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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Monday 28 October 2024

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 28 octobre 2024

The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WORKING FOR WORKERS FIVE
ACT, 2024

LOI DE 2024 VISANT À OEUVRER
POUR LES TRAVAILLEURS, CINQ

Resuming the debate adjourned on October 24, 2024, on the motion for third reading of the following bill:

Bill 190, An Act to amend various statutes with respect to employment and labour and other matters / Projet de loi 190, Loi modifiant diverses lois relatives à l'emploi et au travail et à d'autres questions.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Further debate? I recognize the member for Leeds–Grenville–Thousand Islands and—something else.

Mr. Steve Clark: Thank you, Speaker. Long name, amazing service.

I'm very pleased to be able to debate this bill this morning. I want to take the opportunity to thank the Minister of Labour for all of his work. This bill is really a testament to the work that our government has had with our labour unions. We made sure that at every opportunity we would update that, so I look forward to the Minister of Labour's next Working for Workers bill.

I do want to take this opportunity to recognize Minister Piccini and Premier Ford. Recently, they came to my riding—first of all, I want to go back to last November. Last November, Minister Piccini came and he was the guest speaker at the Leeds Grenville Economic Development Summit. This is a summit that has been organized by the Leeds Grenville Economic Development Office. It also is involved with the three community futures in both 1000 Islands, Grenville and Valley Heartland. It also has the opportunity for MP Michael Barrett and I to work very closely.

Minister Piccini came and had a short meeting with officials from the Kemptville campus. This is a campus that—it was a University of Guelph campus. In 2014, the Liberal government—the then Minister of Agriculture at the time was Premier Kathleen Wynne—decided to close Kemptville campus, which effectively closed that university campus but also a number of skilled trades opportunities that were there. Minister Piccini had a fantastic meeting as

part of his consultation for Working for Workers, and he met with those officials from the Kemptville campus and municipality of North Grenville. Fast-forward to 2017, the municipality of North Grenville assumed significant acreage from the campus in an agreement with the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs.

Premier Ford and Minister Piccini came to my riding on October 4 and had a significant announcement regarding skilled trades. We toured a fantastic business, 401 Electric in Brockville, owned by Barry Moss, who has done an incredible job with the Skills Development Fund. We also had the opportunity, the minister and I, to tour Devries, which is an electrical contracting company in North Grenville. They were also the recipients of Skills Development Fund dollars.

The real opportunity that I want to talk about today is the one that Premier Ford—the tour that we had on the Kemptville campus. He got to meet directly with a number of students from the Upper Canada District School Board who have really gone through the revitalization of that campus. Under the Liberal government, skilled trades courses ended at that campus, and it was from a renewed partnership with the municipality of North Grenville, with the Upper Canada District School Board, that it's so wonderful to have students back on that campus learning skilled trades. The fact that the Skills Development Fund provided us this opportunity really speaks volumes to this minister and our Premier in their commitment to skilled trades. It was a great opportunity for us to talk to students.

I can remember very vividly, prior to the Liberals closing that campus in my riding, which was a significant negative announcement—the fact that we were able to put students back in that same structure that had the heavy equipment operator course; the fact that these young people were back learning the skilled trades—and I want to just talk about the students.

I was in the village of Athens a couple of Saturdays ago and I was walking across the street to go into one of the local businesses, and a mother ran across the intersection to talk to me about the life-changing experience that Minister Piccini's program has done at Kemptville campus. Then, I followed it up. The next weekend, I was at an event, the Leeds county plowing match, out near Forfar in the rural part of Leeds county, and I actually met the young gentleman. He was so very enthusiastic about the opportunities that this government's been able to provide with the Skills Development Fund. It was very unique to have both the Premier and the minister in the riding. I think this really underpins the importance of bills like Bill 190 and the fact that it's not just a piece of legislation, that the gov-

ernment's actually following up with consultation and actually delivering a program like SDF that has literally changed the lives of young people.

This was exactly what our government was saying when we were in opposition to the then Liberal government about the detrimental decisions that they made regarding skilled trades—the detrimental decisions that they made with that campus, which was an extremely viable campus. It really made an important opportunity for us.

Speaker, I think one of the things that we can now deal with is this legislation. I think we've had ample debate, so this morning I move that the question now be put.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): There have been over six hours of debate on this matter, and 12 members have spoken. Mr. Clark has moved that the question be now put. I'm satisfied that there has been sufficient debate to allow this question to be put to the House. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Mr. Piccini has moved third reading of Bill 190, An Act to amend various statutes with respect to employment and labour and other matters. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

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

Third reading agreed to.

REDUCING GRIDLOCK, SAVING YOU TIME ACT, 2024

LOI DE 2024 SUR LE DÉSENGORGEMENT DU RÉSEAU ROUTIER ET LE GAIN DE TEMPS

Resuming the debate adjourned on October 23, 2024, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 212, An Act to enact two Acts and amend various Acts with respect to highways, broadband-related expropriation and other transportation-related matters / *Projet de loi 212, Loi visant à édicter deux lois et à modifier diverses lois en ce qui concerne les voies publiques, les expropriations liées aux projets d'Internet à haut débit et d'autres questions relatives au transport.*

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Further debate?
0910

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I'm pleased to be able to add a full hour's worth of what I hope are thoughtful comments on G-212, which is the so-called Reducing Gridlock, Saving You Time Act, as presented by the government. I have the opportunity to serve as the official opposition critic for infrastructure, transportation and highways, and I have a whole bunch of stuff that I'm looking forward to getting on the record and sharing about this bill. This is a piece of legislation that has certainly garnered a fair bit of attention and interest as we have headed back to Queen's Park. Some folks will know this is the bill about bike lanes, about supposedly reducing gridlock. It isn't a bill about a subterranean expressway—or the 401-nel. If folks are waiting for that, that's not this bill.

