAL. That's 1-833-9-ANIMAL. That is already in place, and there are people who will pick up that phone.

We want to make sure that animals are not overbred before the age of one, so this bill will say you have to wait until after one year—a one-year-old animal should not be bred until after that fact. We also want to make sure that they have strict standards of water, being fed, proper shelter—just the basic needs of a pet.

Through the PAWS Act, we have put together some standards of care for animals. We want to make sure that ethical breeders are following those standards. Unethical breeders could be charged, and if they are charged, it's a minimum penalty of \$10,000 for operating a puppy mill and \$25,000 if the commission of an offence results in the death of a dog.

We want to make sure that these dogs are healthy and that they continue to be healthy. We want to make sure that they are not in distress. We want to make sure these animals are living a life they should. We all have that—

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

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Ms. Peggy Sattler: I want to recognize Huron University College, which is located in London. They are launching a new degree program this September in animal ethics and sustainability leadership. It's the first program of its kind in the world, and it's thanks to the vision and passion of Dr. Kendra Coulter, who is a globally recognized expert in animal welfare advocacy.

One of the concerns that Dr. Coulter has raised in Ontario is the need for more PAWS Act inspectors, so that cases can be thoroughly and quickly investigated. She has also called for more training and protective measures for inspectors.

So, Speaker, my question to the minister: Right now, we have about 100 inspectors under the PAWS Act. How does the minister expect the new PUPS Act to be properly and effectively enforced if we don't have enough inspectors to proactively inspect and do the enforcement necessary?

Mr. Graham McGregor: Thanks to the colleague for the question and that's good to know about Huron University, as well. This bill will be going to committee, so we would love to have them come to committee and testify that as well.

What this act is here to do is to codify and clarify what a puppy mill is and minimum fines to hold those bad actors to account. We've heard, from animal welfare inspectors, concerns about lack of record-keeping. We've heard about lack of definition when they're doing their jobs and laying these charges.

We are clearly laying out: If you are breeding a female dog before a year old, you will face a \$10,000 fine. If you're caught having an animal in bad conditions, where they don't have proper sanitary, they don't have the proper diet, you will face a fine—\$10,000. If your neglect of an animal causes the death of an animal, you will face a fine of \$25,000.

I'm sure the folks from my colleague's riding would agree that this is a very good thing, and we're pleased to have the support of the OSPCA and Canadian Kennel Club as well.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): One very quick question?

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Again, I really want to hear very specifically how you're going to enforce this. You've identified bad actors, but I really want to hear from you. How are you going to enforce this? You have enabling legislation; that is wonderful, but it's the enforcement. And I didn't hear a very adequate answer from you.

Mr. Graham McGregor: I hope the member has heard from animal welfare inspectors the way that we have. These initiatives that we're putting through gives them the clarity they need to enforce the rules and stiff penalties to do so. So this is directly in response to concerns that we've heard. We're taking action to keep dogs safe.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): It being 10:15, it is now time for members' statements.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

RICHMOND LIONS CLUB

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: Mr. Speaker, all of us in the Legislature represent communities and the lifeblood of those communities are volunteers.

I'm honoured to acknowledge the 60th anniversary of Richmond Lions Club in the village of Richmond in the riding of Carleton.

Since 1964, this volunteer-driven organization has been the heart and soul of the community. They raise funds that might go to paying for equipment at the local hospital or helping a struggling family in need. They assist seniors and make donations to programs like Meals on Wheels. They even quietly help underprivileged youth register for minor hockey or youth soccer. They organize road barriers

for community events like parades and road races. They offer a team of volunteers to other groups and organizations who need help to run their events and fundraisers.

In some communities, service clubs are fading away. People have other priorities than giving back to their community. But the Richmond Lions Club is a strong and growing community organization.

The importance of giving back to the community is what drives their members. Love of their community and giving back is what draws special people to become members in this special organization.

Congratulations to the Richmond Lions Club for making our community—a community I am so proud to represent in the Legislature—a better place to live for 60 years.

Service clubs deserve our recognition, not just in Carleton but in every riding in Ontario.

SPECIAL OLYMPICS CANADA WINTER GAMES

JEUX D'HIVER D'OLYMPIQUES SPÉCIAUX CANADA

MPP Jamie West: This year, the Special Olympics Canada Winter Games, les Jeux d'hiver d'Olympiques spéciaux Canada ont eu lieu à Calgary. These 2024 Winter Games were extra special because seven of the national athletes were from Sudbury and they brought home seven medals. Our Sudbury athletes participated in five-pin bowling and the snowshoeing competitions, and during the games, they demonstrated tenacity, courage and love for the sport. One of our athletes, Mathieu, is currently waiting to see if he will be advancing to the worlds in Italy in 2025.

It wasn't just their skills that made an impression; Air Canada was so impressed, they asked for a group photo outside their plane with all the athletes in their plaid Team Ontario uniforms.

It was my absolute pleasure to meet with them and their coaches at my local office last week. I love hearing about all their great experiences, and I'd like to take this time to congratulate Eric and Mathieu and Lori and Amanda, Gabriel and Taylor for their achievements.

You've all made Sudbury incredibly proud. Félicitations pour toutes vos réussites.

CENTRE 105

Mr. Nolan Quinn: Today, I want to draw attention to a remarkable grant awarded to Centre 105, an organization in my riding that serves the community's most vulnerable individuals. Centre 105 received a \$106,800 capital grant from the Ontario Trillium Foundation on behalf of the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport. With this funding, they began funding for two new accessible washrooms in the shower facility, addressing critical needs in Cornwall.

Thanks to generous donations from corporations, individuals and community organizations, over 400 nutritious

breakfasts are served each week. Beyond providing meals, Centre 105 goes above and beyond to meet the diverse needs of those they serve. The centre serves as a hub for vital services such as laundry services, support and resources, and a safe place for individuals to socialize.

Having clean laundry and showers are not just about physical cleanliness, they also have profound effects on mental health. Having access to these new facilities promotes a sense of cleanliness, comfort, confidence and making individuals foster a positive self-image, which can improve their social interactions and increase their chances of job opportunities.

This project exemplifies our commitment to enhancing the well-being and quality of life for all members of our community. I extend my sincere thanks to all staff and volunteers at local agencies and organizations for all you do to help the most vulnerable individuals in our community.

FLOODING

Mr. John Vanthof: Last Friday, on April 12, in Timiskaming–Cochrane, and I believe many parts of Ontario as well, we had a massive rainstorm, but it was particularly intensive in our area.

Interestingly, before this rain event, we were worried about the lack of water in our area because we hardly had any snow. As a result of this rain event, we had the town of Kirkland Lake declare a state of emergency; Charlton and Dack, a state of emergency; Chamberlain township, a state of emergency; and Evanturel township. I'd like to recognize the first responders who did everything they could, and to the municipalities and their employees who did everything they could.

In Kirkland Lake, there were some people who had to be evacuated because the water came so fast and their basements flooded so fast that they didn't have time to turn off the electricity. That's an example of how our climate is changing. We're not used to these big kinds of hurricane rain events where we come from. I've reached out to the Minister of Municipal Affairs, and we're working together to see what can be done for these people, but it's a warning that we have to be prepared.

Also, much of the infrastructure that was destroyed or damaged, quite frankly, should have been replaced years ago. That's also a problem: that our infrastructure is aging and needs to be replaced at a quicker pace.

THUNDER BAY POLAR BEAR PLUNGE

Mr. Kevin Holland: I rise today to congratulate the organizers and participants in the Thunder Bay 2024 annual polar bear plunge. The polar bear plunge in Thunder Bay started in 2010 to raise funds for the Special Olympics. It was cancelled in 2020 and 2021 due to COVID but returned in full force in 2022.

This year, 400 people participated, plunging into a hole cut in the ice on Lake Superior. Participants solicited sponsors and donors, and the 2024 total surpassed

\$155,000, more than double the goal of \$75,000. Organizers stated that this year saw the most participants since its inception, and believe that they have raised the highest overall funds in Ontario this year in the polar bear plunge challenge.

1020

The annual plunge is organized by the Roots Community Food Centre, a non-profit organization that focuses on creating a sense of belonging and supporting people through food awareness programs such as cooking, gardening and shopping. Every initiative at Roots is designed to help people learn and share new skills.

In addition to the Special Olympics, the funds will be distributed to the CNIB, the Roots Community Food Centre and PRO Kids.

Thank you to Roots Community Food Centre for your dedication and compassion to the people of Thunder Bay and for finding innovative and inspiring ways to support the less advantaged in our community.

TENANT PROTECTION

Ms. Jessica Bell: Today I want to talk about above-guideline rent increases. Every week, we talk to residents in buildings who are facing an above-guideline rent increase. When we talk to them, their reaction is fear and worry and confusion, because they already pay rent that is so high, and then they're getting another rent increase. They're very worried about it.

A new report just came out showing that it is actually Canada's biggest and most profitable landlords that are using and abusing the AGI system. They are frequently applying for and getting above-guideline rent increases approved by the Landlord and Tenant Board. Almost all of these companies can easily cover the cost of maintaining their buildings with the millions they collect in rent. They are some of the most profitable companies in Canada. But they are choosing to apply for an above-guideline rent increase because Ontario law lets them get away with it. And it is renters who pay the price.

We have also discovered a very new, worrying trend, which is that once an above-guideline rent increase expires and renters are eligible for a rent reduction, the landlord is failing to tell them about it and not giving them the rent reduction that they are entitled to and deserve.

We raised this issue with the Attorney General. And what was his response? He dismissed it. I think that is a shame.

It is time to bring in strong rent control in Ontario and crack down on AGI abuse. The affordability of our province is at stake.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Ms. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta: Earlier this week, constituents in my riding of Mississauga Centre were thrilled to hear that our government has added more than 300 new weekly trips to support two-way, all-day GO. This investment into the Lakeshore West and Milton lines

will significantly improve the commute for constituents in my riding, and it demonstrates our government's commitment to building and investing in Ontario.

Time after time, budget after budget, our government has shown our commitment to building transit faster.

Speaker, I am very proud to inform my constituents about the many ways our government is making life easier and more affordable.

The One Fare policy implemented earlier this year is a prime example, which is saving commuters thousands of dollars annually.

And in last month's budget, we announced that we are bringing back the Mississauga downtown loop. The Hazel McCallion LRT will now have the downtown loop as part of its official plans, adding a two-kilometre extension looping around Mississauga's city centre.

This is great news for my constituents, as we continue providing easier and faster access to public transit, right in the heart of our communities.

Mr. Speaker, after years of Liberal indifference, our province was left severely behind other jurisdictions when it came to transit infrastructure.

With the strong leadership of Premier Ford, Minister Sarkaria and Minister Thanigasalam, our government will continue to get it done and keep Mississauga moving.

SPORTS AND RECREATION FUNDING

Mr. Stephen Blais: I want to extend my heartfelt congratulations to the Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport—not simply as a fellow Ottawa U alumnus, or because of his remarkable athletic achievements, but for his securing of \$200 million in the Community Sport and Recreation Infrastructure Fund, a fund that will invest in new and upgraded sport, recreation and community facilities across the province.

Mr. Speaker, as the parent of a very active teenager, a former community football coach and an elected official, I can definitely say that investment in sport and recreation is paramount to the future of our society.

The lack of sport and recreation facilities is one of the reasons I ran for city council in 2010. With the support of Ottawa's greatest mayor, Jim Watson, we were able to turn an empty field into the much-heralded François Dupuis Recreation Centre, now one of the focal points of our community. We built 12 new parks in Orléans. We expanded Millennium Park to include a stadium that would rival our local universities. We added a cricket pitch and splash pads and came very close to adding a dome—a dome that our community still needs.

Now more than ever, Millennium Park needs to keep pace and is ready for further investment and expansion. It could include a track and field complex that will benefit many segments of our community, from seniors walking around the track on its grippy surface to avoid falling to helping the future success of track and field athletes and athletes from all sports who will use the facility to train and hone their skills, such as the athletes with Gridiron Academy.

Ottawa is a hotbed of athletics. I'd invite the minister to come to Orléans and meet some of the coaches and athletes who would benefit from this investment.

PASSOVER

Mrs. Robin Martin: Starting at sunset next Monday, the Jewish community will begin observing Passover, or Pesach. Passover commemorates the escape of the Jews from 400 years of slavery—the exodus story, the master narrative of the Jewish people.

Even if you do not observe Passover, we can all embrace the broader message it carries: the universal pursuit of freedom, peace and dignity for all people. Passover sets the moral guideposts for the Jewish people: the obligation to care for the stranger, the worship of an abstract deity and the idea that every person is sacred, made in the image of God.

In Judaism, it's not just about freedom from, it's also about freedom to—freedom to serve. Jews engage in “tikkun olam,” the work of repairing the world, feeling obligated to empathize with the suffering of others and to do something about it. Jews believe that every person is made in the image of God and is therefore worthy of dignity and respect.

Passover also recalls the shared duty to stand for all those who are unable to stand up for themselves. The universality of Passover's three-part message of freedom, love and justice for all resonates strongly in 2024. These principles are the foundation of democratic governance in the West and our pluralistic society.

Respect for each other, for the rule of law and our democratic institutions are what allow us to live together with people of all religious backgrounds and cultural backgrounds. We cannot condone illegal activities like vandalizing homes, businesses or offices; harassing those who think differently; or forcefully shutting down infrastructure, as these undermine our social order.

For Passover, let me confirm that I support our democratic values, our pluralistic society and the belief in freedom, love and justice that underpins them all.

To all those celebrating, Chag Pesach Sameach.

MARKHAM JAZZLICIOUS WINTERFEST

Mr. Billy Pang: I am delighted to share the resounding success of the 2024 Markham Jazzlicious WinterFest, which just wrapped up recently.

Jazzlicious is a three-month-long event which was generously supported by funding from the Experience Ontario program of the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport. It brought together gastronomes and music lovers for a night of great food and live jazz in Markham–Unionville. It showcased the amazing musical talent and culinary skills we have right here in Markham–Unionville. It's also a fantastic celebration of Canadian jazz music and our community's culinary scene.

I would like to thank Minister Lumsden and his dedicated team for spearheading the impactful Experience

Ontario program. Their efforts have not only enriched the fabric of Markham–Unionville but have also given countless local communities opportunities to thrive. By inviting visitors to discover Ontario's diverse offerings and fostering connections with local experiences, Experience Ontario continues to stimulate tourism spending and promote cultural appreciation across our great province. And Speaker:

Sung to the tune of What a Wonderful World.

I see jazz lovers,
Jazz musicians, too,
And chef-inspired dinners
For Jazzlicious Winterfest,
And I think this combination
Makes a wonderful world.

1030

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Jeff Burch: I'm delighted to welcome to the Legislature today 60 English students from the Niagara Folk Arts Multicultural Centre, the agency where I used to work as executive director before being elected. They're here to learn about the Legislature. They're studying for their citizenship and excited to vote one day. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: It's a real honour today to welcome Young Politicians of Canada, who are here today meeting with members from all sides of the House to talk about how youth can get involved in politics. I'd like to welcome Jaden Segal-Braves, Jake Patrick Medley Barton, Giulia Rachel Di Lollo, Anthony Saiters, Jacqueline Ching Hui Liu and Juan Esteban Loaiza Neira. I look forward to meeting with you this afternoon.

I also want to give a shout-out to the St. Francis Xavier secondary school students from Mississauga who I met with this morning.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Minister of Long-Term Care.

Hon. Stan Cho: Good morning. Thank you very much, Speaker. I have a lot of respect for those who are good at their craft, especially when it comes to craft beer. Tonight, thanks to you, in room 228, join us for the craft beer reception. Speaker, drinks are on you. Thank you.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): No problem. The member for Sudbury.

MPP Jamie West: I'd like to introduce some of my colleagues from OPSEU/SEFPO who are here: President JP Hornick, Kathleen Arnup, Geoffrey Cain, Sara Fraser and Shannon Morris. I look forward to seeing them and many more of their colleagues next week at the OPSEU convention.

Mr. Vincent Ke: I'd like to welcome my constituents Maria-Luisa Tonelli and Sergio Tonelli, who are here at Queen's Park today to see their granddaughter Ruby, the head page for the day. Welcome to Queen's Park, and I wish you a wonderful day.

Mr. Kevin Holland: I'd like to welcome Lorna Hudson and Stacy-Ann Dyer-McNish from YES Employ-

ment Services in Thunder Bay. Welcome to the Legislature.

Miss Monique Taylor: I would like to continue the list from my colleague the member from Sudbury and welcome more folks from OPSEU: Casey McGuire, Andrew Ruszczak, Cody Williams, RM Kennedy and Michael Gilmour, who is watching from home.

I'm also pleased to welcome my friend Tricia Jacobs to the Legislature today, and my executive assistant, Heather Lambert-Hillen, is also joining us today. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Good morning, everyone. I would like to introduce super Seren and fabulous Fatih from the Society of Turkish Engineers and Architects in Canada in our House today.

Also, I would happily meet the member for Willowdale at the reception tonight.

Hon. Raymond Sung Joon Cho: I'm very happy to welcome Samuel Farkas, University of Waterloo. He's the brother of my hard-working ministry staff Ruth Farkas. Welcome to your House.

M. Stéphane Sarrazin: J'aimerais souhaiter la bienvenue à l'AFO, l'Assemblée de la francophonie de l'Ontario : M. Fabien Hébert, président; Peter Hominuk, directeur général; et Bryan Michaud, directeur des politiques et des relations gouvernementales. J'ai eu la chance d'avoir de belles discussions avec eux ce matin. J'ai bien hâte de participer à leur événement ce soir dans les nouveaux édifices du Collège Boréal de Toronto, le cocktail dans le cadre des journées de réflexion sur la santé en français 2024.

Au nom des Franco-Ontariens, merci pour votre travail. Vous êtes toujours bienvenus à Queen's Park.

Mr. Deepak Anand: It's an absolute pleasure to welcome the St. Francis Xavier model Parliament to Queen's Park, with Ananya Agarwal, Caitlyn Chin, Joshua Dcunha, Anushka Desai, Angelina, Arianna, Gunar, Alex, Sara, Larry, Swasti, Jordan, Suriya, Amanda, Hannah, Francis, Aryan, Evan, Zaid, Tiya and everyone. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Ms. Marit Stiles: I'm so pleased to introduce the Young Politicians of Canada, who are joining us here today, and students from the model Parliament of St. Francis Xavier secondary school in Mississauga—a group I've met with many times—and their accompanying teachers, Mark Saad, Carol Ann McQuaid and Abbie Elsie.

Thank you so much for coming, and welcome to your House.

Mr. John Fraser: I, too, would like to welcome the Young Politicians of Canada, who I met with in the office this morning. They'll be around Queen's Park, so when you see them, say hello. They've got a lot to say.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: It's my pleasure this morning to welcome students from Our Lady of Grace Catholic School in Angus, Ontario. Welcome. Enjoy the session.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: From my hometown of Amherstburg in the great riding of Essex, I'd like to welcome Philomena and Larry Elliott. Welcome to Queen's Park.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I would like to welcome students from the Maranatha Christian School who are here from Fergus today.

Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos: As we know, this is National Volunteer Week, and so it's my pleasure to be able to introduce six students from my community, who are active volunteers in my office: Arthur Chao, Sagan Garg, Armaan Moon, Logan Stitt, Molly Zhang and Emma Wunderlich.

QUESTION PERIOD

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Ms. Marit Stiles: On Monday, the government tried to pass off service cuts on the UP Express as an improvement. By Tuesday, they were shamed into reversing this decision. That's a record-breaking reversal even for this government. They clearly don't consult people in the community, or they would know that the impact was going to be huge on people who are trying to get to work from these neighbourhoods.

It's hard to think of an announcement that this government hasn't had to reverse in shame.

My question to the Premier is, has his government considered talking to people who actually use transit to get to work instead of their million-dollar man, Phil Verster?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): To reply, the Minister of Transportation.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Mr. Speaker, on Monday, we launched the largest GO expansion in over a decade: a 15% increase in weekly trips; 300 new weekly trips for trains and for commuters across many lines, whether that's Lakeshore West, Lakeshore East, the Stouffville line, the Kitchener line. This is our government's commitment to get people moving. And of course, the NDP wouldn't support that, just like the previous Liberal government, for 15 years, did absolutely nothing on public transit. I expect nothing less than when we launched the largest expansion of GO rail transit in over a decade that they would oppose that, just like they've opposed every one of our investments into public transit and getting people moving faster.

We will continue to invest in public transit and increase services across our networks.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: The truth is, this is just another example of this government ignoring transit riders and ignoring workers in the Bloor-Weston community.

There are 82 Metrolinx vice-presidents on the latest sunshine list—82.

The Premier gave the Metrolinx CEO a 65% raise while he was still fighting to keep teachers and education workers and other public sector workers at 1%. He went to court over that.

Even with all of these highly paid executives, Metrolinx still can't say when the Eglinton Crosstown P3 is going to open.

1040

So my question is, why does the Premier keep rewarding Metrolinx for failing to deliver for the people of Bloor-Weston?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Let's recap what the NDP and Liberals have voted against on public transit—the largest investment in North American public transit. The NDP and Liberals have voted against the Ontario Line. The NDP and Liberals have voted against the expansion of GO Transit like we have here today, infrastructure improvements that support the expansion of 300 new trips per week. They voted against the west extension that we just announced the RFQ process on a couple of weeks ago. They have voted against the Scarborough subway extension. The Eglinton Crosstown West extension, when that is built, is going to take over six million cars off the road. Guess what? The Liberals and NDP have opposed that. Their record on public transit is horrible.

Our government has a mandate to build and to get people moving, and that's exactly what we are doing when we are putting these investments forward.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

The final supplementary?

Ms. Marit Stiles: Actually, the official opposition believes that people going to work deserve reliable and affordable transit. And you know what? That is why we in the NDP had to fight to integrate the UP Express into communities after the Liberals envisioned it as just this boutique line.

People don't want a government that's actively making their lives harder by just recklessly changing their transit routes overnight. Had the minister spoken to a single commuter—a single commuter—he wouldn't have even put this forward.

Why does this government keep putting forward policies without consulting a single person impacted by their decisions?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Reliable transit, affordable transit—I want to ask the members from both the NDP and Liberals: Why did you vote against One Fare with \$1,600 of savings for commuters across the province thanks to my colleague Minister Thanigasalam? Why would you vote against One Fare, an integration of transit services across this province? Why are you going to vote against 300 new trips of GO Transit expansion, the largest expansion in over a decade? Your record on public transit is embarrassing.

Our government is getting it done. We're building transit. We're investing in public transit—\$70 billion over the next 10 years—when the previous Liberal government failed to do so. We're making it more affordable. I hope the NDP and Liberals will support this government's investments in public transit. Until this day, they haven't, and that's a shame.

HEALTH CARE

Ms. Marit Stiles: Speaking of another government policy that's making life harder for people in this province, this government is letting for-profit clinics take advantage of the millions of Ontarians who are struggling to find primary care. More and more, we're hearing about clinics that are breaking the law by charging patients to see a doctor. Yesterday, the Ontario Health Coalition released a report with the stories of over 100 patients who were unfairly and illegally charged to see a doctor.

The Minister of Health herself has acknowledged that the province can take action to stop this predatory practice, but has chosen not to—has chosen not to. Why has this government chosen to sit back instead of taking action to protect patients?

Interjections.

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

To reply, the parliamentary assistant, the member for Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry.

Mr. Nolan Quinn: Ontario is leading the country with 90% of Ontarians having a family doctor or primary health provider. The Ontario Health Coalition is an out-of-touch, NDP-backed special interest group that has spent the last decade ideologically opposed to innovation taking place in our health care system.

Our government has taken bold action to connect more people to the care they need when they need it. Over the last year, we have increased publicly funded diagnostic imaging capacity by an additional 97,000 MRIs and 116,000 CT operating hours, added tens of thousands of OHIP-covered cataract surgeries and achieved some of the shortest wait times in Canada.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary?

Ms. Marit Stiles: Bold actions, Speaker? What this government has done is they've written a letter—a letter. That's all they've done. That's not action. That's the very bare minimum of what a government could and should do for the people of this province.

Not only are these clinics charging patients thousands of dollars just to get through the door, but patients are also being misled and upsold. It's illegal and these clinics are knowingly breaking the law because they've been given the green light by this minister to expand in Ontario. Now she's pretending that there's nothing she can do about it, except for writing a letter, and that is pathetic, Speaker.

Why won't this government show some leadership to stop this predatory practice once and for all?

Mr. Nolan Quinn: Our government will not tolerate clinics taking advantage of a loophole created by federal legislation. As echoed by Minister Jones and other Ministers of Health across the country at our annual federal-provincial-territorial meeting of health ministers this past November, this lack of a prohibition has created a loophole that certain health care providers and their clinics are taking advantage of, knowing there is no legal consequence or risk of getting shut down.

We look forward to working together with the provincial, territorial and federal governments to ensure that this loophole is closed.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: Speaker, let me be very clear with the government—and I'm going to ask this question to the Premier again.

We're seeing the expansion of these so-called executive health clinics that provide primary care only to patients who are willing to pay really hefty fees. We saw this starting under the Liberal government, but it has totally taken off under this government. These for-profit clinics are taking advantage of the primary care crisis that has left 2.4 million patients in this province without primary care physicians.

My question to the Premier is, again, when will this government address for-profit clinics that are taking advantage of worried and anxious patients in this province?

Mr. Nolan Quinn: Through Bill 60, our government has further strengthened the oversight of community, surgical and diagnostic centres by bringing these centres under the oversight of the Patient Ombudsman. We have strengthened our laws to ensure that Ontarians will always access insured services at community, surgical and diagnostic centres with their OHIP card, never their credit card.

Our plan is adding thousands of hours of MRI and CT scans and more procedures, including hip and knee replacements closer to home, all accessible with their OHIP card, not their credit card. Our plan has already reduced the surgical backlog to below pre-pandemic levels, Speaker.

TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE

Ms. Marit Stiles: Speaker, this question is for the Premier. Three years ago, the federal government designated the proposed Highway 413 for a federal environmental assessment. That assessment would have given the public and decision-makers accurate information about the impacts but also the costs of this highway that runs through the greenbelt, a project that we already know is planned only for this government's friends with benefits.

If we can't get this information through an environmental assessment, Speaker, maybe the Premier will finally tell us here. To the Premier: How much will Highway 413 cost Ontario taxpayers?

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

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Mr. Speaker, Highway 413 is a generational investment into infrastructure across this province. We're investing \$28 billion over the next 10 years—whether it's Highway 413, the Bradford Bypass, Highways 11 and 17.

I urge that member and the Liberals to get out of the Queen's Park bubble, get onto the roads of Milton, of Brampton, of Mississauga, of Vaughan, and see first-hand the gridlock and the necessity for this project.

Flashback to June 2, 2022, Mr. Speaker, when this government received one of the largest majority governments based off their commitment and promise to build the 413, and we will get shovels in the ground.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Waterloo will come to order.

The supplementary question?

Ms. Marit Stiles: You know what is generational, Speaker? It's going to cost generations of Ontarians to foot the bill for that. That's what that minister won't share with Ontarians.

The government's expert panel said Highway 413 would save drivers only 30 to 60 seconds per trip. The same experts said that if this government used Highway 407 better, it would solve the problem.

1050

But when the NDP put forward a solution to relieve the burden of tolls for trucks on the 407, the Conservatives said no. This Premier won't even say how much this highway through the greenbelt is going to cost the taxpayers of Ontario.

So I want to know: Why is the Premier ignoring solutions that would save drivers money and time today in favour of a project that will only be complete in decades and has no price tag?

Interjections.

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

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke will come to order. The member for Kitchener–Conestoga will come to order.

Minister of Transportation.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: I urge both the Liberals and NDP to talk to the people of Milton, talk to the people of Mississauga, talk to the people of Brampton, of Vaughan. This is going to make a significant difference in commuting for all of them: over 30 minutes saved each direction per trip.

We have seen over a million people come into this province in the last two years. The NDP and Liberals have opposed every project that we have put forward, whether that's public transit or whether that's building highways. This highway will support 3,500 good-paying jobs, have an impact of over \$350 million to the GDP. We need to continue building infrastructure for 15 years.

We saw what the Liberals did: absolutely nothing. They cancelled projects. Our government is about getting shovels in the ground and building for the future generations of this province, and that is exactly what we are going to do. The 413 will have shovels in the ground, and we're going to build this 52-kilometre-long highway.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Hamilton Mountain will come to order.

Please stop the clock. We are 15 minutes into question period and there are a small number of members who are repeatedly ignoring my requests to come to order like I'm

not even here. I am here. We're going to revert to warnings if you completely ignore my requests to come to order. We know where that leads.

Start the clock. The next question.

ENERGY POLICIES

Ms. Laurie Scott: My question is for the Minister of Energy. Ontarians need access to affordable electricity. They never want to return to the days of the skyrocketing hydro rates we had under the previous Liberal government.

People want their homes and their businesses powered by clean and sustainable power. At the same time, they also want to be sure that our government continues to fight the costly Liberal carbon tax and keep costs low.

Can the minister share with this House what our government is doing to ensure Ontarians have clean, reliable and emissions-free energy while the opposition wants to take a step backwards and lean on a terrible carbon tax?

Hon. Todd Smith: Thanks to the great member from Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock for the question this morning.

We are continuing to increase the province's supply of clean, affordable, reliable and safe nuclear power in the member's own region with four small modular reactors—world-leading small modular reactors that are going in at the Darlington OPG site. We're refurbishing the Candu reactors that are there. OPG and our building trades and skilled trade workers and engineers are ensuring that those refurbishments aren't just on time and on budget, they're actually ahead of schedule and on budget, which is a tremendous success story, and that's given us the confidence to move forward on the refurbishment of the Pickering Nuclear Generating Station.

Just yesterday, I was down announcing a \$1-billion refurbishment of the Sir Adam Beck hydroelectric facility in Niagara Falls—clean, reliable water power for our province's future. We're building out a clean grid, but it's the queen of the carbon tax, Bonnie Crombie, and her friend Justin Trudeau, that are increasing the carbon tax, driving people into poverty.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary?

Ms. Laurie Scott: Thanks to the Minister of Energy for his incredible work. I am very proud of our government's continued advocacy for Ontario's incredible nuclear industry and the skilled tradespeople that work in it, many of them from my riding of Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock.

We know that these refurbishments are massive undertakings, and by completing them ahead of schedule and on budget, we are demonstrating that major energy infrastructure projects can be built here in Ontario on time and on budget. That's why it's disappointing to see the opposition completely neglect Ontario's nuclear industry. They would rather support a regressive carbon tax that punishes hard-working individuals and families in Ontario.

Can the minister explain what the NDP and Liberal opposition to our nuclear sector means for our Ontario

skilled nuclear workforce and the businesses that make up our nuclear supply chain?

Hon. Todd Smith: We certainly know the NDP energy critic's stance when it comes to nuclear power. They're against nuclear power.

Speaker, 76,000 people are working in Canada's nuclear sector every day, and 68,000 of them are working in Ontario's sector, in the supply chain and operating the plants. Those are hard-working people—skilled trades, engineers and plant operators—who get good paycheques every single day. They're providing almost 60% of the province's baseload power—clean, reliable, affordable electricity.

It's our party, it's our government, under the leadership of Premier Ford, that is supporting not just the current crop of skilled trade workers and nuclear operators, but those who are training to become nuclear engineers in our universities and who are going to be operating the new Candu or large nuclear plants that are being built at Bruce, and the small modular reactors, which are world-leading in the G7, that are coming online later this decade, that are going to continue to provide our province with the clean, reliable, affordable electricity we'll be able to count on for decades to come.

LABORATORY SERVICES

MPP Jamie West: My question is for the Premier. This week is National Medical Laboratory Week. Instead of celebrating their important work, the Conservative government is discussing the potential closure of six of the 11 Public Health Ontario labs. Those are labs in Timmins, Sault Ste. Marie, Orillia, Hamilton, Kingston and Peterborough.

The mission of Public Health Ontario is to enable informed decisions and get actions that protect and promote health and contribute to reducing health inequities. Closing six of 11 community-based PHO labs goes against that mission. Many of these labs are hundreds of kilometres and several hours from the next closest location.

Closing public labs will increase health inequities and will endanger northern and rural families. We deserve access to the free diagnostics and testing needed to be healthy.

Speaker, not everyone in Ontario knows where Walkerton is, but we all remember what Walkerton was. Seven people died, and 2,300 people became ill.

My question is, will the Premier learn from Walkerton and keep these labs open? Yes or no?

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

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Perhaps the member opposite wasn't here yesterday, when I answered this question very clearly. Because we have the benefit of Hansard, I will repeat that answer:

“Let me be as clear as I can possibly be: There is no one in the province of Ontario or in this Legislature who

believes that putting well water testing at risk is on the table. I want to be very clear on that matter.

“Of course, the Ministry of Health funds Public Health Ontario to provide testing services for individuals who rely on private drinking water systems to serve households. We all know that.

“The ministry has not made any decisions about changes to the provincial well water testing program, including which laboratories conduct testing of water samples.

“I want to be very clear: There have been no changes.”

Yes, it is medical lab technology week today, and we have a Learn and Stay program—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

The supplementary question? The member for Hamilton Mountain.

Miss Monique Taylor: Back to the Premier: The Hamilton public health lab completes thousands of water samples and time-sensitive medical tests every day and often takes overflow from other locations that are beyond capacity. In fact, Hamilton’s lab has one of the largest workload volumes in the province, which includes water testing for more than 11,000 private residences and hundreds of beaches. And yet, closure is looming.

The province should be improving access to health care and increasing our public health capacity, not cutting it.

So I ask the Premier, during National Medical Laboratory Week, why are you not investing in our public health infrastructure which is needed to keep Ontarians safe and healthy and keep all of these labs open?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Look at the numbers. We are investing in our public health units. We are investing in our lab techs—a critically important piece—clinicians in our health care system, where we’ve actually improved and encouraged through a Learn and Stay program, led by the Minister of Colleges and Universities, to fund new individuals who want to practise and train as medical lab techs in the province of Ontario.

1100

That’s the expansion that we’re doing. That’s the investment that we’re making. The member opposite needs to get her facts right and actually look at the numbers to see the investments that we have made, not only in the training, but in our public health system as a whole.

TAXATION

Ms. Christine Hogarth: My question is for the Minister of Finance. Families and business owners in my riding of Etobicoke–Lakeshore and across the province are concerned about the negative repercussions of the Liberal carbon tax. They tell me this punitive tax is making their lives more expensive, from their heating bills to groceries and fuel costs. This is unacceptable. To make it worse, the queen of the carbon tax, Bonnie Crombie, and her small Liberal caucus are happy to see this tax increase. The opposition NDP and the independent Liberals need to stop playing politics. Listen to your constituents and join this government and call for the elimination of this tax.

Through you, Speaker: Can the minister please tell this House how the government is supporting Ontarians by keeping this cost down?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): To reply, the parliamentary assistant and member for Oakville.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Thank you to the great member from Etobicoke–Lakeshore for a very good question. If I could give advice to everybody in the chamber here today and everybody watching on TV: Fill up your cars today. Gas is going up 14 cents a litre tonight, and Bonnie Crombie and the federal Liberals and provincial Liberals do not care.

When we put forward motions and legislation that would keep costs down for Ontarians, the Liberals showed their true colours by voting against every single measure. Even the independent Bank of Canada has come out and said that the carbon tax drives up inflation, yet somehow, the Liberals continue to support it.

Instead, our government is focused on keeping costs down, extending our gas tax cut until the end of the year, helping families save hundreds of dollars. This government and this Premier are the only ones who are standing up for the hard-working people of Ontario.

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

Supplementary question?

Ms. Christine Hogarth: I want to thank the parliamentary assistant for that response and the advice to fill up cars today.

The carbon tax harms individuals and families across this province. As many Ontario families continue to struggle with high interest rates and the rising cost of living, the last thing they need is more burdens.

Our government, led by Premier Ford, has been clear from day one: We need to keep costs down and put money back in the pockets of Ontarians. But the Liberals in this House have refused to stand up with us against this tax that is driving up prices, and it’s really hurting your own constituents. We know that they had a choice and they had a chance, and they would keep continuing to burden Ontarians with more tax grabs. As we know, the Liberals don’t see a tax they don’t like. That’s why our government will always stand up for Ontarians. We will always stand up and safeguard their hard-earned paycheques.

Mr. Speaker, I’m going to ask the parliamentary assistant if he can tell this House how our government is protecting Ontarians from new taxes on carbon.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Again, a great question from the member from Etobicoke–Lakeshore.

The Liberals in Ontario are taking their cues from their federal cousins and playing politics that are costing the people of Ontario way too much. But this government won’t stand by and allow Ontarians to be hurt further by the queen of the carbon tax, Bonnie Crombie, and her Liberal Party.

Unfortunately, the federal budget yesterday did not eliminate the punitive carbon tax. Premiers from different political parties across Canada have demanded the government scrap the federal carbon tax, yet the provincial

Liberals are playing politics and still not condemning the federal carbon tax. That is why our government is ensuring that no government can ever bring in a punitive carbon tax without first holding a referendum.

Speaker, it's time the independent Liberals put partisan politics aside and stand with us as we continue to call to scrap the tax.

HOUSING

Ms. Jessica Bell: The federal budget came out yesterday, and I'm worried Ontario is going to miss out because the Conservatives are failing to be bold on housing. There is federal housing infrastructure funding available for provinces that say yes to fourplexes and legalizing gentle density, which means this government has two choices: You can either continue saying no to more housing, or you can say yes to fourplexes, to ensure Ontario gets its fair share of infrastructure funding. What is this government going to choose?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: Yes, I listened to the federal budget yesterday, like a number of Canadians across the country who were disappointed in what they saw.