But this is a bill that seeks to bypass various due diligence and environmental assessment processes in order to

fast-track costly and unnecessary highways through the greenbelt while making it harder for municipalities to provide and ensure cycling infrastructure. This bill also makes permanent the existing restricted tow-zone pilot—we've talked about the towing industry in this House before—and also touches on broadband, so I'm going to break that down for us in an hour.

This government has named this bill the Reducing Gridlock, Saving You Time Act. If that were really goal, the government could take the trucks off the 401 and move them to the 407 to reduce gridlock, but they have voted against that NDP initiative. The government could ensure truck drivers have appropriate training to reduce collisions on northern roads, but so far, they seem to be pretending that that isn't the terrible problem that it is. They could ensure transits gets built. They could turf the notorious CEO of Metrolinx, Phil Verster, and commit to more transparent and accountable building of needed transit infrastructure.

But this legislation, I would say, Speaker, is not about improving traffic. Instead of solving the problem, it picks around the edges of existing legislation. It does tighten up a few things: seeks to advance the government's commitment to appease its donors and seeks to pick a culture war for political purposes that puts the lives and safety of vulnerable road users at risk, including kids and people who cannot afford a car. It is about a government dictating that people who choose to get around by bike are worth less than people who choose to drive by car. If this bill were really about getting people moving, it would be a commitment to finishing the Eglinton LRT and diverting commercial truck traffic off the 401 and onto the 407.

The government talks about prioritizing infrastructure, and yet, we're seeing, it will not invest in the professional engineers within the public service that Ontarians depend on to ensure our infrastructure is safe and reliable.

This is not a bill about traffic. It's about starting, as I said, a culture war and a nonsensical fight against bike lanes. This is a fight the government is waging without evidence, as I will lay out for us in this time.

The government is making grand claims about driving test savings, which aren't real. But what is real is the Auditor General's scathing report that the government is not addressing real concerns and real fraud. If the government were interested in reducing gridlock, they would not be so focused on gumming up the works with new red tape for municipalities.

Speaker, schedule 2 of this bill, the Building Highways Faster Act, designates Highway 413, the Bradford Bypass, the Garden City Skyway bridge and any other highway project prescribed by cabinet as "priority highway projects." I'll get the nitty-gritty on the record and then we'll explain it for the folks at home. Schedule 2: The minister may order utilities to move their infrastructure to make way for a priority highway project. The minister or a delegate may enter any non-dwelling property to carry out a site inspection. The minister may, by regulation, deem that certain municipal bylaws, to the extent that they restrict the delivery of goods and services to a priority highway project, do not apply. The government already has extraordinary powers to expropriate property or conduct site inspections; I don't

know if there is evidence—we certainly haven't seen any—that it needs these additional powers. Is this just another power grab that seeks to avoid public accountability? I'm looking forward to the debate.

Schedule 3 is the Highway 413 Act. Again, I'll wade into the details here. It exempts the Highway 413 project from the Environmental Assessment Act, ending the EA that has been under way, off and on, since 2007. The Highway 413 project is defined broadly to include highway connections to Highway 410 and Highway 427. Highway 413 early works—that would include specified bridge and ramp projects—are also exempt, and the act sets out an alternative environmental impact assessment and consultation process for these exempted projects. So schedule 3 fast-tracks various projects related to Highway 413 by weakening or removing important safeguards that protect the public and the environment from the cost of harmful or wasteful projects.

There is no requirement to publish the estimated costs of any part of the Highway 413 project or to provide a business case for proposed highway investments to confirm the value for money. There is no specific requirement to study the impacts on traffic or trip times, including the impacts of induced demand. There is no specific requirement to study impacts on species at risk. All of those things one would expect to find with a project of this size and scope.

The act requires that the minister state the purpose of the Highway 413 project, but does not require the minister to evaluate alternatives to achieve the same purpose as would be required for a full environmental assessment under the EA Act. The alternative environmental impact process described in schedule 3 of this bill is carried out by the Ministry of Transportation or its consultants. There is no requirement that the impact assessment, including its terms of reference, be reviewed by subject-matter professionals in the environment ministry, agricultural ministry or other relevant ministries.

The Building Highways Faster Act, as the bill calls it—who is this building faster for—before proceeding with Highway 413 and the Bradford Bypass, is the government going to tell the public how much the mega projects are going to cost them? Because that information has not been forthcoming

This is a government that has so far refused, stubbornly, to utilize existing infrastructure. We have the 407, and it is underutilized. Back in May, the NDP introduced a motion to remove tolls from trucks on the 407 to move more of them from the 401 to the 407. Everyone who has driven on the 401 knows that the trucks on the 401 add to the gridlock. If the government is so convinced that these highways will improve traffic, instead of attracting more cars and making congestion worse, why doesn't this piece of legislation require the ministry to publish a traffic engineering study showing the evidence to back up the government's claims? I would posit, Speaker, that it's because it won't.

So let's look at some better and different ideas. Environmental Defence put out a press release, "Queen's Park

Motion to Slash 407 Truck Tolls Undermines the Ontario Government's Business Case for Highway 413." This was back in March when the NDP brought forward the motion to remove the truck tolls from the 407 to direct more of the trucks away from the 401. They have said, "The opposition bill is proposing to reduce tolls on the 407 ETR for commercial truckers which would help to reduce congestion on the slower-moving Highway 401. According to an expert report by global transportation analysts Eunomia, the transportation benefits would be enormous: Despite costing \$6 billion less than the 413 scheme, this plan would shift 12,000 to 21,000 trucks a day off Highway 401, and slash journey times for truck traffic passing through the GTA by approximately 80 minutes.