Listen, massively increasing taxes—not helpful to getting more homes built; massive inflationary spending—not helpful to getting more homes built; inflationary spending, which leads to higher interest rates—not helpful to getting more homes built; not eliminating the carbon tax—not helpful to getting more homes built across the province of Ontario; no path to a return to a balanced budget—not helpful to getting more homes built.

What we saw in yesterday's federal budget is a government whose spending is out of control, not focused on what matters to the people of the province of Ontario, which is affordability, giving them the opportunity to buy homes and giving the people who build the homes the opportunity to build those homes. We need lower interest rates, Mr. Speaker. We can't accomplish that with a federal government whose spending is out of control and who will not reduce taxes for the people of the province of Ontario so that we can get our economy moving.

They're dividing provinces against each other. That's not what a federal government does. It's up to Ontario again to lead the way and we will.

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

Ms. Jessica Bell: Back to the Premier: What I'm worried about is that the Conservatives are forcing Ontario to miss out on needed federal investment to build the housing that we need for Ontarians. The Conservatives refuse to submit a credible affordable housing plan to secure federal funding for affordable housing, and the government is refusing to say yes to increased density to secure federal funding for infrastructure.

Ontario wants you to show leadership on the housing file, and for that to happen you need to make a deal. Is this

government going to make a deal with the federal government? Yes or no?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Mr. Speaker, I've already announced that we will be working with our municipal partners to bring forward a plan that we can take to the federal government. The reality is, what we have done is unilaterally, on our own, brought forward the most comprehensive, the largest investment in infrastructure in the history of this province, because we've heard from our municipal partners and from home builders that the number one obstacle to actually getting homes built is infrastructure: sewer and water. That is the number one obstacle. We have a plan to do just that. The Minister of Infrastructure has brought forward the largest plan in our history.

Now, Mr. Speaker, where the NDP can be helpful—but we know that they won't be helpful, colleagues, because unless it's increasing taxes, unless it's making things more unaffordable for people—they just talked against the 413, even though they got wiped out in the last election about it. They're talking against building communities. But where they can be helpful is picking up the phone, calling Jagmeet Singh and saying, “Do not support a budget that does not make the appropriate investments in getting shovels in the ground and making life more affordable for the people of the province of Ontario.” We can move forward with a government in Ottawa that—

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

The next question.

TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Stephen Blais: My question is for the Premier. Ontarians know all too well that the Premier's gravy train is running down the tracks, and it's filled with his friends, his family and his insiders. In an attempt to make some more friends, the gravy train stopped in Ottawa a couple of weeks ago, where the Premier promised to re-upload Highway 174 to the province. The problem, Mr. Speaker, is that the communications department said things like “potential provincial ownership of the road” and that the deal would “explore and assess the considerations related to ownership.”

Further, Mr. Speaker, the Deputy Minister of Finance signed an agreement that says, relating to Highway 174, “in the event that an asset transfer is considered”—that sounds like a lot of wiggle room for the gravy train to backtrack.

Ottawans know that the Premier often likes to say one thing while his government does something else. So will the Premier commit—yes or no—to re-uploading Highway 174 back to the province before the next election?

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Nepean will come to order.

The Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing can reply.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Mr. Speaker, I absolutely love having this Liberal Party here, because they highlight

every single day why they will never, ever form another government.

Now, we went to Ottawa. We signed a new deal with Ottawa which was roundly applauded by the mayor of Ottawa and which was applauded by the community as a whole. Now a guy who built a train in Ottawa that does not work is giving us advice on infrastructure, coming from a party who, when asked to build bridges in the province of Ontario, built them upside down. So I'll tell you what we'll do—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I can't hear you.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Ottawa South is warned. My patience is exhausted.

Supplementary question?

1110

Mr. Stephen Blais: Again, my question is for the Premier: The Premier and his government and too many politicians in Ottawa are grasping at straws if they think that a fake deal to upload Highway 174 that won't happen for years is going to convince anyone.

Just about two years ago, the government published the transportation plan for eastern Ontario. It's 35 pages on how the government plans to prepare for the future, connect people, improve safety etc. And you know what, Mr. Speaker? You know what there's no mention of in that transportation plan for the future of eastern Ontario? Highway 174. Highway 174 and 17, which connect eastern Ontario from Hawkesbury through Alfred and Wendover and Rockland and Cumberland and Orléans and all the way into Ottawa—not a single mention in the master transportation plan for the province.

Since the Premier won't commit to uploading the highway before the next election, will his government commit to updating the plan to ensure that the improvements that are needed for 174 actually happen?

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Nepean is warned.

The Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing can reply.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Again, not only are we going to upload Highway 174, we're going to make sure that transit and transportation in Ottawa actually work. For 15 years, the members opposite had the opportunity to do anything, but they did nothing.

But we're not only doing that. On the advice, of course, of the members of provincial Parliament from the Ottawa area, we heard about the need to make investments in law and order in some of the parts of Ottawa, in social housing in those areas. I want to thank the member for Nepean and for Carleton for bringing those forward. They played a critical role in helping us negotiate a deal with the city of Ottawa, which the city of Ottawa has said will move that city forward, will ensure that we have a national capital that we can continue to all be proud of. We'll have safer communities. We'll have better transit and transportation.

The member for Nepean was fighting for how many years to get an interchange off of—what was it?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Barnsdale.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Barnsdale. You know who wouldn't build a Barnsdale exit? It was the Liberals. And now we're supposed to take advice from the Liberals on anything to do with transit and transportation? I think not.

TAXATION

Mrs. Daisy Wai: My question is for the Minister of Energy, who is always bringing good news to my residents in Richmond Hill.

I wish the federal government could also bring good news to us by scrapping the carbon tax. The carbon tax is making life more expensive for everyone. Residents in my riding of Richmond Hill have raised concerns over the high cost of groceries and gas. They want the federal government to scrap the carbon tax. Unfortunately, their plea fell on deaf ears.

What's worse is that, under the leadership of carbon tax queen Bonnie Crombie, the independent Liberals continue to endorse this terrible tax. While they choose to ignore the hardships Ontarians continue to face as a result of the carbon tax, our government is fighting for the people.

Speaker, can the minister please tell the House how our government is supporting Ontarians and making life more affordable?

Hon. Todd Smith: I'm going to bring some more good news for the residents of Richmond Hill this morning: Our government is actually trying to make life more affordable for people by reducing the cost of gasoline by 10.7 cents a litre.

Unfortunately, I do have to deliver some bad news, but it's not because of anything our government is doing. If you heard the organization this morning, Canadians for Affordable Energy, on news, on TV and radio this morning, they're talking about a 14-cent jump at the pumps tonight.

Part of this is because of the federal carbon tax that increased a couple of weeks ago—a carbon tax that Justin Trudeau, when he had the opportunity to hit the pause button or take it off of the cost of living in Ontario, decided, “No, I'm going to increase it by a whopping 23%.” So, tonight, we're going to see the price of gas go to a buck 80—a buck 80, on average, across the province. And the teeny, tiny Liberal caucus here is more than happy to support Justin Trudeau's carbon tax—

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

The supplementary question?

Mrs. Daisy Wai: Thank you to the minister for all your insights and sharing that with us.

We know it's really bad news as we go to the pumps. Experts, provincial governments and Ontarians have been clear: The carbon tax is making life more and more unaffordable. Families and businesses feel the burden on their energy bills every month.

Unfortunately, the Liberals are not listening, and they do not care. Earlier this month, they went ahead with a 23% hike on the carbon tax. Speaker, that is ludicrous. The last thing Ontarians need is another tax hike. The carbon tax must be scrapped.

Can the minister please explain why people and businesses in Ontario cannot afford the Liberal carbon tax?

Hon. Todd Smith: It's pretty simple. When the price of gasoline jumps to a buck 80, like it's going to tonight—and that's with our 10.7-cent-per-litre reduction that Premier Ford and our government has brought forward in our budget.

Yesterday, the federal Liberals up on Parliament Hill had an opportunity in their budget to provide some relief for the people of Ontario, and they didn't provide any relief. And now, as a result, tonight, we're seeing the price of gas increase by 14 cents a litre to a buck 80. It would be a buck 90 if we weren't taking 10.7 cents a litre, approaching \$2 a litre, but that's what Justin Trudeau and that's what the queen of the carbon tax, Bonnie Crombie, want to do. They want to make the price of gas more expensive. That's why they're putting this federal carbon tax on there, and the queen of the carbon tax is happy to have that federal tax in place.

It's unacceptable for people who are living in an affordability crisis in Ontario and across the country to have this punitive carbon tax in place. Do what we're doing: Try and make life more affordable for the people of Ontario.

JUSTICE SYSTEM

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: My question is to the Premier. An Ontario family that has been waiting three years for the trial of the reported murder of their beloved brother has just been told that they'll have to wait another year, and this is because that is the next available date at the Toronto Superior Court.

Last week, yet another child sexual abuse case was thrown out at the Toronto Superior Court, once again due to court delays. This is all happening under the Premier's watch.

The first step to getting help is admitting that you have a problem. Yes or no—question to the Premier: Will the Premier admit that public safety is in chaos because the Ontario courts have not been his priority?

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

Hon. Doug Downey: I read the same articles about the federal government not appointing enough judges, but we're not going to stand by and let that be the cause of anything.

When we put \$72 million into the criminal backlog strategy, they voted against it. When we hire crown attorneys, when we hire case management coordinators, critical homicide assistants, community justice coordinators, bail vettors, the Ontario Victim/Witness Assistance Program, they vote against it.

We've hired over 350 additional full-time people, and we have done things that have changed the system—the digital evidence management. We are the second-largest front line in the government, and our people are working hard. We're adding to their resources. We're making sure that they have what they need.

I can't even believe that the member opposite voted against supporting independent legal advice for sexual assault survivors. They vote against everything that we do. I'll tell you what they do want, which is to defund police so there are less cases in the system.

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

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Back to the Premier: If every excuse from this minister was actually tabled, it could fix the problems that we have, but the justice system on his watch is clearly failing him and all Ontarians.

We have a record-high historic backlog. This is the worst record across the country. But this government works harder at putting out press releases than they do at fixing the courts. They search for old funding announcements so that they can reannounce them again instead of finding qualified workers to actually staff the courts.

Nathaniel Brettell's murder trial was delayed yet one more year. His sister told CTV, "My life has been on hold for three years.... I'm suffering badly with survivor's guilt. Now, with another year on top of that, I'm not in a good place."

For the families watching: Does the Premier believe that it is reasonable to make Ontario families wait four years for a murder trial date?

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Hon. Doug Downey: Let me use just one example of what we are doing different. Back when I was a court clerk, the NDP were in charge of this province. If the court collapsed in two hours, I got paid two hours and sent home. It was precarious employment. When they were done with what they were doing, the Liberals took over. You know what they did? They did absolutely nothing.

You know what we're doing, Mr. Speaker? We're offering full-time employment to those workers. We're increasing their pay. We're making sure we have the resources in place. It took this government to pay attention, to invest in the justice system to make that happen.

TAXATION

Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady: My question is to the Premier. Every single day, every single question in this House is met with the same response, and we see it again this morning: the carbon tax. So let's actually talk about it. It's a distraction from the real issues, like the greenbelt scandal, the health care crisis, the \$9.8-billion deficit, the increase in the Premier's office staff, many of whom are enjoying an income greater than a combined income of families in my riding of Haldimand-Norfolk.

In January, I launched a petition calling on this government to follow the lead of Saskatchewan Premier Scott Moe—no response except for carbon tax referendum legislation that does absolutely nothing to help the people of Ontario today. It's a publicity stunt. So who is actually playing politics with the carbon tax here at Queen's Park? If the carbon tax is front and centre here at Queen's Park, then obviously the members opposite could take real action.

Speaker, through you to the Premier: Will this government follow the lead of Saskatchewan Premier Scott Moe, who is providing real relief to the people of Saskatchewan today?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

The Premier.

Hon. Doug Ford: They call saving taxpayers money a publicity stunt. You know, Scott Moe is one of my best pals there. We share the same values. But if you call saving taxpayers money by reducing 10.7 cents off the gas prices when everyone is going to wake up tomorrow morning and pay another 14 more cents on top of the 17.5 cents, getting rid of the licence stickers, getting rid of the registration, making sure we got rid of the 412 and 418 tolls—that's a publicity stunt?

We're the only government in the history of Ontario that has never raised a tax on your parents; making sure they're going to have a job, the students up there; making sure that we created 700,000 new jobs; putting more money on people's kitchen tables and being able to pay rent and put a deposit down for a house. You call that a publicity stunt?

By the way, you won't have a job next election.

Interjections.

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

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order. Those kinds of comments are not helpful.

Start the clock. The member for Haldimand–Norfolk.

Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady: I actually accept what the Premier is saying is actually good news, because he didn't say, "Ontario can't create affordability against the carbon tax." But all the tinkering that he's talking about isn't quite cutting it for families who are continuing to pay more, get less and fall further behind.

What this government doesn't talk about is that it has its own carbon tax on industrial emitters, a result of the scrapping of Ontario's cap-and-trade system. This government collects compliance payments from the biggest industrial producers of greenhouse gas and will rake in nearly half a billion dollars by 2030. What is happening with that money?

Members opposite might find it cute that they count how many times they say the word "carbon tax" during question period. What I don't find cute is the families who come to me telling me they're choosing between heating and eating. If this government will not provide meaningful relief for Ontario families and has no other plan against the carbon tax other than to consult, it's time you stopped talking about it and focused on the issues you can control here in Ontario.

Saskatchewan Premier Scott Moe has truly taken Ottawa on—

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

The Premier.

Hon. Doug Ford: Just to remind the member, we took the federal government to court. It was forced upon us. The carbon tax is the worst tax you could ever put on the

backs of people. It's going to cost parents more money to take their kids to school, to take them to events, to go home from work, back and forth.

But guess what? We're building Ontario. We've become an economic powerhouse. Under the Liberals and the NDP—you destroyed the province. You bankrupted it. You created hallway health care. You didn't build any hospitals.

We're building 50 new hospitals or additions. We're building the 413 and the Bradford Bypass. We're putting \$190 billion into infrastructure to make sure people have an opportunity to get from point A to point B, but most importantly, we've landed \$28 billion in the EV sector, creating tens of thousands of jobs.

Over 700,000 people are working today that weren't working five and a half years ago. Under your watch, you lost 300,000 jobs—

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

I remind the members to make their comments through the Chair, not directly across the floor at each other.

The next question.

TAXATION

Mr. Kevin Holland: My question is for the Minister of Indigenous Affairs and Minister of Northern Development. The Liberal carbon tax is making life more unaffordable for all Ontarians, especially those in northern Ontario. That's not a publicity stunt; that's reality. Northerners already pay more at the gas pumps than in the rest of the province. They need relief, not a punitive tax burden.

As many Ontarians continue to struggle with rising costs, the independent Liberals and opposition NDP remain silent. They don't care that this regressive tax adversely affects Ontario businesses and our economy.

Speaker, everyone in the province has had enough of the carbon tax. The federal government must scrap the tax. Can the minister please elaborate on the negative impact the carbon tax has on northern Ontario?

Hon. Greg Rickford: I just got back from Sudbury and Nickel Belt. On a beautiful spring day in northern Ontario, there was lots to say about that, but I think it's important to just have some context here, Mr. Speaker.

The nation was in the grips of a soap opera called the carbon tax paradise. Trouble in paradise last week as Jagmeet was unsure of his commitment and Justin was confused with the position. By Monday, a tired, broke nation from paying the carbon tax found out that Jagmeet reaffirmed his commitment, embracing the carbon tax on families, communities and businesses.

The next episode started this morning, when Premier Furey from Newfoundland said that he felt baited by the Prime Minister, Mr. Speaker. He says he's being "very sclerotic in his approach" to this ideological marriage.

Mr. Speaker, we've divorced ourselves from the carbon tax fully and completely. We stand up for families and businesses in northern Ontario who are probably looking

at a \$2-per-litre gas price tomorrow, Mr. Speaker. Scrap the tax.

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

Mr. Kevin Holland: It is unfair that northern businesses and families are disproportionately impacted by the carbon tax. Rather than standing up for Ontarians in the north, the NDP and the independent Liberals are choosing to stand idly by.

Unlike other areas in our province, northern Ontario has distinctive challenges related to fuel costs that need to be considered. While the Liberal and NDP members opposite continue to ignore the repercussions of the carbon tax on rural, remote and northern communities, our government will not stop calling for an end to this disastrous tax.

Speaker, can the minister share with the House the detrimental effects that the carbon tax is having on northern businesses?

Hon. Greg Rickford: A couple of important quotes here, in all seriousness, Mr. Speaker: It “can seem punitive to consumers.” “So, in that sense, it’s not something I endorse.” Who did these quotes come from? Jane Goodall, perhaps one of the most prolific climate change fighters there is out there. I’ve got all the respect in the world for her. I’ve met her, Mr. Speaker. My daughters adore her. But she gets it, Mr. Speaker. She knows that families and businesses are suffering under the pressure of this carbon tax.

In Sudbury and Nickel Belt yesterday, I spoke to a young couple who started up a new business, and they’re bringing out all the trail groomers from ski hills and snowmobile trails from across northern Ontario—from Kenora and Timmins all the way down to Sudbury for repairs, okay? And I said, “What is this costing your business?” He said, “It’s almost out of reach.” It doesn’t make financial sense to get this heavy machinery down to their shops in Sudbury.

Mr. Speaker, whether they’re steel fabricators in Nickel Belt or folks that do the real work, preparing for mining equipment—

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

The next question.

HEALTH CARE

Mr. Jeff Burch: Speaker, through you to the Minister of Health: My office continues to hear from constituents, including seniors, across Niagara suffering through unthinkable wait times for crucial surgeries. Elizabeth Cook, 83 years old, is in perilous condition as a result of a gastrointestinal issue that is causing fecal matter to leak through her reproductive organs. Two recent surgeries scheduled to occur at the Niagara Health System were cancelled, and she is again waiting for surgery after four years of dealing with intestinal issues.

What does this minister have to say to Elizabeth and the thousands of patients who are suffering through unacceptable wait times in Niagara and across Ontario?

1130

Hon. Sylvia Jones: What I would say to Elizabeth and the many individuals across Ontario who want to get their critical diagnostic and surgeries done faster is, first of all, why is your representative, why is your NDP member, opposed to innovation in the health care system? Why does your NDP member continue to rail against innovation in our hospital sector, whether that is expansion of surgical and diagnostic centres in our communities so that we, yes, can continue to decrease wait times for diagnostic and surgical interventions?

It is really unfortunate that we have a member who represents a party who is diametrically opposed, philosophically opposed, to innovation in our health care system. We need to encourage that innovation to make sure that your constituents like Elizabeth, organizations and individuals across Ontario get access to that—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

The supplementary question?

Mr. Jeff Burch: Speaker, this government has had six years to fix it, and it’s gotten worse, not better. That’s not innovation.

An Ontario Health Coalition report released yesterday uncovered the extent to which private clinics are using deceptive tactics to charge patients extra fees for OHIP-covered surgeries. In the case of cataract surgeries, they found clinics charging for extra eye measurements, tests, special lenses and unnecessary add-ons they say are better than OHIP-covered services. Seniors reported being charged for appointments, membership and administrative fees for primary care, as well as user fees.

Why is this minister ignoring the fact that seniors across Niagara and across Ontario are being ripped off by private, for-profit clinics?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: As we made one change in the cataract and minor eye surgery space for expansions of existing community centres, we saw 17,000 people who had access to that surgery in the last year and a bit. That is the change that we need to have in the province of Ontario to ensure that people can get back to living, they can get back to volunteering, they can get back to driving their car, they can get back to reading books to their grandchildren. Those are individuals who accessed clinical services in community, without the wait, ensuring that they will be able to participate and be part of community.

And again, I will say an organization and an NDP—

Mr. Chris Glover: Your privatization is killing people. It’s disgusting.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I’m going to ask the member for Spadina–Fort York to withdraw the unparliamentary comment.

Mr. Chris Glover: I withdraw.

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

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Hamilton Mountain is warned.

SENIOR CITIZENS

Mr. Anthony Leardi: Speaker, my question is for the Minister for Seniors and Accessibility. Just a few weeks ago, I had the pleasure of hosting the minister in my riding of Essex, where we visited towns like Kingsville and Amherstburg and LaSalle. It was an opportunity to gather with seniors from communities and talk about the importance of staying active and staying connected.

Combatting social isolation is important for the health and well-being of our seniors. Our government must continue to invest in initiatives that help seniors stay fit and active and healthy in their own communities.

Speaker, can the minister share with the House what our government is doing to help seniors stay fit and active and healthy in Ontario?

Hon. Raymond Sung Joon Cho: Thank you to the excellent member from Essex for the question. This MPP is doing a marvellous job advocating for seniors. I was honoured to join him along with the MPP for Windsor–Tecumseh to visit the new seniors active living centres in Kingsville and Amherstburg. They will each receive \$50,000 in new funding for seniors in the community. This means places like the Kingsville Community Centre can expand their activities and allow even more seniors to participate. It was amazing to see the energy of the seniors in Essex. It makes such a difference in the lives of seniors when they come together.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: I thank the Minister for Seniors and Accessibility for that response. It's great to see our government making investments that promote wellness and help seniors stay active and connected. This funding will lead to more services and permanent services for older adults in my riding, and especially in the towns of Kingsville and Amherstburg.

We often hear the minister say that social isolation is enemy number one for seniors. They need access to programming that enables them to be engaged with their communities.

Speaker, can the minister share the importance of the seniors active living centres and how they are helping seniors in Ontario stay healthy and stay active and stay socially connected?

Hon. Raymond Sung Joon Cho: Thanks to this Premier and the hard work of the Minister of Finance, we are investing record amounts for seniors. We now have 316 seniors active living centres. I travel all around the province and to see first-hand the benefits of these centres. I celebrated a new centre in Havelock with the MPP for Peterborough–Kawartha. I joined the MPP in Innisfil to celebrate the new mobile seniors active living centre that will bring programs to the region.

Mr. Speaker, everywhere I go, I see seniors so happy because they're active, socially connected and having fun.

LAND USE PLANNING

Ms. Catherine Fife: My question is for the Premier. In Waterloo region, 770 acres of prime farmland in Wilmot township are at risk of being expropriated for an undisclosed industrial site. Waterloo's regional official plan accommodated all anticipated growth until 2051 without significant farmland loss. This is very important for the people of the region of Waterloo. Yet a month ago, farmers in Wilmot were offered an insulting cash offer per acre and given seven days to accept an offer or face expropriation.

This government's current legislation makes it possible for what is happening in Wilmot to happen anywhere in Ontario, with no transparency and no community consultation. We don't need any more Vegas deals on Ontario land in this place.

My question to the Premier, why is this government undermining the farming sector and encouraging back-room deals with developers?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: Actually, we're doing no such thing. I suggest the member speak to the regional municipality if she has specific questions.

What she references in the bill, of course, is an issue that came before this House when the Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade was trying to encourage the Volkswagen plant to operate or to establish itself in St. Thomas. The member will recall that a bill was brought forward into this House seeking to provide that community with the ability to provide incentives to help us land that. To the best of my recollection, that was passed unanimously by all members, including the member opposite. So if the member opposite and the party have a problem with what they unanimously passed, I would suggest that they chat with themselves about why it is that they would want to put at risk massive investments like the VW plant, like Stellantis and all of the other investments that we're bringing that helped us create 700,000 jobs for the people of the province of Ontario.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Point of order: the Minister of Education.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Just a very brief introduction: I noticed that we've been joined this afternoon by a variety of rabbis and leaders who are here as part of Education and Sharing Day, which marks the work of Rabbi Mendel Schneerson. I want to thank you for your leadership in Ontario. Welcome to Queen's Park.

DEFERRED VOTES

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

Deferred vote on the motion for second 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): Call in the members. This is a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1141 to 1146.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): On April 11, 2024, Mr. Calandra moved second reading of Bill 185, An Act to amend various Acts.

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

Ayes

Anand, Deepak	Jones, Sylvia	Sabawy, Sheref
Armstrong, Teresa J.	Jones, Trevor	Sandhu, Amarjot
Babikian, Aris	Jordan, John	Sarkaria, Prabmeet Singh
Barnes, Patrice	Kanapathi, Logan	Sarrazin, Stéphane
Bell, Jessica	Ke, Vincent	Sattler, Peggy
Brady, Bobbi Ann	Kerzner, Michael S.	Saunderson, Brian
Burch, Jeff	Khanjin, Andrea	Scott, Laurie
Byers, Rick	Kusendova-Bashta, Natalia	Shaw, Sandy
Calandra, Paul	Leardi, Anthony	Skelly, Donna
Cho, Raymond Sung Joon	Lecce, Stephen	Smith, Dave
Cho, Stan	Lumsden, Neil	Smith, David
Clark, Steve	MacLeod, Lisa	Smith, Graydon
Coe, Lorne	Mamakwa, Sol	Smith, Laura
Crawford, Stephen	Mantha, Michael	Smith, Todd
Cuzzetto, Rudy	Martin, Robin	Stiles, Marit
Dixon, Jess	McCarthy, Todd J.	Surma, Kinga
Downey, Doug	Mulrone, Caroline	Tabuns, Peter
Dunlop, Jill	Oosterhoff, Sam	Tangri, Nina
Fife, Catherine	Pang, Billy	Taylor, Monique
Flack, Rob	Parsa, Michael	Thanigasalam, Vijay
Ford, Doug	Pasma, Chandra	Thompson, Lisa M.
French, Jennifer K.	Piccini, David	Triantafilopoulos, Effie J.
Gates, Wayne	Pierre, Natalie	Vanthof, John
Ghamari, Goldie	Pirie, George	Wai, Daisy
Gretzky, Lisa	Quinn, Nolan	West, Jamie
Grewal, Hardeep Singh	Rae, Matthew	Williams, Charmaine A.
Hardeman, Ernie	Rakocevic, Tom	Wong-Tam, Kristyn
Harris, Mike	Rasheed, Kaleed	Yakabuski, John
Hogarth, Christine	Rickford, Greg	
Holland, Kevin	Riddell, Brian	

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

Blais, Stephen	Hazell, Andrea	Schreiner, Mike
Bowman, Stephanie	Jama, Sarah	Shamji, Adil
Clancy, Aislinn	McCrimmon, Karen	
Fraser, John	McMahon, Mary-Margaret	

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Trevor Day): The ayes are 88; the nays are 10.

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

Second reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Shall the bill be ordered for third reading? I heard a no.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I refer 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.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member from Sudbury has informed me he has a point of order.

MPP Jamie West: I have friends and family in the gallery I would like to introduce. I'm joined by my son Thomas, my daughter Ella, as well as Ella's friend Emma Corcoran and her mom, Roxanne Corcoran. Welcome to Queen's Park.

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

The House recessed from 1151 to 1500.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Miss Monique Taylor: I would like to welcome back to the Legislature this afternoon folks from Ontario public health labs and OPSEU members Shannon Morris, Sara Fraser and Cody Williams. Welcome back to the Legislature.

Hon. Michael Parsa: I'd like to welcome a few special guests this afternoon: first and foremost, Jeffrey Roode—welcome to the Legislature; as well as Jane Kovarikova, Shaida Maleki, Kimiya Zamani, David Steele and Shauna Buttivant and other members of my team who will be joining me very soon. Thank you so much for being here.

INTRODUCTION OF
GOVERNMENT BILLSSUPPORTING CHILDREN'S
FUTURES ACT, 2024LOI DE 2024 VISANT À SOUTENIR
L'AVENIR DES ENFANTS

Mr. Parsa moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 188, An Act to amend the Child, Youth and Family Services Act, 2017 and various other Acts / Projet de loi 188, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2017 sur les services à l'enfance, à la jeunesse et à la famille et diverses autres lois.

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

First reading agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Would the minister like to make a brief statement?

Hon. Michael Parsa: Speaker, this bill amends the Child, Youth and Family Services Act, 2017, including amendments concerning offences and the rights of children in care with respect to the Ombudsman; new sanctions which provide for restrictions to the use and disclosure of certain personal information in certain circumstances; new sanctions and amendments which relate to refusals to issue, refusals to renew or revocation of a licence; amendments respecting suspensions of licences; and new sanctions providing for the issuance of administrative monetary penalties by an inspector or director. This bill also makes various related amendments to several other acts.

MOTIONS

COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

Mr. Trevor Jones: I move that the following change be made to the membership of the following committee:

On the Standing Committee on Government Agencies, Mr. Smith (Scarborough Centre) replaces Mr. Bouma.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Agreed? Agreed.

Motion agreed to.

PETITIONS

LABORATORY SERVICES

Miss Monique Taylor: I'm honoured to be able to hand in and to read a petition of over 9,000 signatures to save our Public Health Ontario labs, which do critical work in our communities. There are six of the 11 labs currently in Ontario that are looking at being cut from our communities, including the community of Hamilton. It will compromise the safety and the well-being of our communities when we don't have known drinking water that is free and clear. These public health labs actually test water from wells, cisterns and beaches to ensure that our drinking water and our swimming water are safe for our communities.

These people have signed these petitions to ensure that we stop these closures in six communities and that the government invest in the infrastructure of Public Health Ontario labs.

I will sign my name to it and give it to page Aislyn, because I wholeheartedly support this.

SCHOOL SAFETY

Ms. Chandra Pasma: I am pleased to rise today to table this petition with over 230 signatures, collected by COPE 527, which represents education workers in the

Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board. These education workers are deeply concerned about the rates of violence within our schools, which they note are shockingly high, and that many education workers are suffering profound injuries, and yet many of these injuries are going unreported.

But we also know that increasing the number of educational workers in our schools and in our classrooms would help to reduce the levels of violence, making sure that there are enough adults to provide care, that children are not being frustrated and that their needs aren't going unmet. So the petitioners call upon the Legislature to increase the number of education workers in classrooms across Ontario.

I am very proud to support this petition, will add my name to it and will send it to the table with page Simon.

LABORATORY SERVICES

MPP Jamie West: The petition is entitled, "Prioritizing Public Health: Keep Our Community PHO Labs Open."

Just as a summary of it, this is a real major concern. There are conversations about possibly closing six of the 11 public health labs in Ontario. The minister, obviously, today during question period, said that there's no conversation about that at this moment. But it does make people nervous, especially in rural areas and northern Ontario. You would know the distances people have to travel.

The concerns people have are about medical testing as well as water testing. It's what we swim in, what we drink, but also, just coming out of the pandemic, they do the testing for COVID; they do the testing for all medical procedures that come through. Having access or having the ability to get those samples to different labs and transportation, especially in the winter in northern Ontario, is a major concern for these members and what they're doing.

As well, the consequences of closing down these labs if we hit another outbreak—you think of H1N1; you think of COVID-19; you think of measles rising recently. If we have a major outbreak and we're unable to process the labs because they share work internally—because we'll be cutting more than half of them if we close these down. That really is what their members are talking about and the concern they have and that access to lab testing especially in northern Ontario and rural areas.

I support this wholeheartedly. I'll affix my signature and provide it to Duncan for the table.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Mr. Chris Glover: I want to acknowledge this petition presented to the House. It's to raise social assistance rates. This has been sent to me by Professor Sally Palmer at McMaster University in the department of social work. She has sent me, over the last couple of years, hundreds of these petitions with thousands of signatures.

This is asking that Ontario Works and ODSP rates be doubled because right now, it's \$733 a month for somebody on Ontario Works. There's no way anybody can survive in the province of Ontario on \$733 a month. The Ontario disability support payment plan is \$1,300 a month; of that, \$556 is for housing. There is nowhere in Ontario where you can rent a room for \$556. There was a room advertised recently online for \$800 for a bed in a kitchen.

These Ontario Works and ODSP rates are leaving people with disabilities in Ontario living in destitution. Many are choosing MAID, and that is one of the things that we are seeing in the news as well. So we're calling upon the government to provide at least a doubling of ODSP and Ontario Works rates. It will save lives, and it will show the people in Ontario with disabilities that we have respect for them and that we want them to be able to live productive lives.

I fully support this petition, will affix my signature and pass it to page Shiara to take to the table.

LAND USE PLANNING

Ms. Catherine Fife: I have 242 signatures here in support of sustainable growth in Waterloo region. There are 770 acres of prime farmland. This is class 1 farmland that is being expropriated by the region, with the urging of the province of Ontario through legislation, for a large industrial project.

1510

We lose 319 acres of farmland every single day. This entire process has been without transparency, without process, is outside the official plan and is indicative of where this government is going with regard to encouraging sprawl and decimating farmland.

I fully support this petition and will affix my signature.

AIR QUALITY

Ms. Chandra Pasma: I have the honour to table a petition today that's signed by many residents of the greater Sudbury area.

We know that air quality in our schools has a significant impact on our children, on their health, on their capacity to learn, on whether they're present in school or not. But in Ontario, there are no standards for measuring or monitoring air quality and reporting on it. In our neighbouring province next door, Quebec, there are such standards, and so these petitioners are calling on the government of Ontario to require the Ministry of Education to take action to improve air quality in our schools and child care centres in Ontario by supporting and adopting the Improving Air Quality for Our Children Act.

I am very happy to add my signature to this petition and send it to the table with page Manha.

MISSING PERSONS

Miss Monique Taylor: I'm proud once again to table a petition, "Vulnerable Persons Alert," calling on the

government to move Bill 74 through committee and back to the legislative floor to ensure that we have a system to bring people home safely when they're vulnerable and they've gone missing in our communities.

This petition stems from the death of a young boy, Draven, who had autism, went missing and was very vulnerable, and unfortunately died and was not brought home safely. Also, a woman in Hamilton, Ms. Shirley Love, had dementia, was in her eighties, went missing—very cold weather elements—and was found four days later.

The alert system would ensure that the geographical area that the person went missing in was notified that there was a vulnerable person missing in their community and they would be able to keep an eye out for them.

As I'm sure you're aware, Speaker, I wholeheartedly support this petition. I'm going to affix my name to it and give it to page Simon to give to the Clerk.

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Ms. Catherine Fife: This petition, signed by around 300 of 7,000 signatures, is in support of stronger mental health services in the province of Ontario. It's a petition that was inspired by the Roth family, who lost their daughter Kaitlyn to suicide.

Kaitlyn didn't fit into the mental health services and supports that exist in the province of Ontario. She sought help. She wanted help. She wanted to get better, but at the end of the day, she was turned away and/or received insufficient or improper mental health supports.

This petition really calls on greater training, targeted funding, specifically asking the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions to earmark funding for training to ensure that when people have enough courage to come forward, to request help in very difficult circumstances, that help is there for them.

It's in honour of Kaitlyn Roth. It is my pleasure to affix my signature and call on the government to address the mental health crisis in Ontario.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

IMPROVING REAL ESTATE MANAGEMENT ACT, 2024

LOI DE 2024 SUR L'AMÉLIORATION DE LA GESTION DES BIENS IMMEUBLES

Miss Surma moved third reading of the following bill:

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

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Minister Surma, back to you.

Hon. Kinga Surma: I am very happy to rise for the third reading of the Improving Real Estate Management Act, 2024. Of course, today, I will be sharing my time with Amarjot Sandhu, my parliamentary assistant and the member for Brampton West.

If passed, this legislation would serve as the next step in our government's plan to build a stronger Ontario by providing a more coordinated and strategic approach for managing our real estate portfolio. Opting for a more centralized approach to real estate management will allow Ontario to deliver critical priorities more cost-effectively, like building more housing, including affordable housing options, as well as long-term-care facilities, which Ontarians need and deserve. Centralizing and/or realigning the oversight of real estate is integral to our government's strategy for increasing economic growth and saving taxpayer money.

Before I get into the details and potential benefits of the proposed legislation, I want to talk about how it fits into our government's overarching plan for the future. Under Premier Ford's leadership, our government is building a stronger and more prosperous Ontario. Across every corner of Ontario, we are making smart, targeted infrastructure investments that lay the foundation for economic growth and prosperity now and for future generations to come.

We understand that in order to keep pace with the demands of a rapidly growing population, building essential infrastructure is more critical than ever, especially when you consider Ontario is the fastest-growing region in North America. In 2023 alone, Ontario grew by more than 500,000 people and, by 2041, we anticipate Ontario's population will grow by approximately 30%.

Infrastructure is the backbone of a strong and healthy economy. It is essential to the quality of life of Ontarians. It brings us together, connecting us to our families, friends, workplaces and schools every single day. When a new road, highway or transit line is built, we are helping hard-working residents get home to their families safely, conveniently and faster. When new high-speed Internet infrastructure is installed, we allow families to work, stay connected with their loved ones and educate their children in the comfort of their own communities and help online businesses grow and succeed. When we build hospitals and long-term-care homes, we ensure our most vulnerable have access to the care that they need. When we invest in new and affordable housing, we increase the housing supply and provide housing options for hard-working Ontarians and their families.

We have heard time and time again that municipalities need more funding options to meet the growing demand for infrastructure in their communities. Our government is listening, and we are taking action. For example, last month, we announced we are quadrupling the Housing-Enabling Water Systems Fund from \$200 million to \$825 million over the next three years. The initial intake of this program will help municipalities repair, rehabilitate and expand drinking water, waste water and stormwater infrastructure. Applications are being accepted until April 19.

Our government has also introduced the new \$1-billion Municipal Housing Infrastructure Program to support building core infrastructure projects such as road and water infrastructure to enable housing for growing and developing communities.

As I just mentioned, our government knows that investing in critical infrastructure is necessary for ensuring a world-class standard of living remains for generations to come. That is why we are giving municipalities the tools they need to build more homes faster to tackle the affordability crisis that is pricing too many people, especially young families and newcomers, out of the dream of home ownership.

As we navigate ongoing global economic uncertainty, our government's responsible, targeted approach will allow us to build the critical infrastructure our communities need to thrive while saving taxpayer money. I'm incredibly proud to be a part of a government with an innovative strategy to build a stronger Ontario and a plan to get the job done fast.