0920

"After a decade of legal wrangling and disruptive construction, the benefits of this policy would be felt almost immediately." It sounds like a good idea.

From the Trillium article about the same initiative: "PCs Vote Against NDP Motion to Remove Truck Tolls from Highway 407." This was back in March. "NDP leader ... introduced a motion to call for the removal of tolls for trucks on Highway 407, arguing it would ease congestion on the 401 and save truckers tens of thousands of dollars."

Again, they've said, "Diverting some truck traffic to the 407 would save truckers about 80 minutes of commute time, get 12,000 to 21,000 trucks off the 401 and cost \$6 billion less than Highway 413, according to a recent study by Environmental Defence."

This is something that we brought forward, we debated in the House and the government was not interested in exploring—certainly not in supporting, but I have tried to have this current Minister of Transportation talk about the idea in the Legislature and even that seems to be a bridge too far.

But there are other ideas out there that this province could look into. If they're absolutely committed to their current highway plans, what is preventing them from looking at other alternatives at the same time? Because if I believed—which I don't—that Highway 413 was going to change the world and make it a traffic-free space or whatever, if it was going to just improve the lives of Ontarians so much, if that were true, it still isn't going to happen any time soon. Removing trucks from the 401, diverting them to the 407 by removing the truck tolls, would be something we could do tomorrow. So putting off any kind of relief for people until that highway is built—if I believe that that's what it would do, which I don't—is poor government, right? Governing for the people: What do they need today? What do they need tomorrow? What do they need in the future? Let's look at all of the things, and yet, we're not.

This bill claims to build highways faster, but, again, I don't believe that that's a thing that's going to happen, especially because I think that this Premier should engineer a believable and better plan. And, yes, Speaker, there was a pun in there because, right now, a lot of people are interested in what's going on with the professional engin-

eers in the public service. They're engineers. Engineers are a special breed of people. Anybody who has engineers in their friend group know that they see the world differently. We need them. They imagine potential possibilities, how to make the world better designed. We need them and we should value them.

If building infrastructure were really a priority for this Premier, then this government would be investing in the planning and design of great projects for the province. But instead, we get back-of-the-napkin pipe dreams like the 401-nel or whatever we're calling it, the subterranean 401 tunnel.

Right now, for the first time in 35 years, the engineers who work in the public service are taking strike action. This is unbelievable, but it's happening because this Premier wants to cheap out on paying for professional services to ensure our infrastructure is the best it can be to serve Ontarians for generations to come. I see it as short-sighted.

Speaker, this is from an article by Global News, "Ontario Engineers Plan to Remove Members from Highway 413, Bradford Bypass Projects."

"The Professional Engineers Government of Ontario union"—or PEGO—"which represents engineers who work on oversight and management of government projects and regulations, say they are planning to begin pulling their members from work related to Highway 413 and the Bradford Bypass, two key government projects.

"While this labour dispute will impact the delivery of Ontario's key infrastructure commitments and the management of existing infrastructure and operations, PEGO is ensuring its strike is both tightly focused and responsible," the union said in a statement....

"The latest move means removing its members from projects the government has deemed a provincial priority. The engineers generally work in project management and contract consulting roles, with oversight over how quickly the projects can move forward....

"The union said it was working to remain 'responsible' in how it escalated its protest, with safety in mind."

The government is spending what it deems necessary on P3s and private engineers and sees that as an investment, but apparently sees paying their own in-house professional engineers as an expense. All things being equal, we need engineers, wherever they are working in the private sector and the public sector, to be able to do the work that Ontarians need them to do. I would say that if the government were really interested in advancing their infrastructure priorities, then they need to not just look in the mirror, but they need to look in-house and make sure that they are indeed investing in infrastructure.

Again, this bill, the Building Highways Faster Act, if the engineers who are overseeing and are involved in the Bradford Bypass and Highway 413 are planning to withdraw their members from that, how quickly is that project going to go, folks?

I'll continue here. This was from last week: "PEGO Frustrated by Lack of Progress at the Bargaining Table....

"PEGO has provided the Treasury Board with an analysis showing that PEGO members earn at least 30% to 50%

less than they could earn in the broader Ontario market for their skills by working for municipalities, other government agencies, or in the private sector. PEGO is deeply concerned about the challenge Ontario faces in recruiting and retaining expert engineering and land surveying staff. Mounting vacancies could result in impacts and delays on key priorities of the government, including Highway 413, the Bradford Bypass and others—some of which have been recently designated as priority projects for construction. It is important to note that successful construction is a result of strong planning and design work in the early stages of complex infrastructure projects—work that PEGO's engineers and land surveyors are engaged in."

Engineers aren't nice to have; they're needed. I would challenge the government to put its focus, if they are indeed interested in building infrastructure—we can argue about which projects, but any government of the province of Ontario, I hope, wants to build long-lasting, safe, well-planned infrastructure for generations. Prove to us that that is indeed your priority.

Further to that, with the engineers, I would ask, why doesn't this Ontario government recognize the value and invest in the engineering and land surveying expertise that is critical to Ontario's infrastructure priorities? Why are these PEGO represented engineers and land surveyors who work for the province not paid at the same level as other public entities such as Metrolinx, city of Toronto, region of Peel, for doing equally or more complex expert work? Let's not forget that the folks in-house sign the papers that they are working for the people of Ontario. That's top of their mind, and we don't want to bleed them to, I'll say, the outside world, where they can make enough money to pay their bills or, rather, what's fair for their expertise.

Speaking of engineers, the Ontario Society of Professional Engineers has opposed both Highway 413 and the Bradford Bypass. I'll share with folks, from OSPE, the Ontario Society of Professional Engineers, which is the advocacy body and voice of the engineering profession: "Ontario currently has over 85,000 professional engineers, 250,000 engineering graduates, 6,600 engineering post-graduate students and 37,000 engineering undergraduate students."

I'm going out on a limb here, but I'm pretty sure that all members of this House get invited to engineering licence presentations, that we meet with the engineers locally in our community to celebrate their achievement, their academic success, wish them well in their future. We value the work that they do in word, but I don't know if we do in deed.

0930

This is from a letter that they had written at that time to the Premier and then-Minister of Transportation as well saying, "Last week, the Auditor General of Ontario disclosed that there were numerous recommendations from qualified subject-matter experts to defer pending highway projects. In April 2021, OSPE echoed the recommendations, strongly opposing the proposed highway projects, specifically Highway 413 and the Bradford Bypass, based on feedback from Ontario's engineering community....

“OSPE strongly urges the Ontario government to abide by the recommendations of your engineering subject-matter experts and defer the highway projects, specifically Highway 413 and the Bradford Bypass, and reinvest that money into higher-priority projects. Our network of engineering experts continues to offer valuable information to the Ontario government and is willing to support your government’s objectives on an ongoing basis...” That was from Sandro Perruzza, chief executive officer, back in December 2022.

Again, we have a habit here in the province—we; I’m not a member of the government—the government of Ontario seems to have a habit of discounting what engineers are saying, and that’s another example and of course connected to what we’re talking about here today.

While we’re discussing Highway 413, let’s talk about the environmental ramifications. This Premier wants the 413 and has promised all those lucrative off-ramps connected to it to PC donors and developers. There are lots of articles that folks can check out and see that each off-ramp is owned by a different donor and developer. There seems to be nothing that can stop this Premier, certainly not a pesky species at risk, not the community and, arguably, not the feds.

I have an article here from Environmental Defence, “Ontario’s New Highway Bill Would Lock in Gridlock, Strangle Low-Cost Housing Development and Set Up Conflict with Federal Government.” That is about this particular bill. We’re debating Bill 212, Reducing Gridlock, Saving You Time Act. Environmental Defence has certainly taken a strong stand and are providing Ontarians with evidence as to why this bill is problematic in so many ways.

As they had said, “The Ontario government’s omnibus highways bill, which it has labelled the ‘Reducing Gridlock, Saving You Time Act, 2024,’ would bulldoze ahead with destructive new highways that make traffic worse. The bill ignores environmental values, hinders affordable solutions to traffic congestion, undermines efforts to deliver affordable infill housing and puts the province on the collision course with the federal government.”

They go on, “Ontario could and should be tackling gridlock right now by making better use of existing infrastructure, such as moving commercial truck traffic from the 401 onto the underutilized Highway 407. This shift alone could ease congestion on major routes without further damage to ecosystems or the climate.

“More highways mean more gridlock, more wasted time, more destroyed natural areas and more pollution,” said Tim Gray, executive director at Environmental Defence.” He goes on to say, “Shifting truck traffic from the 401 to the 407 now and investing in modern, well-connected public transit would relieve congestion more effectively and sustainably without destroying natural areas and farms or increasing carbon pollution.”

“By short-circuiting environmental reviews, Ontario is proposing to ignore the fate of dozens of federally protected endangered species, the Humber, Credit and Holland rivers, and irreplaceable Indigenous archaeological sites. All of these values are the responsibility of the federal

government and cannot be destroyed at the stroke of the pen by the Ontario government.”

They continue, the Premier’s “‘callous and contemptuous disregard for wildlife, rivers, clean water and culture cannot be legally ignored by the federal government,’ added Grey. This bill should be a bright, waving red flag for the federal government to immediately designate all new major highways in Ontario for federal impact assessments as we have requested.” There’s a lot going on with this bill and a lot at stake, Speaker.

As reported by the Narwhal, “Canada’s Environment Minister Has 90 Days to Decide Whether to Review Ontario’s Highway 413—Again.

So, “Environmental Defence has requested a federal impact assessment on the heels of the provincial bill” that we have in front of us.

As they have reported on October 22, “An environmental group has made a formal request for the federal government to intervene in Ontario’s Highway 413, throwing the project’s fate into uncertainty a second time....

“Canadian Environment Minister Steven Guilbeault is mandated by federal law to reply within 90 days—by Jan. 19, 2025, at the latest. If he decides to subject the project to a second review, called an impact assessment, the project could once again be caught in bureaucratic gridlock.

“All of this has already happened once before: the federal government originally decided to review Highway 413 in May 2021. At the time,” it was about “public concern about the project, and raised red flags about how its construction could impact three federally protected species at risk. The highway would cut across Ontario’s greenbelt, along with wetlands, rivers, forests and prime farmland in Toronto’s outer suburbs....

“Ontario’s transportation minister”—the current one—“has vowed to push forward with the highway at all costs, arguing it will ease the greater Toronto area’s traffic congestion—despite decades of evidence showing new highways don’t clear gridlock. Some estimates for the project indicate it could cost up to \$10 billion, though the Progressive Conservatives have refused to put a price tag on it....

“If passed, the bill would exempt the project from undergoing a full provincial environmental assessment, Ontario’s equivalent to the federal impact assessment. Instead, the province is proposing an ‘accelerated’ process, which would require a more limited review of the highway’s environmental impacts, and allow the government to start early works like bridges before completing it.”

This current minister “told reporters he hopes the federal minister ‘stays out of the provincial lane on this.’”

We will wait and see what happens, but exempting it from environmental protections doesn’t seem like the right way forward.