1520

We are investing over \$190 billion over the next 10 years, including more than \$26 billion this year alone, to get shovels in the ground to build priority infrastructure, such as highways, roads, hospitals, long-term-care facilities and schools that Ontarians depend on every day. These investments will also help us attract businesses and create good-paying jobs to the province. Our investments are laying the foundation for Ontario's economic growth while supporting critical services that people need in order to succeed. Simply put, we are making life better for millions of people who call this beautiful province their home.

But it is important to remember that behind the bricks, mortar, steel and glass, and the enormous costs of these projects, the success of Ontario's families, workers and businesses relies on our ability to maintain and build essential infrastructure quickly and efficiently.

Our government also understands that Ontario's taxpayers cannot and should not be left to pick up the tab for the infrastructure the province needs. We must constantly find new ways to attract trusted Canadian institutional investors to help build essential infrastructure that would otherwise not be feasible, while ensuring we reduce the burden on taxpayers. That's why we are creating an Ontario infrastructure bank called the Building Ontario Fund, a new arm's-length, board-governed agency that will enable public sector pension plans and other trusted institutional investors to participate further in large-scale infrastructure projects across the province.

Under our proposal, our government will provide \$3 billion to the Building Ontario Fund in initial funding to support its ability to invest in critical infrastructure projects here in Ontario. This initial investment will support critical projects, such as building new housing, including affordable housing options; new long-term-care homes; energy infrastructure; municipal and community infrastructure; and an expanded transportation network. The mandate of the Building Ontario Fund includes

support for infrastructure projects for Indigenous communities that advance community and economic well-being. Our efforts will accelerate the development and completion of essential projects that address the most pressing needs of people across the province. Madam Speaker, I know the road ahead may not always be easy, but I also know that when faced with new challenges, Ontarians will come together to get the job done.

Across every corner of the province, we're making incredible progress in our government's plan to build critical infrastructure in our growing communities. Last December, I was pleased to join Infrastructure Ontario's president and CEO Michael Lindsay for the release of its latest quarterly market update. With an estimated value of over \$35 billion, this update lists 31 major infrastructure projects and pre-procurement and active procurement phases of development. The work behind this pipeline of projects is an indicator of the progress our government is making to get critical infrastructure projects built faster. It demonstrates our drive and ability to bring critical infrastructure projects to life by getting more shovels in the ground on the projects that Ontarians need, projects like:

—the West Park Healthcare Centre, which reached substantial completion last November. West Park will provide specialized rehabilitation and complex continuing care to help individuals manage difficult health challenges like lung disease, stroke or amputation arising from life-changing events or illnesses. The facility features a new six-storey hospital building providing in-patient, out-patient and outreach services;

—the site preparation under way to rebuild Ontario Place, which, once complete, will deliver over 50 acres of parks and public space woven through three anchored attractions: Therme's water park and wellness facility, a revitalized concert venue and a brand-new science centre; and

—the construction under way at the 1Door4Care project at the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario, which will become a single state-of-the-art, purpose-built site on the hospital's main Smyth Road campus, bringing care closer to home for families. IO's track record is one we should all be proud of, and their success has been critical in maintaining the confidence of taxpayers.

Since the inception of its public-private partnership program almost 20 years ago, IO has brought 87 projects to substantial completion. That is 87, Madam Speaker.

Our government understands that Ontario's economic success depends on a healthy, competitive market, and our approach must adapt to meet the anticipated needs of the province's growing population.

Our well-rounded strategy is attracting investments while addressing critical infrastructure needs, fostering economic growth and promoting responsible fiscal management.

We know that, despite our government's historic infrastructure investments, more is needed to achieve our ambitious goals. To build strong communities we must find ways to innovate and efficiently manage our infrastructure

to ensure it meets existing and growing demands so that Ontario remains the best place in the world to live, work and raise a family.

This includes implementing new ways to better manage and maintain real estate to help us keep pace with the growing demands on the province's infrastructure. Many may not know this, but Ontario's general real estate portfolio is one of Canada's largest realty public sector portfolios and one of the largest in North America. This portfolio consists of approximately 43 million rentable square feet of space, with 77% being owned and 23% leased.

The realty portfolio consists of over 4,300 buildings and structures used daily for offices, courthouses, detention centres, etc. Despite being one of the province's most valuable resources, there has never been a centralized approach to managing and overseeing decisions about real estate, which ultimately comes at a cost to the taxpayers.

The lack of a centralized approach to managing real estate has resulted in poor decision-making that lacks comprehensive and strategic direction aligned with government priorities and those of Ontarians, but our government will not repeat the mistakes of our predecessors.

By centralizing and realigning resources and expertise, we can avoid the duplication of efforts, reduce administrative costs and negotiate better deals for large-scale property transactions. Centralized real estate management enables government to optimize the use of its assets.

Centralization also reduces red tape, improves information flow and enhances collaboration to ensure projects can proceed without delay. This approach provides flexibility to adapt to changing economic conditions, allowing us to respond effectively to the evolving needs and challenges in the real estate landscape.

Centralizing the management of real estate will allow Ontario to operate more efficiently, make informed decisions that are aligned with our overarching goals, and mitigate risks while ensuring consistency and transparency in the process.

Since taking office in 2018, our government has embraced the opportunity to enhance the efficiency of managing Ontario's real estate portfolio. We have proposed a framework to centralize specific real estate authorities and decision-making processes, which will improve the overall management of Ontario's real estate portfolio. This is part of our promise to make life better for Ontarians by working harder, smarter, and more efficiently.

In partnership with Infrastructure Ontario, the Ministry of Infrastructure has developed a process to review and evaluate government surplus properties. We want to ensure that properties no longer needed by the government are repurposed to address the needs of Ontarians.

We want those properties to be used for government priorities like building more homes, including affordable housing and long-term-care homes. By doing so, we're addressing a need, generating revenues, and reducing the burden on the taxpayer.

To ensure the government's real estate assets are maintained and can continue to operate, our ministry has

invested an additional \$250 million over three years for capital repairs. And starting in 2023-24, we are investing \$107 million over four years to address funding gaps for improving accessibility.

1530

We are also continuing to optimize and centralize the provincial office real estate portfolio, which supports the workplaces of Ontario public service employees and associated organizations. We are supporting new ways of working in the office and designing modern workplaces to unlock and increase the value of government real estate assets. This includes projects in Toronto, Sudbury and Ottawa that will optimize government-owned office spaces. These projects will drive workplace transformation and reduce operational costs to improve the effectiveness of the Ontario public service and associated organizations. Our efforts have already seen a reduction in over 450,000 rentable square feet across the government's real estate portfolio.

The government has recently revealed the new site for the head office of the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board, or WSIB, in London, Ontario. We anticipate this move will generate annual savings of \$70 million for the WSIB, or a 40% reduction in overall costs compared to its existing head office in Toronto. Scheduled to open in 2025, the new office will initially employ at least 500 individuals and is expected to support the creation of a minimum of 2,000 jobs in the London area over the next five years. This will allow us to harness a skilled and top-tier workplace that can live and work within their local communities.

Last spring, the Legislature passed the Reducing Inefficiencies Act (Infrastructure Statute Law Amendments), 2023. Part of this legislation will empower the province to enhance real estate management. The other part of this legislation implements efficiency modifications to the class environmental assessment process. The passing of this legislation marked the first step in our government's plan to establish a framework for centralizing real estate authority. The amendments for real estate management established an initial framework to remove and/or modify the real estate authority of specific organizations and provide the Minister of Infrastructure with authority over their real estate portfolios.

Only with the initial framework set out in the Reducing Inefficiencies Act can we propose some of the changes we are here for today, through Bill 151, the Improving Real Estate Management Act, 2024. The proposed amendments, if passed, would facilitate centralizing or realigning the real estate authority of 10 organizations and one proposed organization, allowing the government to act as one holistic organization to manage real estate while also meeting those organizations' highly specialized service delivery needs, such as museums, science centres, convention centres and art galleries.

The proposed legislation before the House today suggests modification in two key areas. The province is proposing changes that would, if passed, create a framework to remove or modify four organizations and one

proposed organization's ability to deal with real estate, if prescribed. It would provide the Minister of Infrastructure with control of real estate property previously under the control of these organizations. The four organizations and one proposed organization impacted by these changes would include the Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion—Public Health Ontario; Ontario Health; the Centennial Centre of Science and Technology—Ontario Science Centre; the Niagara Escarpment Commission; and the proposed Ontario Health atHome.

Secondly, this bill also proposes a tailored approach to modify the realty authority, in part, for the following six organizations: the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Metropolitan Toronto Convention Centre Corp., Ottawa Convention Centre Corp., the Royal Ontario Museum, Science North, and the Algonquin Forestry Authority. Under the proposed approach, these organizations would be restricted from engaging in specific real estate activities. The organizations that fall under a tailored approach would maintain control over real estate but also need government or ministerial approval and must adhere to potential regulatory requirements to dispose of freehold interests in real property.

For instance, if passed, this legislation would prohibit the Royal Ontario Museum from buying or selling property without permission from the Lieutenant Governor or in Council, also known as the LGIC. The museum would only be allowed to sell property if it followed specific rules set by the LGIC, so the museum could only sell its prime location at the intersection of Bloor Street and Queen's Park if the LGIC approved the sale and the museum followed a prescribed set of rules.

Another example is the Algonquin Forestry Authority. They would need permission from the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry to buy or sell any property.

Madam Speaker, the history of Ontario has shown us that a one-size-fits-all approach is not always the best approach when it comes to managing real estate. We can meet the varied needs of our province far more effectively by streamlining real estate authority to ensure our decisions contribute to our economic growth and prosperity and align with the well-being and high standard of living that Ontarians rightfully deserve. The proposed legislation before the House would create a more responsive, agile and accountable system to manage the complex nature of Ontario's real estate governance.

Since 2020, the Ministry of Infrastructure has engaged in consultations with essential stakeholders as part of our government's ongoing efforts to enhance the use of real estate. This collaborative effort includes 15 oversight ministries representing 39 organizations. Of these 39 organizations, 10 organizations and one proposed organization would be impacted by the proposed legislative amendments under Bill 151, the Improving Real Estate Management Act, 2024.

During these consultations, I was pleased to hear support to enhance real estate management, and that our plan was aligned with initiatives to enhance efficiency and effectiveness. This support of our plan is reiterated in the

numerous third-party reviews on the benefits of a more centralized real estate model to optimize decision-making capacity.

In 2017, the annual report of the Auditor General detailed recommendations to ensure the effective and economical management and maintenance of properties in Ontario. The AG's report recommended that the Ministry of Infrastructure thoroughly examine and implement enhancements in the management of government properties. It also highlighted the potential for increased efficiency in the operation of the ministry's real estate portfolio through centralized authority and decision-making.

The 2018 Ernst and Young line-by-line review of government spending, entitled *Managing Transformation: A Modernization Action Plan for Ontario*, also verified the Ontario government's commitment to restoring trust and accountability and maximizing the value of tax dollars. The report recommended that ministries manage their capital assets with the assistance of IO and emphasized the benefits of a centralized approach to real estate management and a more efficient asset management process. The benefits of a centralized approach could lead to reductions in overall government spending, a streamlined and efficient asset management life cycle, and improved policy alignment, enabling more efficient and cohesive government-wide decision-making.

The 2018 PricewaterhouseCoopers assessment of the general real estate portfolio operating model highlighted challenges in the way ministries and IO managed real estate, particularly for office space. The report emphasized that adopting an enterprise view for government real estate could enhance transparency, decision-making and reporting, while fostering integration with ministry programs.

The advantages of a more centralized model for managing real estate are clear. Rethinking or better managing the use of real estate can enhance accountability and align its use more tightly with our government's overall priorities. We've seen first-hand how managing real estate in a decentralized manner can lead to underperforming assets that waste taxpayer dollars. Siloed approaches resulted in decisions that lacked a strategic and holistic vision.

1540

Madam Speaker, the research and feedback on the ground reiterates the benefits of a centralized real estate model—the same model we are proposing, in part, through the proposed Bill 151, the *Improving Real Estate Management Act, 2024*. If passed, it will help increase efficiencies by allowing organizations to plan better and help maintain and manage real estate, allowing organizations to act in a clear, focused way that enables them to take an enterprise-wide approach when making decisions, while reducing costs by eliminating duplication of responsibilities and by providing clear guidelines, all while improving the quality of services that Ontario delivers.

Ontario has come so far after the challenges we've faced the past few years, and while we have made progress, we know that there is so much more to do. As we face

challenging economic headwinds, we must continue creating the conditions for economic growth and prosperity while saving taxpayer dollars. And we must take more action to ensure people are connected to the high-quality services they expect and deserve no matter where they live.

The proposed legislation before the House today is not just about buildings and real estate; it's about good government management. As we work to meet the demands of a rapidly growing population, Ontario must adopt a more centralized strategy for real estate management. A more centralized approach will allow us to align the allocation and use of properties to support Ontario's broader goals and initiatives.

This proposed legislation represents the next steps in a clear and comprehensive framework our government has created to consolidate information and decision-making processes—a framework that prioritizes fiscal responsibility by identifying and eliminating redundancies, negotiating favourable terms and, overall, making more cost-effective decisions. This increased efficiency serves the interests of taxpayers and aligns with the complex and ever-changing regulatory landscape of governing public properties.

By consolidating real estate authority under the purview of the Ministry of Infrastructure, our government aims to enhance accountability for how we spend taxpayers' dollars while safeguarding essential services that people rely on. Despite the unprecedented uncertainty facing the province today, our government continues to work shoulder to shoulder with Ontarians to find new ways to create the conditions to attract new investments and jobs across every corner of the province.

We are building a stronger and more resilient Ontario today and for future generations to come.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): I recognize the member for Brampton West.

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: I'm honoured to rise today for the third reading of the *Improving Real Estate Management Act, 2024*. And as Minister Surma already mentioned, if passed, this proposed legislation would advance our government's vision of building a stronger Ontario by implementing a more streamlined and strategic framework for managing Ontario's real estate portfolio, which is one of the province's most important assets.

To address pressing priorities for Ontarians, like building more affordable housing and long-term care, we're starting the next phase of our strategy to manage our province's real estate more efficiently. If passed, the proposed legislation will help establish a uniform, streamlined and sustainable process for managing real estate that would unlock cost savings, increase efficiencies and improve accountability.

First off, I would like to acknowledge the significant progress Ontario has made despite facing challenges that none of us could have predicted. From the global pandemic to economic uncertainties, the road has been challenging, but when faced with adversity, Ontarians have stood strong together. In these uncertain times, I'm

constantly reminded of the incredible resilience and unwavering solidarity displayed by the people of this province.

It is during moments like these that the true character of our province shines through, because Ontario's success is rooted in the unique contributions of everyone who calls our beautiful province home. Ontarians have rolled up their sleeves and tackled each obstacle head-on with determination and resolve. As we continue to navigate the road ahead together, I'm confident we will emerge stronger than ever before.

Speaker, in my role as the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Infrastructure, I take pride in collaborating closely with a team that is dedicated to fulfilling our government's commitment to build a stronger Ontario. Today I stand before you to emphasize a crucial aspect of Ontario's future: our infrastructure. We are at a pivotal moment in our province's history where the decisions that we make today will shape Ontario's economic growth and prosperity for generations to come.

It is no secret that Ontario's infrastructure is facing significant challenges. Our highways, transit systems, hospitals, water systems and other vital infrastructure are aging and under strain as the province's population grows rapidly. We're experiencing congestion, delays and inefficiencies that hinder our ability to compete on the global stage. But under Premier Ford's leadership, our government refuses to let these challenges hold us back.

We are addressing Ontario's growing infrastructure needs head-on. Investing in our infrastructure is not just about replacing pipes or building new transit or new roads. It's about laying the foundation for a stronger, more prosperous Ontario. As Ontario's population continues to experience rapid growth, the urgency of constructing long-overdue infrastructure projects to meet the needs of our people has never been greater. This is why our government is advancing Ontario's most ambitious capital plan, investing more than \$190 billion in critical infrastructure projects over the next decade. This includes more than \$26 billion in 2024-25 alone to build highways, expand transit systems, modernize hospitals, construct long-term-care facilities, enhance schools, create more child care facilities and deliver the other essential infrastructure that Ontarians need and deserve. Because when we invest in infrastructure, we build more homes, create jobs, stimulate economic activity and attract investments.

Improved infrastructure enhances our competitiveness, making Ontario an attractive destination for businesses to thrive and grow. But our commitment to infrastructure goes beyond just bricks and mortar; it is about investing in the future of Ontario, in our people, communities and economy. It is about ensuring every Ontarian can access reliable transportation, safe and efficient public spaces, and essential services such as health and long-term care.

Madam Speaker, much more needs to be done to modernize and upgrade Ontario's infrastructure. We must continue to make targeted investments in projects that yield the highest possibility of return, and ensure that every dollar spent is used effectively and efficiently.

Speaker, we have already made great progress to modernize real estate management and streamline the approvals process by passing the Reducing Inefficiencies Act, 2023. This legislation is our government's initial effort to support the streamlining of real estate authority. This legislation established an initial framework to remove or modify the real estate authority of prescribed organizations. Additionally, any property belonging to a prescribed organization is now controlled by the Minister of Infrastructure, subject to any exceptions or limitations set out in the regulation.

This legislation established the first-ever framework for centralizing and managing Ontario's real estate portfolio. As a next step, we are proposing changes to the real estate authority of 10 organizations and one proposed organization through Bill 151, the Improving Real Estate Management Act, 2024. This will allow the government to act and direct more as one holistic organization to manage real estate. Our approach will also allow us to meet the highly specialized service delivery needs of certain organizations, such as museums and art galleries, science centres, convention centres and corporations.

In particular, the province is suggesting modifications in two key areas. The province is proposing changes that would, if passed, create a framework to remove or modify four organizations' and one proposed organization's ability to deal with real property, if prescribed. It would provide the Minister of Infrastructure with control of real property previously under the control of these organizations.

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It also proposes a tailored approach to realign the realty authority of six organizations. The organizations requiring this proposed tailored approach would be restricted from engaging in specific real estate activities, would need government or ministerial approval, and must comply with regulatory requirements as necessary before acquiring or disposing of freehold interests in real property.

If passed, this approach would allow the government to manage and oversee real estate more cost-effectively and efficiently, which could create opportunities, such as the sale of surplus properties, to better support government priorities like building more housing and long-term care.

Speaker, the advantages of a streamlined, holistic model for managing real estate are crystal clear. That is why we are shifting toward a more centralized approach to boost accountability in real estate management. This move could potentially increase the value of these assets through improved management or by reimagining their purpose.

Our strategy will allow us to streamline the ways we handle, oversee and upkeep real estate in alignment with our government's broader goals. This will allow us to use our resources far more wisely to make the most out of properties and avoid letting any assets go to waste.

Having reliable data on how we use real estate assets makes it easier to plan and adapt when necessary.

If passed, the proposed Improving Real Estate Management Act can unlock cost savings, accountability,

government-wide planning, program benefits, increased efficiencies and more. The proposed measures within this bill would help ensure the optimal use of real estate while finding innovative ways to revitalize the real estate portfolio.

Communities across Ontario will benefit from a more strategic use of real estate to support priorities that people need—like building more housing units, including affordable housing and long-term care.