Schedule 4 of this bill is regarding the Highway Traffic Act—there are two parts. It re-enacts an as-yet-undone part of Bill 162, the Get It Done Act, which was to set a statutory driver’s licence fee at the amount of the current fees set by regulation. Future fee changes will require an

amendment to the Highway Traffic Act. It sets statutory fees for certain drivers' examinations at the amount of the current fee set by regulation. Future fee changes will require an amendment to the Highway Traffic Act.

Speaker, the government already has the power to set driver's licence and examination fees, so setting them via statute instead of regulation won't change a darn thing for drivers. The fact that the statutory driver's licence fee from Bill 162 still hasn't been proclaimed six months later—and no one has noticed or cared—is proof of this. I am more interested—and I'm sure that the folks at home are more interested—in what the government is doing about the allegations of fraud and corruption within Ontario's privatized DriveTest centres or the similar allegations of fraud at Ontario's private truck driver training schools. I am wondering why the ministry is bullying vulnerable road users instead of tackling these actual problems.

This government is claiming that they're saving Ontarians \$72 million. This is the sticker in the window. As you're driving by this bill, you see a flashy sign in the window and it says, "We're going to save Ontarians \$72 million." Well, let's take a moment to delve into that. This is just a small detail but it's worth discussing because this is what government looks like on the outside—hoo, \$72 million—and here is what it looks like on the inside: \$72 million is over a decade. That's \$7.2 million a year for those who pay for a driving test, but the cost is staying the same, so no one is actually saving anything. Right now, the test is \$90—correct me if I'm wrong, but that's the number I understand it to be. If the government were hypothetically considering an increase to \$100, then one person would not have to spend an additional 10 whole dollars.

0940

Now, imagine 720,000 people will pay for a test this year—that's \$7.2 million—and then, times the 10 years, that's your \$72 million. Imagine that rate over 10 years, and that's how the government gets to \$72 million worth of savings that might be 10 bucks per person, once in 10 years.

However, this government is magnanimously choosing not to implement an increase. They could've pretended or threatened to increase it to \$1,000. Imagine the hypothetical, magical savings that we could extrapolate over a decade or extrapolate over a century. It would just be marvellous—maybe buy back the 407. But this government isn't actually increasing the rates, so whatever imagined savings they're talking about is based on some hypothetical, potential increase they've chosen not to levy against drivers.

Also, how many times do you take a driving test, Speaker? That's not a personal question; you don't have to answer. I'm sure you're a great driver, I don't know. What if the government, as I said, were pretending that they were going to increase that cost to \$1,000 per test over 10 years? That's the sticker that is in the window for this bill. Anyway, it's not a real thing.

But what is a real thing is the Auditor General's 2023 value-for-money audit regarding driver training and examination: "The Ministry of Transportation ... is responsible

for protecting the public by restricting the privilege of driving to those who demonstrate they have the necessarily knowledge, skills and experience to drive safely....

"A 10-year contract with a service provider to deliver driver examination services ended in 2023. The ministry intended to perform an extensive evaluation of service delivery options."

This is from the Office of the Auditor General, regarding their value-for-money audit. Fun fact: That 10-year contract that the government was committed to reviewing got extended without the extensive review.

Why this matters, according to the Auditor General: "Ensuring that novice drivers acquire effective training and pass the ministry road test requirements before receiving a driver's licence is a crucial step in keeping Ontario's roads safe."

They highlight a number of very concerning challenges faced in the sector. They have outlined that: "The ministry allows novice drivers who complete the optional beginner driver education program to choose to shorten their 12-month wait period for the city road test by up to four months."

They found that people "who shortened their wait period had collision rates that were on average 30% higher than drivers who completed the program but did not shorten their wait period," and that 11 out of 14 driving schools that were sampled "allowed the students to shorten, or even abandon, their in-car training but still issued their students beginner driver education certificates."

What? How many people in this room are comfortable with that, that people who don't do the in-car training are still issued their beginner driver education certificates? Well, that was highlighted in the value for money and this government is ignoring that. There's a chance in this bill, as we're talking about driver tests and training, to do something, to actually address some of what has been highlighted in the Auditor General's report. It makes for interesting reading. For the folks at home: driver training and examination, 2023 value-for-money audit—look it up.

I will share here, from the driving instructors' alliance, they have written to "urgently request your assistance in raising critical questions concerning the government's failure to implement the Auditor General of Ontario's recommendation on driver training and examination. This issue is of significant public safety concern and immediate action is essential to protect all Ontarians on our roads."

Their recommendations and their concerns—again, these are driving instructors, the people who teach folks how to drive safely on our roads who then go to the private testing centre, which is run by Serco, which I'll talk about, and they get a shortened version of the test, which I will talk about, where they are not held to the same standards that probably many of the folks in this room were because things have changed. They as instructors, who see it up close up and personally, are sounding the alarm. That should be enough for anyone in this room to pay attention.

They have highlighted: "Novice drivers from urban areas who take their road tests at rural or suburban centres are involved in collisions at rates 16% to 27% higher than

those tested in urban settings. For example, drivers from Brampton who tested outside the city had a collision rate 22% higher ... than those who took their test within the city. Could you inquire why the government has not monitored this dangerous trend and what immediate steps it will take to address these safety implications?" Well, the answer is that the government has not addressed them.

Their next question: "To address a COVID-19 road test backlog, the ministry reduced G (highway) test requirements. These lowered standards remain almost two years later, without any proper evaluation of the safety impacts. Could you ask the government why the full G test requirements have not been reinstated to ensure road safety, and why changes were made without a thorough safety review?" That was to clear the backlog, folks, and we'll talk more about that.

They've also said, "The ministry awarded a new contract to Plenary/Serco without a competitive process, despite years of performance issues and disputes over penalties. Furthermore, the ministry paid over \$19.2 million to extend operating hours and cover costs that should have been the service provider's responsibility. Could you ask the government why a non-competitive contract was awarded under these circumstances, and why the ministry has borne costs that should have been the responsibility of the service provider?" I could ask.

They also flagged: "Drivers with multiple suspensions have a fatal collision rate six times higher than the general driver population. Yet only 5% of these high-risk drivers completed retraining in 2022. Will the government implement mandatory retraining for drivers with repeat suspensions, and what other measures will be taken to address this alarming safety risk?" Well, the answer, Speaker, appears to be no.

So, as they have said, "These are not just policy gaps; they are pressing road safety issues that affect all drivers in Ontario. I urge you to hold the government accountable and ensure these concerns are addressed urgently in the interest of public safety." That is from the driving instructors' alliance.

Speaker, I had met with the Ontario Driving Instructors Association, a different group. These are associations of driving instructors who are so concerned about what they are seeing that they are banding together and forming their own associations.

That shortened process that we talked about is interesting because Serco runs this. It's a private company that does the road tests. They have doubled their revenue. It's still \$90 for that test because the government, as we've talked about, has decided not to increase the fees and they are pretending that that is a saving. So it's still 90 bucks, but it's more business for Serco because the revenue has gone up. They can do now two 30-minute tests in an hour or however long it is. They can do twice as many tests; they are doubling their money. The government isn't increasing the fees for people, but Serco, the private company, is still doing the reduced, shortened tests and making bank. That's alarming.

They also highlighted that there are people teaching illegally in their own private cars; that they see insurance fraud on a regular basis; that they have safety concerns because to be a licensed driving instructor, you have to pass a vulnerable sector check, and there are a lot of folks who are running after-hour programs who are skipping that step. It shouldn't be that hard to get a vulnerable sector check. It isn't hard for the people who have done it. It might be hard for someone who should not be alone in a vehicle with young people, ostensibly teaching them how to drive. That is something that has been flagged for this government, and that is not a protection that we see in this bill.

Moving on to another part of schedule 4, the Highway Traffic Act, this is where we've seen a lot of interest in the broader community. This section of the bill requires prescribed municipalities to obtain ministry approval to install a bike lane if the bike lane would reduce the number of lanes available for motor vehicle traffic: "The ministry may consider whether" the bike lane "would unduly diminish the orderly movement of motor vehicle traffic." The ministry may require prescribed municipalities to provide prescribed traffic information relating to an existing bike lane.

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For a government that claims to be all about cutting red tape, it makes no sense for the government to place new regulatory burdens on municipalities who are in a much better position than the MTO, or this Premier, to make decisions about local transportation matters—in this case about bike lanes. The province's goal should be to improve overall traffic, not just motor vehicle traffic. Bikes take up less space on the road, and if we can make cycling a safe and convenient choice for people of different ages and abilities, it will get cars off the road and improve overall traffic. But, as written, this bill could ban even well-used bike lanes because bike traffic is not considered. The only thing that counts in this bill is motor vehicle traffic.

This legislation is not about improving traffic. It seeks to pick a culture war for political purposes that puts the lives and safety of vulnerable road users at risk, including kids, people who can't afford a car and anyone who uses those bike lanes. It is about a government dictating that people who choose to get around by bike are worth less than those who choose to drive a car. Bike lanes already face enormous political barriers and the bike lanes installed on municipal roads represent only a tiny fraction of the total road space dedicated to motor vehicles. It is ridiculous to suggest that municipalities are casually installing bike lanes everywhere without a thought. Reducing bike lanes and increasing mayhem is what we're doing with this bill. The Premier and minister are taking on bike lanes and wanting a culture war with an election on the horizon. They seem intent on picking this fight that they think will be popular. But it isn't popular with everyone and for very real and rational reasons. Municipalities know how to plan, and plan what they know—their communities. I would have to ask why municipalities are having their decisions overruled.

Speaker, there are a lot of people interested in this bike lane conversation. Here's an article from the Toronto Star, "Doug Ford's Bill to Limit New Bike Lanes Will Also 'Review' Existing Ones."

As written, under sweeping new legislation "the Highway Traffic Act is being amended to say 'the Ministry may review existing bicycle lanes' and municipalities must receive provincial approval before installing new lanes.... The province would cover any costs incurred by municipalities to remove bike lanes."

And also, "When considering whether to approve the design for the construction of a bicycle lane, the ministry may consider whether it would unduly diminish the orderly movement of motor vehicle traffic," the bill states."

"Whether it would unduly diminish the orderly movement of motor vehicle traffic"—as I have mentioned this is not about overall traffic; this is strictly about motor vehicles.

The Association of Municipalities of Ontario has criticized this as a "significant overreach into municipal jurisdiction."

"Toronto mayor Olivia Chow has also pushed back at the usurping of municipal authority." It reads that "ripping up our roads (to remove bike lanes) will make congestion worse." She also has said that "the province should tackle gridlock by completing the delayed Finch West and Eglinton LRTs." Yeah, imagine that.

The Association of Municipalities of Ontario, or AMO, are well-known to all of us as legislators in this room, and many of the members in this House have been well-connected to AMO and also have been leaders in their own home municipalities. I'm sharing this press release: "Province to Introduce Legislation Governing Bicycle Lanes."

"According to the government news release, 'municipalities would be required to demonstrate that the proposed bike lanes won't have a negative impact on vehicle traffic.'"

As AMO has said, "Bicycle lanes are an essential element of urban transportation planning and road safety. Requiring provincial approval would be a significant overreach into municipal jurisdiction. Based on local knowledge and community input, municipalities develop transportation plans that balance traffic flow with planning priorities like active transportation, multimodal transportation, and environmental and health protection. AMO is not aware of any consultation with municipalities regarding bicycle lanes or of the evidence the province considered in its decision.