To meet our goal of building a stronger Ontario, we know that managing real estate more efficiently to drive economic growth and save taxpayers' money is a necessity.

As the Minister of Infrastructure mentioned, the Ministry of Infrastructure leads our government's general real estate portfolio, one of Canada's biggest public sector realty collections. We are making the most of this portfolio by partnering with other ministries to advance provincial priorities. This is part of our commitment to improving Ontarians' lives by rolling up our sleeves to get it done by working harder, smarter and more efficiently. Teaming up with Infrastructure Ontario, we're staying true to our promise by selling off surplus and underused government properties. This saves taxpayer dollars and allows these properties to be put back into use to meet the needs of Ontarians—such as for housing, long-term care, public use, or sparking economic growth.

For example, our government sold surplus property in Oakville to kick-start the delivery of 640 new long-term-care beds.

Or take the new central division facility for the Waterloo Regional Police Service, which has just opened officially—we made this happen by selling properties to Waterloo region at its market value of \$6 million.

This saves Ontarians \$550,000 yearly on operations and property costs and puts that land to good use for the hard-working people of Ontario.

By selling off surplus government property, we're turning it into something productive, benefiting all levels of government. And by supporting these sales, we're bringing in revenue and cutting costs for taxpayers by slashing liabilities and ongoing maintenance bills.

It's just common sense. That is how we are getting things done for the people of Ontario.

Speaker, we're getting things done by seizing a once-in-a-generation opportunity to build the Ontario of tomorrow. A crucial part of our plan is building more homes to support Ontario's rapidly growing population, but with this influx of people coming comes a challenge: building more housing quickly. Simply put, we don't currently have enough homes to accommodate everyone and that's a major problem. Ensuring robust water infrastructure is essential to facilitate the construction of new housing. That is why we're enabling new housing infrastructure by significantly increasing our investments to more than \$1.8 billion over three years to address Ontario's housing supply shortage and help build at least 1.5 million homes by 2031.

As part of the increased funding, the government has introduced a new \$1-billion Municipal Housing Infrastructure Program to support building core infrastructure projects such as roads and water infrastructure to enable housing for growth in developing communities.

In addition to the new Municipal Housing Infrastructure Program, we're quadrupling our investment from \$200 million to \$825 million over three years to expand the Housing-Enabling Water Systems Fund. This investment aims to bolster growing communities by providing municipalities with the funding they need to upgrade vital infrastructure projects. Under this program, eligible municipalities can seek financial assistance to maintain, enhance and expand core water, waste water and storm-water projects, safeguarding communities and facilitating the construction of new housing developments. Applications for the initial intake for the Housing-Enabling Water Systems Fund are open to municipalities until April 19, 2024.

The Housing-Enabling Water Systems Fund works in tandem with the recently unveiled Building Faster Fund, a three-year, \$1.2-billion initiative geared towards aiding municipalities in achieving their housing targets, including housing-enabling infrastructure and other projects that support community growth.

But we cannot do it alone. Ontarians remain committed to collaborating with all levels of government to construct infrastructure, meet housing targets and build stronger communities. Let's build the homes that Ontario needs for today and for the future.

Meanwhile, when it comes to building transit for today and for the future, we're focused on ensuring our communities can access faster, more reliable and seamless transit. Under our plan for expanding transit, we're creating vibrant mixed-use communities around GO Transit, light-rail transit and subway stations throughout the greater Golden Horseshoe. These transit-oriented communities, also known as TOCs, will bring more housing, jobs, retail and public spaces closer to transit. People are busier than ever these days with work, family and other day-to-day responsibilities. Access to a modern, connected transit network isn't just a luxury, it's a necessity.

As part of our TOC program, we will plan to build approximately 5,900 new residential units near six upcoming transit stations, including those along the new Ontario Line and the Scarborough subway extension. These TOCs won't just provide housing; they will offer affordable options and enhance transit access, all while generating more than 1,900 jobs. Once completed, our government's TOC program will create more than 79,000 new job opportunities and about 54,000 additional residential units. And Madam Speaker, this is just the start.

Last December, this House passed Bill 131, the Transportation for the Future Act, 2023. This legislation offers municipalities a new voluntary funding tool to finance the design and construction of new GO stations, with costs recouped gradually as new development springs up around them. It's a way to drive new housing and mixed-use communities. It's a win-win when we bring

transit closer to where people live and work. We boost ridership, cut down on congestion, kick-start economic growth, ramp up housing availability and reduce the burden on taxpayers to fund these projects.

Speaker, let me tell you about another critical aspect of our plan to build a stronger Ontario: our substantial investment of nearly \$4 billion in high-speed Internet access. We made a historic pledge to ensure that every community across Ontario will have access to reliable high-speed Internet by the end of 2025. Our government has finalized agreements totalling more than \$2.42 billion for more than 200 high-speed Internet and cellular projects throughout the province. Our progress is nothing short of remarkable.

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Thanks to our competitive process, we have signed agreements with eight Internet service providers as part of the Accelerated High Speed Internet Program, extending access to even more municipalities across Ontario. Through programs like Improving Connectivity for Ontario (ICON) and partnerships with the federal government under the Universal Broadband Fund, we're committed to bringing high-speed Internet access to areas that have been underserved, including First Nations and remote communities.

And let's not forget about the Southwestern Integrated Fibre Technology project, or SWIFT, where we are investing \$62 million to provide high-speed Internet access to communities in southwestern Ontario. That's a game-changer for nearly 65,000 homes.

In eastern Ontario, we're investing \$71 million to the Cell Gap Project that will bring high-speed Internet access to rural communities. As of this February, the Eastern Ontario Regional Network, also known as EORN, has completed 307 tower upgrades, 23 new site builds, and 44 new site co-locations. Working alongside EORN, Rogers, and the federal government, we're expanding cellular coverage to even more communities in the region.

High-speed Internet isn't just about streaming videos or sending emails; it's about connecting people to opportunities, empowering communities and building a stronger, more prosperous Ontario for everyone. Speaker, the Building Broadband Faster Act, 2021, is another significant step we have made to bring high-speed Internet access to communities across Ontario. This legislation removes obstacles that can slow down the construction of high-speed Internet infrastructure. We have introduced guidelines and regulations to provide more clarity for Internet providers, municipalities, and others involved, making it easier to get shovels in the ground and projects completed faster.

We have launched a new interactive map showing where provincially funded high-speed Internet projects are happening in communities so that people can see the progress we are making in their neighbourhoods. Speaker, under our plan to build a stronger Ontario, no community will be left behind, no matter where you live.

Another way we're strengthening Ontario is building long-overdue, complex infrastructure projects through public-private partnership ventures, known as P3s. P3s

allow us to partner with the private sector to get big projects done, whether it's building bridges, highways, hospitals, subways, or long-term-care facilities. Even in these uncertain times, Infrastructure Ontario continues to work closely with our industry partners and remains dedicated to helping us fulfill our bold capital agenda: projects like the Highway 3 expansion project, which will widen the roadway to four lanes for 15 kilometres in Essex County and get people where they need to go faster and get goods to market more efficiently; or the site preparation work that is under way to rebuild Ontario Place, which, once complete, will deliver more than 50 acres of free parks and public spaces woven through anchor attractions—Therme's waterpark and wellness facility, a brand new indoor-outdoor concert venue, and a brand new science centre.

Last December, Infrastructure Ontario released its latest market update, which lists 31 major projects in pre-procurement and active procurement, with an estimated value of more than \$35 billion. Infrastructure Ontario's market update demonstrates its ongoing commitment to delivering major and critical infrastructure projects across the province effectively.

IO's incredible track record is one we should all be proud of, and their success has been vital for our government's delivery of effective and resilient infrastructure that drives economic growth and prosperity across every corner of our beautiful province.

Since the inception of our public-private partnership program almost 20 years ago, IO has brought 87 projects to substantial completion. Our government understands that Ontario's success depends on a healthy, competitive market, and our approach must be able to adapt to meet the anticipated needs of the province's growing population. We are pushing forward with projects that create competitive wages and bolster economic growth for the hard-working people of this province.

The proposed bill before the House today isn't just about bricks and mortar; it's about laying the groundwork for good governance. Moving towards a more centralized real estate management approach isn't just smart; it's necessary to meet the needs of Ontario's growing communities. It's how we ensure that the allocation and use of properties align with the province's broader goals and initiatives.

We have created a clear and comprehensive framework to bring together info and streamline how decisions are made, a framework that puts a premium on being fiscally responsible by identifying and eliminating redundancies, negotiating favourable terms, and overall making more cost-effective decisions. This efficiency saves taxpayers money and adapts to the complex and constantly changing regulations governing public properties. By aiming to simplify real estate authority, our government is enhancing accountability in how we use taxpayers' dollars to safeguard essential services for both present and future needs.

In our vision for the future, a centralized approach to real estate management processes is a critical element of

our plan to build a stronger Ontario. Madam Speaker, together we're building more resilient communities that serve the needs of people and their families for generations to come.

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

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I, as the infrastructure critic for the official opposition, have had the opportunity to stand in this House and debate this bill with a one-hour lead, sit at committee and hear from Ontarians, and now, again, put the same question, frankly, that I put at the beginning of this debate: What is this bill seeking to measurably fix?

If we had a dollar for every time the minister used the word "optimization," we almost could have paid for the parking structure at Ontario Place. But I don't tangibly know what that means. I understand "optimize" is making it better, but in what way will this bill make the realty portfolio in the province measurably optimized?

Hon. Kinga Surma: Thank you very much to the member for the question. In my remarks, I mentioned that we are one of the largest real estate portfolios in North America. I would argue, given the fact that we own such a diverse portfolio of physical assets, that we should probably pay close attention to it because (1) it costs money to maintain those buildings; (2) we have to keep our workers safe; (3) through modernization of workplaces and technology, we want to provide the best environment for our workers; and (4), we also want to make sure that we have a good view of all of the real estate within this portfolio so that we can manage it well.

If there is an opportunity for a building to be used by government for some other purpose, we would have insight. I guess the members opposite, the NDP, don't think that 43 million square feet of office space and government assets is important, but we, on the other side, are fiscally prudent, good managers, and we do find that very important.

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

Ms. Laura Smith: I want to thank the member and the minister for their presentation. Providing homes for our most vulnerable, including those in long-term care, is an investment that our government has made a priority. How would this bill align with our government's initiatives to invest in infrastructure and supporting communities?

Hon. Kinga Surma: Thank you very much to the member for the question. I also mentioned in my speech earlier today that things are tough, that the economic circumstances out there are difficult for families. We recognize that. That is why our government has implemented many measures to make life more affordable for the taxpayer.

At the same time, we're also responsible for government services and government assets and real estate. And so, of course, it is our responsibility to make sure that we manage those assets well, that we have a plan and a strategy in place to make good use of those assets. Having that centralized view of, again, all of those real estate properties and assets is important, so that government can

be a good manager and can be fiscally prudent, especially during these difficult times.

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

Ms. Jennifer K. French: To the minister's point, this is a bill that takes more of the gems of the properties and brings them under that government umbrella—so Infrastructure Ontario, I guess—the Ontario Science Centre being one that folks have talked about in this space, and I'm looking forward to my one-hour lead and delving more into that.

But the Royal Ontario Museum, the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Science North: When the minister talks about how there might be other opportunities for the province, does she have something in mind for those?

Hon. Kinga Surma: In my remarks, I clearly identified the fact that should these institutions and their agencies want to sell or purchase real estate, they simply notify the minister responsible and/or seek an LGIC, which could include conditions as part of it.

We just want to know, if there is an agency or institution, when they are selling real estate. We want to know, because if there is some other purpose that government can use this real estate for—be it long-term care, be it affordable housing, be it providing additional space for ServiceOntario or anything else—then we may have that opportunity. But we wouldn't know if we weren't notified. That's all this is doing. It's just for us to have some insight on realty decisions moving forward.

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

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Oh, I apologize. I'm going to stick with the member for Oshawa, and then I will—

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Thank you, Speaker.

In terms of the government being able to put eyes on or to be notified or to have insight into—I don't disagree that we hope that the government has insight into big provincial decisions. But Infrastructure Ontario had previously taken over the property management of the Ontario Science Centre, and they failed to do the necessary repairs. One would imagine that the government would know about that, since Infrastructure Ontario is the de facto landlord allowing this neglect to unfold; one can only surmise why.

So I guess, if they're looking to have insight, they already had it, and we have Infrastructure Ontario who have already been proven to be a bad landlord. So how come we're giving them more provincial treasures to be responsible for?

Hon. Kinga Surma: Well, I would like to remind the member opposite that the science centre is quite an old asset. It's over 50 years old. I would also like to remind the members opposite that there were multiple studies that were conducted previous to me becoming the minister that clearly outlined the necessary need in repairs and deferred maintenance. That was very significant in cost, which is

why, while we were redeveloping Ontario Place and we presented the vision, it included a brand new facility: because the old one is so old and requires so much maintenance that it is in fact more cost-effective to build a new science centre, which was supported by the AG report last year. The AG report stated that to be true, and the AG report also confirmed the fact that the science centre needed new exhibits, because they haven't been updated for 10 or more years—

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

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: I want to congratulate the Minister of Infrastructure on Bill 151. Most people, and certainly most people in Ontario, would have no idea that the Ontario government is such a large landlord, that it owns so many properties across our large province. Today, when we are a province emerging with technology and innovation and reinventing ourselves to be a province for a future generation of explorers and entrepreneurs, it begs the question—to the minister—in the absence of a centralized management approach, how would we be able to take on the infrastructure of tomorrow?

Hon. Kinga Surma: Well, that's a very, very good question. Part of this proposed legislation is to have clear standards for notifying when real estate transactions are to happen. In the case that we don't do that, then I think it's a process that's disjointed and it's one that does not optimize—

Interjections.

Hon. Kinga Surma: I know the members opposite love that word, but that does not optimize the assets that we have. Again, given the economic situation, I think there's a greater role for government to be far more prudent, to really look at the assets that we have, to have a process in place where we have insight into real estate decisions so that we can make sure that we're providing the best services to the hard-working people of Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Unfortunately, we do not have time for more questions, but it is time for further debate.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I am glad to be able to take my place in this room as the critic for infrastructure, transportation and highways on behalf of the official opposition. Today I have my second opportunity to give a one-hour speech on Bill 151, the Improving Real Estate Management Act. I have had the opportunity to debate it in this room, follow it through committee, hear from Ontarians and then come back with all of that learning from committee. I look forward to regaling the members of the Legislature with all that I brought with me here today.

Speaker, this particular bill is interesting because, after having followed it all the way through the process, I'm not sure what it is seeking to accomplish, actually. I've listened to the presentations from government. I've heard a lot about modernizing, optimizing and whatnot. But I don't really know what they're hoping to accomplish, and I'm a little short on trust with this particular government, so I have that quiet little voice in the back of my head that

worries when I see a bill like this. There is no evidence that further centralization of real estate management will indeed make things better in Ontario. In fact, there's some evidence that it will make things worse. There is no reason to trust this government's intentions, especially when we're not even clear on what they are.

This bill continues the government's centralization of their real estate holdings, and they have significant real estate holdings. They say “modernizing”; we get worried. I had said earlier that, if we had a dollar for every time the minister said “optimization,” we might actually be able to pay for that parking structure at Ontario Place.

But this bill seems to solve a problem that we can't identify and that this government has not explained. The 2017 Auditor General's report was scathing, and it outlined numerous recommendations for this government to clean up its act and improve real estate management. Instead, we got Bill 69 and now this Bill 151, which tinkers around the edges. Instead of public civil servants, who are accountable, looking after things, the government is putting even more under the Infrastructure Ontario umbrella, where they rely on expensive private contractors to be in charge. The private contractors show up a lot in the Auditor General's report, and nothing is good where it shows up in the Auditor General's report. The public doesn't trust this government's decisions. Frankly, I don't either, and I would like this minister and government to prove that they're not doing something harmful.

Speaker, this bill, as I said, is the second phase of centralization of this province's real estate holdings under Infrastructure Ontario. Bill 69 started, and this Bill 151 continues that. In the Auditor General's 2017 report, the Real Estate Services 2017 report—it was scathing, and it looked at how this province and Infrastructure Ontario looks after—or doesn't look after—its properties, from contract management to maintenance.

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I've had a few opportunities through the years at estimates, and I've asked many questions of Infrastructure Ontario, with different leaders at the helm. The answer is usually something to the effect of, “Just trust us.” Michael Lindsay, who is the president and CEO of Infrastructure Ontario—I like working with him. I have appreciated that he is quite accessible. The opposition appreciates having access to real information. But Infrastructure Ontario is not necessarily one person or one leadership team; it is all of its private contractors that are not doing the work, not doing the job, that are filling up the pages of the Auditor General's report.

This particular bill says that it is addressing some of the Auditor General's concerns, but we don't see that. The overall conclusion in the Auditor General's report from 2017—I'll just read the overall conclusion's paragraph:

“Infrastructure Ontario could maintain government properties more cost-effectively by better overseeing the companies that it has engaged to provide most capital repair and property management services to ensure costs for capital repairs and property management services are reasonable and projects are completed on time. As well,

existing government properties could be used more efficiently, with people occupying less space per person. The agreement between Infrastructure Ontario and the Ministry of Infrastructure needs better performance standards to incentivize Infrastructure Ontario to manage and maintain government properties more cost-effectively.”

So that’s one section, the overall conclusion. None of those concerns were addressed in this bill or in the previous one. I would say that something that folks need to understand, as I said, Infrastructure Ontario is not a bad organization. But if the work isn’t getting done by the people that they’re overseeing, we have a problem. Infrastructure Ontario hands out mega contracts for a few large property management firms, and they’re sending millions of public dollars to private pockets. I don’t know how that is in the best interests of Ontarians, of the taxpayer.

The 2017 AG report found that Infrastructure Ontario’s repair and maintenance expenses are 20% higher than the private sector pays. Ontarians will pay more for repairs and inevitably get less. We ought to bring this work back in-house and restore public sector capacity and affordability. Public dollars need to serve the public interest, not private pockets.

The thing about these embedded Infrastructure Ontario contractors, and what folks need to understand, is that Infrastructure Ontario’s real estate services are actually delivered not by public servants but by embedded private contractors that add layers of shareholder profits, driving up costs for public agencies and Ontario taxpayers. According to the Auditor General, these embedded private contractors do—this is my word, not hers—a garbage job. Despite this poor performance, they keep getting rewarded with contract renewals following flawed procurement processes that favour these entrenched incumbents, these existing contracts. That is what the Ministry of Infrastructure wants to force on all these public agencies that currently manage their own real estate interests.

Bill 151 does not fix the problems that the Auditor General has identified. It entrenches these problems and expands them further, and that is enriching these embedded private contractors at the public’s expense. That does not seem like the right direction.

Speaker, trust is dwindling for this government and their connections. I had the opportunity to sit at committee, and we heard from folks there, but we also received submissions. I wanted to share a letter from the Ontario Nurses’ Association that had been submitted to all committee members, and this speaks to the evaporating trust. Again, because this is a bill that I’m saying—and I’m fairly bright and capable most days—I don’t specifically understand what this bill is seeking to achieve. Optimization, modernization: Those aren’t tangible, measurable things, and if they are, we certainly don’t know what the measures are.