"It is unclear how the Ministry of Transportation will be in a better position than municipalities to make decisions about local transportation matters. Rather than micromanaging bike lanes, the Ministry of Transportation could focus on accelerating its own approval processes to help support new housing."

AMO goes on to say: "There have been recent examples of unintended consequences when the province has tried to take over local decision-making. We urge the province to respect local decision-making when considering trans-

portation improvements and not repeat its mistakes of the past."

Those are clear words. I'm going to paraphrase, and what I read was that AMO is saying, "Stay in your lane and leave municipal planning decisions to municipal planners." Again, this is a government that is determined to move forward at all costs. When AMO says that they are unaware of the evidence or the consultation process, that would suggest to anyone paying attention that the government is skipping steps and just doing whatever they think will be popular instead of what, indeed, is needed.

This is from an article, "'They're Coming Out:'—the Premier—"Says He Will Remove Bike Lanes from Three Toronto Streets."

This article says: "As he left a Progressive Conservative caucus meeting at Queen's Park on Tuesday, Premier Doug Ford told Global News his government has already identified three routes to be targeted for removal. Asked whether the government wanted certain criteria to be met before the removal of those lanes, the Premier said: 'No.'

"The Premier suggested the decision was a done deal.

"They're coming out,' he told Global News.

"The comments appear to presuppose the outcome of a process that's still being developed at Queen's Park. The legislation ... still has to be debated and reviewed by a parliamentary committee before becoming law."

The Premier, as reported here, has already told us what's happening. I guess it doesn't matter what we do in this room; the Premier has got bike lanes on his Christmas list.

"Separately, the Minister of Transportation has emphasized that the decision over what lanes would move ahead and which would be removed, would be decided through a rigorous process of regulations."

Left hand, right hand, guys. The Minister of Transportation's office has said regulations will be "completed over the coming months" and that they will include an outline of "data and submission requirements, timelines, approval criteria and information-sharing details."

The minister's office has said there's going to be a process and approval criteria, timelines, all of that, and the Premier has said, "No."

I will never, ever, ever, ever be a member of this particular government, and I am not unhappy about that. But I have to wonder what some of the members think, as they walk through the halls as government members, knowing that they've got ministers and the Premier saying one thing, saying another, maybe at odds or just not communicating. It is quite interesting, because it looks like chaos from the outside, eh? I don't know what it's like being on the inside. When we are government, we will have a different kind of process, I'm sure.

Continuing on about the bike lanes, people care about getting around their communities safely. They care about well-planned, safe infrastructure.

I have a letter here from Matt Alexander, who has written, "Please do not let this government get away with legislating restrictions on bike lanes. I know their new

proposal is mainly a distraction ... but if they go through with this people will die....

“Their proposal is government overreach. It’s anti-democratic. It rejects the authority of local municipal governments to make decisions for their own constituents, and it represents red tape, which this government claims to be against.”

Matt goes on to say, “Most people in Ontario have no issue with bike lanes, and most people in Ontario want to feel okay about their children or parents riding a bike.

“I grew up in Oshawa and I loved riding my bike in my neighbourhood as a kid, but I never felt safe riding a bike to go anywhere as a teenager because we didn’t have any bike lanes.”

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This Premier’s “anti-bike lane bill isn’t just about punishing Toronto, it will also punish people in Oshawa who want to get around without their car. You know how jammed up the roads are The only solution to those kinds of traffic jams is giving people a viable alternative to driving.

“Bike lanes provide that alternative. I really hope you will stand up and defend municipalities that want to give people an alternative to driving so that the people who really need to drive have fewer drivers clogging up the roads.

“Please do not let them get away with this. They will get people killed.”

That’s from Matt Alexander, a constituent in Oshawa. There are a lot of folks paying attention to this bike lane attack. It doesn’t make sense. It’s attacking municipalities’ right to plan for their communities.

At the end of last week, there were hundreds of people out on the lawn, protesting this bill, folks who support bike lanes. And not everyone out there was a bicycle rider. There were a lot of folks that have wheelchairs, have different devices, that are pedestrians—people who use bike lanes so that they are protected from the cars, so that they can get around and not be part of that traffic jam.

Here’s a letter from Henry Zongaro, who is writing as a cyclist, and he has said:

“Dear Minister ... I felt compelled to reach out to you regarding your opinion piece, ‘Bike Lanes Only Make Sense in the Right Places’ ... I have to agree that bike lanes only make sense in the right places. However, I disagree with your opinion that they only belong on quieter streets and neighbourhoods.

“As an example, I live near Bayview and Eglinton in the riding of Don Valley West and work in Markham. I would love to be able to ride to work, but instead I use public transit. The great difficulty in making that trip by bicycle is getting past major highways, like the 401, 404 and 407....

“The way neighbourhood streets are laid out in many parts of the Toronto area makes it very difficult to navigate them for longer distance travel that cuts across several neighbourhoods. The only straightforward solution is to make accommodations for bicycles on major streets. That will encourage more people to take advantage of those

lanes, more often, getting more of them out of their cars, even if it’s only for eight or nine months per year. Placing bicycle lanes on quiet streets and neighbourhoods will ensure they will only be used for leisure riding, which is mostly how those streets are already used.

“Rather than imposing a one-size-fits-all, top-down solution that keeps commuters in their cars, I feel you should leave it to municipalities to decide where bike lanes make the most sense. They are closer to their communities and are better placed to determine where bike lanes should be placed.

“Regards,

“Henry Zongaro.”

I’m pretty sure all of the government members—well, all members in this House—are getting letters like that on this bill.