Why the government is doing this remains to be seen, but others are also wondering the same thing. Here is this letter, from February 20, 2024, and this was sent to the standing committee regarding protecting public health

care infrastructure in Ontario—actually, a side note before I read this: This particular bill is focused on centralizing real estate assets, and among those are Ontario Health and Public Health Ontario—those entities. Back to their letter:

“I am writing to you on behalf of the 68,000 registered nurses and health-care professionals, and over 18,000 nursing student affiliates represented by the Ontario Nurses’ Association (ONA). Our members work in hospitals, long-term care (LTC) facilities, public health units, the community and clinics across Ontario.

“ONA is deeply concerned by the government’s decision to privatize components of health care. Last year, we strongly opposed Bill 60, Your Health Act 2023, which allowed more private for-profit clinics to perform surgeries and diagnostic procedures. We also opposed Bill 135, the Convenient Care at Home Act, which established the structure where for-profit provider companies can operate and erode Ontario’s public home care system. ONA continues to have deep concerns regarding the use of for-profit nursing agencies and for-profit LTC homes.

“If passed, the Improving Real Estate Management Act, 2023”—that’s this one, Speaker—“gives the Minister of Infrastructure oversight over properties that belong to Public Health Ontario, Ontario Health and Ontario Health atHome. Public health-care infrastructure in Ontario is invaluable. It is critical that buildings, labs, hospitals and other public health-care facilities continue to provide social benefit.

“We are concerned that the proposed legislation makes it easier for the government to sell off public health facilities to private, for-profit developers. We urge the Standing Committee on Social Policy to amend the legislation so that public health properties cannot simply be handed over to well-connected developers. Instead, unused properties should be repurposed for community use. Examples of this include building non-profit community health centres, long-term care homes and co-operative and supportive housing projects.”

That’s signed by Erin Ariss, president of the Ontario Nurses’ Association.

Again, this is what all of the committee members received as one of the submissions at committee. Folks are concerned. They have questions, and I would have imagined that the minister would have taken every opportunity to tangibly explain what this bill and Bill 69—the same question: what it’s ultimately for, what the goals are.

Speaker, we’ve had a few conversations in this Legislature about the Ontario Science Centre, and the Ontario Science Centre is among those properties that are included in this bill, so I will just read from this article here:

“Ontario to Wrest Realty Functions from Agencies.

“The Ontario government is moving to wrest realty functions from 10 additional provincial agencies, including the administrator of the health care system, the manager of Algonquin Park, major museums and convention centres. Newly introduced legislation”—at the time—“follows measures taken earlier this year to centralize authority for

real estate management within the Ministry of Infrastructure....

“The proposed new legislation, Bill 151, the Improving Real Estate Management Act, is presented as a means to manage real estate more efficiently and cost-effectively and to give the provincial government more flexibility.”

Basically, it quotes the minister: “If passed, this legislation would create a more centralized approach to how government manages and makes decisions about real estate...”

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Again, the centralization for the sake of centralization when we don’t really know why doesn’t make anyone feel good about this.

Ontario Health, Public Health Ontario, Niagara Escarpment Commission, Ontario Science Centre, Royal Ontario Museum, McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Metropolitan Toronto Convention Centre Corp., Ottawa Convention Centre Corp., Science North, Algonquin Forestry Authority—a central government authority would assume control of those properties, so again with the why.

Here’s my concern: When we look at an example that has become familiar, because we’ve spent time talking in this room and also because many of us, as children, went to the Ontario Science Centre—folks still may go and enjoy the magic and wonder of the Ontario Science Centre. Infrastructure Ontario is their landlord, so Infrastructure Ontario is responsible for most of the Ontario Science Centre’s repairs; it’s not the Ontario Science Centre that is responsible itself. That’s according to their 2022-23 business plan. It turns out that Infrastructure Ontario is technically the Ontario Science Centre’s landlord.

Also, when you look at the business plan from 2022-23, you’ll see that the plan also described building conditions as being possibly a risk that ranked as medium high, and that it was ministry capital funding that was the solution to fix those concerns—certainly not the teardown that the minister has been describing. It’s further evidence that Infrastructure Ontario is a neglectful landlord and its privatized real estate management isn’t working, and evidently it’s sometimes oriented towards interests other than the public interest, as we’re seeing with this sad, unfolding Ontario Science Centre situation—and I don’t say the Ontario Science Centre is sad; the situation is sad, because it doesn’t have to be like this. The government could choose to invest in it and actually give it some spit and polish, but they’re choosing not to because they’re wanting to tell that—well, who knows why. But they are now able to tell the story that it is falling apart at the seams and we have to replace it.

Speaker, in the Ontario Science Centre’s 2019-20 business plan, they shared that the 10-year deferred maintenance needs of the building are \$147.5 million, so I believe and understand that to be the cost to upgrade everything to appropriate standards, and I believe this would be a relevant comparator with respect to whether it would be cheaper to build something new at Ontario Place or renovate the existing building. Given the huge estimated

cost of a parking garage at Ontario Place, I am confident that it is impossible that an entirely new science centre on that site would be cheaper than spending \$147.5 million—forget the cost of the loss of Raymond Moriyama’s irreplaceable architectural masterpiece.

What is particularly interesting in that report, the 2019-20 business plan from the Ontario Science Centre—it says that landlord Infrastructure Ontario and its private contractor, CBRE, which is responsible for facility management, and not the Ontario Science Centre itself, are responsible for the most worrisome aspects of the centre’s repair backlog. The risk assessment note in the 2019-20 business plan says the centre can capably manage the repairs that it controls, but it says that “bigger issues” include “the degree to which the centre is able to influence decisions related to building improvements,” suggesting to me that landlord Infrastructure Ontario and its private contractor had been slacking in terms of repairs and that they have known about the need for those repairs.

Speaker, I tell you that to tell you this: Here’s a perfect example of just how imperfect this landlord and this system of the private contractors—in this case, CBRE—this is an example of what Infrastructure Ontario as a landlord looks like, and here we have a bill where we’re adding Ontario Health, Public Health Ontario, Niagara Escarpment Commission, Ontario Science Centre, the Royal Ontario Museum, McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Metropolitan Toronto Convention Centre Corp., Ottawa Convention Centre Corp., Science North, Algonquin Forestry Authority.

We’re putting them closer, and what will that look like for them? Are they still going to be able to manage their own affairs? What will that look like? And when we ask, we get fancy words like “optimization.” Well, okay, but that’s not tangible.

Speaker, when we don’t keep costs reasonable, fewer resources are available to maintain aging assets; thousands of public assets in urgent need of capital repairs, and we’re overspending to deliver private sector profits. The deferred maintenance more than doubled from \$420 million in March 2012 to \$862 million in March 2017, and that’s pulled from the Auditor General’s report. These are big numbers. That’s a lot of science centre exhibit repair.

My question to the government has always been that, since Infrastructure Ontario had taken over the property management of the Ontario Science Centre, they failed to do the necessary repairs, they have been a bad landlord, so how come they’re making their role permanent, and how come we’re extending their reach?

Something else I’d like to delve into, because these are institutions that are laid out in this bill. The Ontario Science Centre: There are a lot of folks pretty unhappy about this. I’ve raised it in this House, that the minister is painting it as a teardown. But it isn’t. I would encourage everybody to take their families and go visit to explore their brilliant exhibits. But their capital repairs and building renewal are years behind, and according to their business plan—Infrastructure Ontario is technically the

landlord, so it has been their choice not to invest and not to do those necessary repairs.

What's needed is for the government to cough up the money for those repairs, and they have chosen not to. The deferred maintenance costs are \$147.5 million, as I talked about, and that's real money, but it's far less than the cost of the Premier's proposed parking garage at Ontario Place. There's no way that the government doesn't recognize that being a better landlord and doing the necessary repairs would be far less costly than building a whole new science centre.

Now, we saw the "business plan." It was a business plan, and we waited a long time for it. The Minister of Infrastructure had said that they were going to be triple-checking the numbers. I don't know that that's what they were doing with the numbers. But when we saw the business plan, it doesn't hold water—unlike the proposed parking garage might have to, but that's another thing.

I did want to raise that the government has made a number of claims about moving the science centre, that it will allow thousands of new developments to be built on the site. The Premier wants density. But the science centre sits at a scenic ravine setting and the lands are considered hazardous due to steep slopes and flood plain associated with the west Don River. That's not a place for houses. I don't know what that's a place for.

So I'm wondering—side question—what the science centre is going to become, since the government is saying it has to be moved to Ontario Place.

They have claimed that the science centre staff want to make the move. They want something new. They want something sparkling to have an opportunity to walk around, said the Premier. But the president of OPSEU, the union that represents some 400 employees at the centre, says, "Not a single one of them is happy. They're angry. They're upset. They weren't consulted."

The Premier had cited visitors to the centre were down 40%. It turns out that it was 30% that he was pointing to, but it also is interesting that the 2012-13 figures were being compared to pandemic figures of 2022-23, when attendance was slashed. That's not comparing apples to apples. That's not fair. It would be interesting to compare now, when people are realizing they're faced with losing this gem and people are showing up.

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The government has claimed that the new site at Ontario Place will attract one million visitors a year—and, hey, there will be people there; maybe they'll go to the science centre too. But less clear is how many visitors are going to stay away, put off by the unbelievable downtown traffic, their inability to get there. How many visitors are we going to be losing, or people who will never choose to go? There's a big question mark over that.

Another claim was that the existing centre is a rundown old building—but it isn't. The centre's 2017-18 business plan, which highlighted that the building requires ongoing upkeep of obsolete or failed infrastructure, pegged that 10-year-deferred maintenance to \$147.5 million, and the

government is choosing not to do it. Infrastructure Ontario is the landlord who chose not to do it.

The minister has said that this is going to be less expensive, to make the science centre part of Ontario Place, to build a brand new facility, one with new exhibits. I'm going to talk more about that business case in a minute.

They've also said that the new centre is going to be spectacular and state of the art. But do you know what? It's going to be smaller, about half the current space. So what happens to some of the exhibits? I can't find the article right now, but one of the things that I had read was that the rainforest exhibit, kind of a cool thing—and maybe the government recognizes that rainforests are also endangered, so if we're getting rid of rainforests in real life, maybe, I guess, we should get rid of the exhibits, eh? But it's not making the move to Ontario Place. In fact, the new science centre is going to be, I think, 45% of the size, so it's going to be basically half the size, but they're suggesting that it's going to have so many more visitors—but also 53 fewer staff members to handle those numbers.

This facility was purpose-built to be a science centre, not a parking garage topper. So we are going to be missing out. I also think that, as we saw in the business case, putting this cultural gem at Ontario Place might warm the cockles of a few hearts that are otherwise really aggressively opposed to what is happening at Ontario Place. This maybe sweetens the deal a little bit.

But it's too bad, and it's a missed opportunity. If they were bound and determined to put a science facility down at the lake, there's a fair bit of lake science that one could learn. You could have a satellite location. You could have a science centre water edition. Why not? A little bubble in this giant spa bubble—I mean, what's another bubble? However, that's not what we're seeing. We're seeing an attack on science, which maybe isn't just a provincial thing, but anyway.

Folks are quite upset about losing the Ontario Science Centre—I'm reading here: "Architects Rise to Defend Ontario Science Centre."

Here's one: "'I have to use words that are quotable. I'm horrified,' said Diane Chin, chair of the board of directors of Architecture Conservancy Ontario...."

"Architect Joel Leon, programming director for the Toronto Society of Architects" said the Premier's "statement took the society by surprise.

"'It's a very significant building. And it seems like we are in a crucial point, again, in our history here in Ontario, where we have to work quite hard to preserve buildings that maybe sometimes are a bit misunderstood or need a little bit of work to bring them back to their full life.'"

It's reminding folks that "the science centre was designed by revered Toronto architect Raymond Moriyama in the brutalist style and opened in September 1969."

It was supposed to have a really exciting life ahead of it, right? The government has claimed, without evidence, that at this point it would be more costly to complete long-delayed repairs to the science centre than to relocate it, with a much smaller facility built atop a publicly funded,

government-funded parking structure that alone is going to cost an estimated half a billion dollars.

The late Raymond Moriyama, the world-renowned architect, had stated that with proper maintenance, the Ontario Science Centre could last “far beyond 250 years.” It also has the embodied carbon in it, instead of building a whole new one.

But back to what I had promised, which is that I wanted to talk about the government’s business case because that speaks to the heart of this particular bill, which is centralizing control of the real estate portfolio, including the Royal Ontario Museum, the Ontario Science Centre, the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Science North—all of these—Ontario Health, Public Health Ontario, the Niagara Parks Commission—lots of people looking with interest.

People love Science North, and I kind of want to know why it’s not just on the government’s radar, but on their list—their list for what? Their list for optimization, their list for modernization. I was at committee with the member for Nickel Belt, and the people in her riding don’t necessarily love the words “modernization” and “optimization” in and of themselves. They would like to know what designs this government has on Science North, if any—or if the government is wanting to use that property for something else, will it be used for community good? There are lots of things needed in her community. So there are a lot of people looking at this with interest.

But a lot of folks have been looking, to this point, at the Ontario Science Centre, because the government and Infrastructure Ontario, as the landlord of that, are at the centre of this bill, with all of these institutions being moved closer under the Infrastructure Ontario umbrella. We have been waiting with bated breath. We’ve been waiting. We’ve been begging for the business case from the Minister of Infrastructure about why they are moving the Ontario Science Centre to Ontario Place.

Here’s a piece that reminds us that the report, the business case, suggests the move could “counter negative perceptions of the commercialization and privatization” of Ontario Place. Yes, probably. If people are so aggressively mad about something, having a deal-sweetener or a positive thing—anyway, I’ll continue reading.

This is from a CTV article:

“According to the report written by Infrastructure Ontario ... about \$396 million minimum would be required in the next 20 years to address this repair work, the report suggests.

“Much of the repair work is due to deferred maintenance that has been put off for years. The building’s roof, wall, mechanical, electrical and elevator systems, among other things, are in disrepair and require significant investment.

“The report”—and this is the government’s business case—“also notes that impact from construction related to multiple transit projects in the area, including the Ontario Line, may result in a decrease in visitors.”

Michael Lindsay, president and CEO of Infrastructure Ontario—I mentioned him earlier—had told reporters at a

technical briefing, “In short, no matter what money we spend on updating the existing OSC site, it will always be less efficient, oversized for its current needs and be more expensive to operate and maintain.” He also “added that the benefits of having the science centre at Ontario Place was the ‘clustering effect.’ Visitors will be able to enjoy all of the other features at Toronto’s waterfront while also visiting the science pavilion.”

Okay, so this whole bill is about infrastructure and Infrastructure Ontario. This is a quote from Michael Lindsay, and I’m going to read it again because it made me think: “No matter what money we spend on updating the existing OSC site, it will always be less efficient, oversized for its current needs and be more expensive to operate and maintain.”

There’s a rainforest in there. I don’t know how efficient a rainforest exhibit is, but how is the government and how is Infrastructure Ontario measuring efficiency? It’s a science centre. You walk in and you’re in an experiment, okay? You walk in and there’s the magic and majesty of the building, of the place and of the exhibits. It’s not an office building. You don’t walk in and there are tight little cute cubicles that maximize production and whatever; it’s a science centre, and there’s lots of space in there for learning.

1650

In fact, the building also has a lot of nooks and crannies in behind where people can repair exhibits; they can build and make. They’ve got maker spaces. It’s not just about the kids who go there and learn; you also have businesses who use that space for fabrication, that they might make props for community theatre. They use that facility.

Side note: None of those spaces and places are going to be part of the parking garage cherry down at Ontario Place. That’s something that is no longer going to be a part of this. Is that efficient use of space? I don’t know. How are we measuring it? It was bringing money in to the Ontario Science Centre as a side venture, to actually allow people to come in and use their fabrication space. That will now be gone. Rather than the Ontario Science Centre bringing money in to offset some of their costs, that will be gone, so aren’t we reducing the efficiency of the space?

Anyway, “oversized for its current needs.” Guys, the people in this building who have offices—and I know the government members don’t all have offices in this building. There are 14-foot ceilings. I want to point out that we are standing in a beautiful hall of majesty. I don’t know that I would deem it efficient. I still am going to protect it, and I’m going to celebrate it, and I want to ensure that it gets to live longer than the 53 years that the science centre gets to exist because the minister says it’s so old. Well, so is this building, and we are all united in preserving it, ensuring that it has a future for future parliamentarians. We can see the potential in this space, but is it efficient? Maybe you could move the science centre into this room; it already houses the circus on some days. This is not about efficiency necessarily, so for the Infrastructure Ontario folks to only point to money or only point to whatever measures of efficiency they’re using, I

don't think that that's fair, not when we're talking about the science centre. It's not an office building.

I want to thank someone named Elsa Lam. I don't know Elsa, but I appreciate her work in this article from Canadian Architect. I don't know how I missed this article from the first debate, but it's still good and I'm going to use it for this debate. This article is called "Debunking the 'Business Case' for Relocating the Ontario Science Centre." The business case—we waited and we waited and we begged and we begged. The minister said, "We're triple-checking the numbers." Then we got the numbers, and I kind of had to triple-check my own ability to do math, because it didn't add up. It doesn't add up.

"Infrastructure Ontario has released its business case for a major, and controversial, component of their Ontario Place plans: the closure of the existing Raymond Moriyama-designed 1969 Ontario Science Centre, and its relocation to a smaller, new-build facility at Ontario Place.

"The 78-page document, accompanied by a 333-page appendix, argues that the Ontario Science Centre will require \$369 million in deferred and critical maintenance over the next 20 years"—over the next 20 years. That's not the cost to repair it today; that's the cost to repair it and then maintain it for 20 years. That's a 20-year figure, but we're using it just to explain what it will cost to repair. Also "an additional \$109 million to upgrade its exhibitions and public spaces," so the total is \$478 million. In comparison, the report said that "the cost to build a new science centre at Ontario Place would be \$322 million, plus \$64 million for its exhibitions, for a total of \$384 million—\$94 million less."

So just comparing those numbers: \$478 million all in, apparently, to rehabilitate the Ontario Science Centre, according to the government's numbers, versus \$384 million for a new one at Ontario Place. Okay? Okay.

However, when you dig into those numbers, the new science centre is proposed to sit on top of a 2,000-space underground parking garage, which, if built, is going to cost—I forget the numbers now.

Mr. Chris Glover: \$450 million.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Okay, half a billion, give or take, so a lot of money, and the science centre is going to be on top of that. So the science centre won't have a basement or a foundation because that will actually be the parking garage, right? It's on top. We don't have to build a basement. It's sitting on a parking garage. The parking garage is its basement, so that doesn't count.

We're talking about building a new science centre, but we're not factoring in a basement or a main floor because we're assuming the parking garage. Now, if the parking garage moves to the different location, it's going to need a foundation. In order to build a foundation, a basement foundation, it would cost perhaps some hundreds of millions. That's not in the number, okay? So we're building a science centre that doesn't have a foundation if the parking structure doesn't work out—not comparing apples to apples here, kids.

Beyond this, the government numbers for what it would cost to build a new science centre on top of a parking

garage, it also "excludes the cost for a 150-metre-long underground, two-level link between the new science pavilion on the mainland"—proposed—"and the bridge to the pods"—think of the iconic pods—which is going to be "an enormously expensive component of the project," and it will be "an essential element for allowing ticketed visitors to move from the main science pavilion to the pods and cinesphere."

This massive two-level connector, 150 metres long, underground, beside a lake, isn't part of the figure. So what it will cost to build a new one doesn't include this two-level, 150-metre-long link; doesn't include a foundation or a basement, because it assumes a parking garage, so shh.

Now, on the other side, the science centre's required repairs: The government has chosen not to invest over many years. Someone will have to pay that eventually, but that's someone else's problem, I guess.

"The cost of building a new science centre, which the report pegs at \$384 million, disregards pricing put" out "by its own consultants. It doesn't include quantity surveyor A.W. Hooker's allowances for soft costs and a construction contingency—including consultant fees"—sorry, these are numbers that are not in the cost of building a new one, okay? So it doesn't include "consultant fees, project management fees, independent inspection and testing, third-party commissioning, legal fees, development and permit charges, client FFE, and the cost of change orders made post-tender—which amount to an estimated additional \$100 million." That ain't in the number. "A.W. Hooker's overall estimate for the project is \$499,200,000. And that's for a building whose program relies on" a 150-metre-long underground link next to the shoreline, not included, and "2,750 square metres of underground functional space—a full floor—but whose price tag does not include that floor, nor any type of parking, basement, or foundations." Again, it ain't comparing apples to apples here.

I want to thank Elsa Lam because she puts this all very clearly. I'm happy to share this article with folks.

She goes on: "The business case's costing for the relocated Ontario Place omits the costing for the rehabilitation of the pods and cinesphere, as well as the cost for building the underground science link ... detailed in the test fit documents as a two-storey underground link." Okay. So the pods and cinesphere that everybody thinks of—and that's where exhibits will eventually be and whatnot. That's the link we aren't paying for, or we're not talking about, that's where it goes—they're old, okay? And they have to be rehabilitated. The money for that rehabilitation—not in this. So we're going to put exhibits in the pods, but we're not going to talk about what they'll cost. But interestingly, that \$499-million price tag—and that is from their own consultants. The A.W. Hooker's allowances and all of that is their work. The \$499-million price tag also excludes exhibitions from the majority of the pods.

1700

It says that the Ontario Science Centre—I guess this is their board—“has opted to not program three of the pods on opening day” and that “removes \$16.8 million from the previous allowance.” So we have heritage pods that need to be rehabilitated, but the money to do that isn’t included in how we’re going to put the science centre there.

It doesn’t include the “\$25.5 million currently being spent on recladding those structures” and the Ontario Science Centre—I don’t know if it’s the board—has opted not to program on opening day, so we don’t even have to count the \$16.8 million to have exhibits in three of those pods. Because on opening day, they won’t be ready, so we’re not factoring that into the cost of putting the science centre—

Ms. Catherine Fife: Say it’s not so.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Oh, it is so.

This also “assumes that there will be no phased work, no accelerated construction schedule, and no work completed during the winter, after hours, or on weekends.” All of those things would be more expensive and “command premiums.” Thank you, Elsa Lam.

I’m going to read this section, also from her article. For folks following along at home, this is the article “Debunking the ‘Business Case’ for relocating the Ontario Science Centre.” She has written, “For the sake of simplicity, a somewhat more accurate high-level comparison might be to just put the two consultant estimates, in full, side by side: \$499 million for a new science centre and partial exhibitions, to which should be added the cost of a basement level” and “foundations ... versus \$328 million to repair the existing science centre, including giving its exhibitions and public spaces a generous \$100-million refresh,” or a \$109-million refresh.

Also, “the massive carbon cost of building an underground, multi-level concrete parking garage ... next to a lake—as opposed to renovating an existing building whose embodied carbon has already been locked into place” is something that we should value.

Another piece of this math is “the government’s case for relocating the ... science centre is strongly based on the efficiencies of a smaller facility, but also on its ability, paradoxically, to attract more visitors. It estimates that 1.15 million people will visit the relocated science centre in its first years. It also expects to accrue cost savings through staffing reductions: the estimates count on laying off 53 people, or one out of every six people who currently work at the science centre.” Yes, firing one out of every six is going to save them some money.

However, it continues, “They are expecting that 50% more people will visit a facility that is 45% of the size of the current science centre, with a significantly reduced staff managing it all.”

A few more interesting pieces is that, if we were looking at reasons to keep, or what would happen if we kept the science centre where it is—if we actually looked at the numbers, this business case that the government has put forward “assumes that the opening of the Eglinton LRT and eventually the Ontario Line, the densification of

the area with condo towers, and the investment of over \$100 million in exhibitions and public spaces in the building will result in precisely no increase in the visitors to the science centre in its existing location.”

So all that housing, all the transit, all the money into new exhibits, maybe a couple of bucks to advertising, but no one else will come. And so those are the numbers presented in this triple-checked business case.

Another fun fact, again, from this article: “When you remove the ‘adjustment factor’ of 1.3 that” Infrastructure Ontario “instructed its consultants to apply to the replacement value of the existing building, which carries forward in maintenance costs that are inflated by 30%”—yes, the savings from the Ontario Science Centre evaporate and, in fact, are reversed.

So if we didn’t actually doctor the numbers, if Infrastructure Ontario had not instructed their consultants to use an adjustment factor of 1.3, maybe we’d have a sense of the real number there.

The business case contorts itself and makes clear a justification for relocation.

Two years before any public announcement, it was determined to relocate the Ontario Science Centre to Ontario Place. The business case clearly supports that plan, but there does also have to be value. So, real numbers aside, there should also be value in a gem like the Ontario Science Centre, in the experiential value science should still have value.

It’s a great article. I’d invite everybody to read it. Thank you, Elsa from Canadian Architect, “Debunking the ‘Business Case’ for Relocating the Ontario Science Centre.”

But all of that to say that Infrastructure Ontario and its contractors have not made the case for themselves to be given more properties to look after, that the embedded private contracts are more expensive, significantly so, as clearly laid out by the Auditor General. The Minister of Infrastructure has said at some point that this was in answer to the Auditor General’s 2017 report, but certainly nothing we can point to and all of the other very clear solutions and challenges, as laid out by the Auditor General, remain unaddressed.

Speaker, as I said earlier, I had the opportunity to speak at committee—I’m sorry, not to speak at committee; to sit at committee. I did speak, though. Don’t worry. And I had the opportunity to listen. There were a few folks that came. There was thoughtful discussion. There were also some shenanigans. One of the independent members had brought—

Mr. John Yakabuski: Shenanigans?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Oh yeah. Well, one of the independent members brought in a prop that was a mug that said “Save the Ontario Science Centre,” and woo, things went pretty sideways. I remember the member from Eglinton–Lawrence was not going to allow that prop and so it was removed.

Mrs. Robin Martin: Props aren’t allowed.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Props are not allowed. But anyway, interestingly timed though to interrupt my

remarks so that I didn't get all of my thoughts on the record at committee, but I'm going to take the opportunity today.

The committee process was a rushed process, and that's too bad. We have seen that the government wants to do away with the science centre as we know and love it, that they have other plans, but plans that people aren't clear on. The contract, the lease, anything to do with real estate holdings, the government pulls behind the cabinet curtain and folks don't get to know. That doesn't mean they don't care, and that doesn't mean they don't have questions.

I would think that the minister would bend over backwards to be transparent and share those clear numbers with folks, but the breakdown of the business case where Infrastructure Ontario has been the landlord for the science centre and we see mathematic or financial gymnastics in that business case, and that's not what people are looking for.

I don't see much accountability in the province for many things. I would challenge the government to point to numbers, to point to where in the budget, to point to a contract that anyone in Ontario is allowed to see. The only thing that we get to see is through the Auditor General and what we can glean from their reports.

This is the second part of an initiative, this bill is a second part in a series of pieces of legislation, as the minister has told us, to pull more holdings under the control of Infrastructure Ontario, to make their role permanent with many more public gems, public treasures, public agencies, and I think Ontarians broadly have concerns. We had someone come to the committee and say that they did not agree with the centralization for centralization's sake and was challenging them on that, but they raised that we don't have accountability.

I asked questions of the minister at committee about why the need for more and more privatization, more and more opportunities to pull public entities behind that government curtain, but again we're not entirely sure for whose benefit. If they're going to sell stuff, we want to know. Is someone planning to sell something? Like, is there something in the works? Does the government know something the rest of us don't about the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Science North or the Ottawa Convention Centre Corp.?

We don't know what it's for. Is the ROM planning a sell-off of its assets and property? Is Science North planning that? I don't think so, but if they know something and they want to stop it, there's more conversation to be had.

1710

I'll take the last bit of my time to raise an issue that my colleague from Nickel Belt has raised repeatedly, with much frustration, in this House in various ways. I sit beside her, of course. She spent so many minutes of a debate, one time, breaking down the housing in Gogama story. If you google "Gogama housing" and the MPP for Nickel Belt, you'll get stories that go back to 2015 or 2014 and whatnot. But the more recent version—I'll share some of her thoughts from committee that she was actually able to ask the minister directly about. That was a first because,

to this point, the member from Nickel Belt has been able to send letters to various ministries and ministers and has received boilerplate responses—and then sends back, and they get the same one. It has been quite a ridiculous process. It was a big deal that she raised it in committee and actually had the minister acknowledge what she said. So I'm hopeful this may one day be remedied.

What the member for Nickel Belt said was, "In September 2020, the Premier, the Minister of Mines, the Minister of Northern Development, the Minister of the Environment—a whole bunch of ministers came to my riding for the grand opening of the Iamgold mine. While they were there, I showed them—'Look across the street, in the community of Gogama. You, the government, own 11 properties that people want to buy.'

"In January 2021, I wrote to your ministry, I wrote to the Premier, I wrote to the Minister of Mines, I wrote to the Minister of Natural Resources—I wrote to seven different ministers to say, 'There are 1,800 workers sleeping in bunkers at the mine across the street from Gogama. You own 11 properties in Gogama that hundreds of people want to buy. Would you put them up for sale?' The answer I got back in January 2021 from your predecessor was that you had to do due diligence—'Give us a few months.' A year later, I checked, and they said it would be one to two years. Two years later, I checked and I wrote to you, and you wrote me back the exact same letter—'Give us one to two years to do due diligence.'

"If having government oversight of real estate is to improve efficiencies, taking three years—actually, we're going into four; we are into February 2024—to sell 11 homes, and most of them are not worth more than \$200,000, is not efficiency. That's leaving 1,800 workers to sleep in bunkers across the street from where you own properties that are beautiful, that you have paid to maintain—to cut the grass, to shovel the snow, to trim the hedges. They are beautiful. You've paid for all this for years.

"Why don't you put it up for sale? And how is that efficiency, four years later?"

That's a great question.

The minister said, "I can appreciate your frustration. Certainly, I am aware that there is a need for more housing in northern communities, given the government's investments in mines.

"The response that was provided to you in the letter is correct."

She went on to explain the involved process and said, "But it's noted. I will take that back to the team..."

I'm saying that with a little bit of hope for the member from Nickel Belt, who raises this issue all the time. But it's an example that, as we're talking about a government initiative to centralize their real estate portfolio—to make it optimized, maybe more efficient. These are not measurable things—maybe they are, but we don't know what the measures are. We have a community that has been begging for years and years and years to have those properties be usable. Maybe the government wants to do something else. Maybe it doesn't want to sell them—but then tell

them. Maybe it wants to keep the land but sell the houses on it and it's—I don't know. But is there not a conversation to be had? This is why the relationships, the open back-and-forth, are so important and why privatizing real estate and centralizing real estate—why people are nervous.

Speaker, I have had a second opportunity in this House to speak for an hour about Bill 151. Knowing that this is just the second in a series, I have a sneaking suspicion I will be back to deliver what I hope is a very different speech; what I hope is a speech, next time, that says, "Wow, look, the government did something that the folks can trust, that they have full understanding that this solves a problem that's been identified by an officer of the Legislature." But I have a sneaking suspicion that may not be the speech I get to deliver.

We don't know what problem this bill is meant to solve. It certainly does not solve the very clear problems that were revealed in the Auditor General's 2017 report. This may make them worse. In short, this bill does nothing to address the actual problems cited by the Auditor General with respect to the Ministry of Infrastructure's poor oversight of real estate services in Ontario.

With that, I look forward to questions from my colleagues.

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

Mr. John Jordan: I want to thank the member from Oshawa for all the work she did in preparing for the last hour. Thank you very much. I also want to assure her that the new science centre will have a foundation underneath it. I'm 100% confident of that.

But I want to talk about change: the changes to technology that we see today, the changes to building materials, the changes to safety requirements, accessibility requirements for our buildings. It provides the need to support and manage these changes. This needs to be done efficiently: cutting red tape, practising good governance, minimizing administration through centralization and reducing regulations through red tape reduction. Would the member not agree that these are good initiatives for the taxpayers of Ontario?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Okay, there are two parts to that. One, I know we're not going to have a floating science centre—well, maybe in Lake Ontario, but not in the air. There will be a foundation. But as it stands now, it's proposed to be the parking garage, is its foundation. So, yes, it will be on something, but that parking garage—that half a billion or whatever—isn't in the number. Now, if you have to move the parking garage, then, yes, you're going to need a foundation or a basement, and that amount ain't in the numbers. So I agree it will be on something. I just wonder what it will cost and if we'll get to find that out.

The second part was about, I don't know, optimization, modernization—

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Sorry. I apologize. Questions?

Ms. Catherine Fife: The Auditor General found that Infrastructure Ontario does not obtain enough information

from its external project managers to assess whether procurements are done in a competitive and fair manner. The AG found that the external project managers do not have an incentive to complete projects on time. The AG found that almost \$19 million was spent in one year on operating and maintaining 812 vacant buildings. We have a housing crisis; maybe we can do something with those vacant buildings. And then, finally, she found that one private sector company with a history of poor performance is still being awarded new contracts by Infrastructure Ontario, and Infrastructure Ontario does not have a formalized performance evaluation program of private sector companies.

Infrastructure Ontario is the problem. Why has this government doubled down on giving more responsibility to Infrastructure Ontario?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I don't know; I've been asking that same question. When the Auditor General has laid out that we spend 20% more for those repairs and whatnot than if it were brought in-house or delivered by the public sector, that we are awarding contracts to those who are not doing the work well or accountably—I don't know why we would give them more responsibility and, further, make their involvement permanent. I have asked that. There is no answer.

But the Auditor General laid out very specific numbers and challenges, and this government has not addressed them. The real question is: Why not?

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

1720

Hon. Kinga Surma: The member opposite spoke a lot of the science centre. Of course, we are very proud of the decision that we made, because now we will have a brand new science centre that families will be able to enjoy for another 50 years, as opposed to letting an old facility continue to break down and never actually address the issue. But nonetheless, Ontarians will have a brand new science centre.

The member opposite spoke about it. She refuses to acknowledge the facts that were mentioned in the AG report, which do confirm everything the government said in terms of building a brand new facility and some of the challenges of the old building. My question is, then, will the member opposite accept the recommendations and comments made by experts in the field like Lord cultural planning, Ernst and Young, and Pinchin, all of which have commented on the science centre and conducted business cases to move the science centre over to a new—

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Response?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: The cherry-picking—

Interjection.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Okay. Shh.

The cherry-picking is bonkers. It's a document that does not compare apples to apples, and saying that the critical maintenance, the \$369 million in deferred costs—the government is using a number that stretches it over 20 years. That's not what it will cost to fix; that's to fix and maintain over 20 years. That's a big number.

When Infrastructure Ontario had their consultants use a 1.3 increasing factor, those aren't real numbers. That is inflated by 30%. That's not a fair number.

When the government is choosing not to listen to its own consultants, quantity surveyor A.W. Hooker's numbers—that put it at \$499.2 million. How come you're not listening to your own experts in that regard?

This is just trying to make the story fit their narrative, but that doesn't make it real.

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

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Thank you to the member from Oshawa for her very enlightening remarks on this bill and on the science centre this afternoon.

I want to ask a question about the fact that the Ottawa Convention Centre is included in this bill. I'm not aware of anyone in Ottawa who asked for this to be included. I haven't heard any hint of a concern that the Ottawa Convention Centre was going to acquire or dispose of property.

I know that the real concerns of Ottawa residents are the affordability crisis, the lack of affordable housing and our health care system, which is falling down around our ears. So how does this bill make life any better for the residents of Ottawa?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I don't think that there's anything in this bill that's going to do anything for the folks in Ottawa. It may confuse them.

In fairness, I had asked the Minister of Infrastructure about the buy-in or if they had had positive or negative feedback from the institutions within this, and the government has said, by and large, there was buy-in or there wasn't pushback, except for some. But we don't know what the "some" is. We don't know who. We don't know what their concerns are, because that's not for us to know.

It might be interesting for you to circle back to the folks in Ottawa and ask them how they feel about privatization; how they like seeing their money, public dollars, go to these private consortiums, the P3s; and how they feel about accountability and transparency in provincial assets.

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

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: I appreciate the comments from the member opposite. I just want to repeat a very important fact to the member: that we're talking about 40 million square feet of property. We're talking about approximately 30 million feet that are owned by the taxpayers of Ontario. And I don't understand—and perhaps the member wishes to clarify—why we never heard anything in her remarks about centralizing the oversight,

about creating this centralization so that we are efficiently optimizing the assets that we have.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Oh, my God—sorry. The word salad is so amazing. I didn't take that course in order to get here.

The optimization, centralization, modernization, all of that—tell me what that looks like for the taxpayer. All of these fabulous gems in our community, Science North, the Royal Ontario Museum, the science centre, Public Health Ontario, Ontario convention centre corporation—all of these, when people walk in, what is it that they're going to see and measure that they're going to be like, "Oh, my God. Thank goodness the government centralized the optimizable modernness"?

What are you talking about? We don't want word salad. We want value for our tax dollars. We want investment in our gems. That's what we want. Show us what that looks like.

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

Further debate? Further debate?

Ms. Surma has moved third reading of Bill 151, An Act to amend various statutes regarding infrastructure. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Mr. John Vanthof: I said no.

Ms. Catherine Fife: We said no.

Miss Monique Taylor: Oh, you're kidding me. Both of them said no.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): I did not hear a no.

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): I did not hear a no.

Miss Monique Taylor: That's unfortunate.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): The member from Hamilton Mountain has been named. You may leave the chamber.

Miss Taylor was escorted from the chamber.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Be it resolved that the bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

Third reading agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Orders of the day? I recognize the government House leader.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Madam Speaker, no further business.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): This House stands in recess until 6 p.m.

The House recessed from 1727 to 1800.

Report continues in volume B.

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