Speaker, there’s an organization called Friends and Families for Safe Streets. Jess Spieker has been to the Legislature on various occasions to speak about vulnerable roads users. My Bill 15—she has spoken about different initiatives that would keep people safe and protected, and she had some thoughts on this bill. I won’t share them all, but I know she’d be very happy to share them with each individual member who is curious.

As Jess had said, “This will only serve to get innocent people killed. Ripping out bike lanes will not improve overall car congestion since they’re on only 4% of Toronto’s streets....

“This is a brutal slap in the face to every family whose loved one was killed in a car crash and to every survivor of a car crash.”

She has asked, doesn’t the ministry “have to produce documentation ‘proving’ that bike lanes cause car congestion? That’s impossible, because car congestion is caused by too many cars and bike lanes get people out of cars.”

“No restriction on what type of street this evaluation would apply to ... No reason to think that this government will approve a single piece of future cycling infrastructure.” They have such a hate on bike lanes, there’s certainly no guarantees that that won’t continue.

And as she has said, “The Minister of Transportation and his office staff can’t possibly have the capacity to actually do these reviews, both of applications” for new bike lanes “and of existing infrastructure. They can’t get anything done (e.g., Eglinton Crosstown, literally every LRT project everywhere is delayed, highways are riddled with potholes, wasteful 401 widening already just as clogged with cars as it was before, GO service is not frequent enough to be useful for most people, what happened to the all-day Kitchener-Toronto GO service? TTC is starved for operational funding and needs new trains, no actual use case or justification for any of those new highways to enable the ... greenbelt giveaway to developers, on and on and on) so why do they think they have time for this? Have they been sitting on their hands the last six years?”

Jess has lots of thoughts on this, and understandably.

The Premier has been calling for data. Well, it exists, right? They are making things up about their bike lane claims—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): I'm sorry to interrupt the member. I'm going to ask the member to withdraw her comment.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I will withdraw my comment.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Thank you. You may continue.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Thank you.

There are many examples of bike lanes that ensure vulnerable road users are protected while they travel our roads, whether on a wheelchair, pedestrian, cyclist. The Runnymede-to-Shaw segment of the Bloor bike lane is one of Toronto's busiest. It's used by thousands of people every day. I would like to know if the ministry will provide the evidence—actual evidence, not anecdotes—to back up its claims that bike lanes are impeding overall traffic. Why does this bill focus only on motor vehicle traffic and not overall traffic? As written, this bill would ban even well-used bike lanes because bike traffic is not considered.

This bill should be about safety first, especially for vulnerable road users, but despite everything we have heard about safe roads in Ontario, we aren't doing enough to make sure people can be safe on their travels.

The MPP from Ottawa Centre rode his bike from Ottawa to Toronto. He stopped along the way in Oshawa. We heard from folks about near misses; the importance of well-planned infrastructure; injury, death and loss of loved ones. We heard the need for vulnerable road user legislation to keep folks that use our roads safe.

Ben Spurr made a comment on social media that is worth discussing: "Provincial legislation will require cities to demonstrate that bike lanes that remove car lanes won't have an adverse impact on vehicle traffic. The point of the Parkside bike lanes is to slow car traffic. There have been almost 1,500 crashes there in 10 years, and 3 deaths."

Those bike lanes are actually part of traffic calming, which is planned to keep people safe. This bill suggests anything that impedes motor vehicle traffic flow is potentially on the chopping block. Well, these bike lanes are to keep people safe and are meant to slow traffic. Anyway, it's just such limited understanding.

Sometimes bike lanes are installed as traffic calming measures to increase safety. Everyone who uses our roads or works on our roads without the protections of a steel cage should be considered to be vulnerable. Traffic cops, pedestrians, flagmen on construction sites, roadside construction workers, cyclists, bikers, paramedics at a collision, tow truck operators—lots of people find themselves on their roads outside of vehicles, and ensuring they are factored into plans and legislation should not be too much to ask.

Speaker, it is amazing how one can go through an hour in what feels like 20 minutes. I think that the bike lanes conversation is going to be had with enthusiasm in this room. All of us have very full inboxes right now because of people who are quite concerned about this govern-

ment's overreach into the municipalities' planning abilities when it comes to bike lanes.

As the critic, I'm going to take a moment and also mention that under schedule 1 of this bill, the Building Broadband Faster Act, this government already has quite extraordinary power to expropriate property and conduct site inspections. I'm not convinced that this part of the bill is what is in the way of the government getting broadband spending out the door. Everyone needs high-speed Internet in this day and age.

This year, the government is budgeting \$1.3 billion for broadband infrastructure. That's a big number, eh? However, this government has failed to spend the vast majority of its broadband infrastructure budget for as long as this program has existed. Last year, the ministry budgeted \$663 million for broadband but only spent \$93 million. The year before that, the ministry budget was \$693 million for broadband but only spent \$70 million. The year before that, the ministry budget was \$406 million, but only spent \$15 million.

Broadband has been a priority for New Democrats because it matters to all Ontarians. We've tried to include words like "rural, northern and First Nations communities." We've tried to include them as priorities in government legislation to make it clear that they should not be left behind, but all of those amendments have always been defeated.

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Broadband is an essential service. We have to remember that people deserve it. And it's not going to happen if this government doesn't spend to get broadband out the door.

This bill, Reducing Gridlock, Saving You Time, doesn't reduce gridlock and isn't saving us time. We need a government to actually plan things well for the improvement of Ontario. This bill is not getting us there.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): It is now time for questions.

Hon. Todd J. McCarthy: My question to the member for Oshawa concerns her earlier comments on Bill 212 and the environmental assessment reference.

As acting or alternate Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks, I wanted to ask the member for Oshawa: Does the member understand that we've had, since 2007, dozens of studies and reports on the 413 and that this government is being guided right now by those studies and reports, in addition to the accelerated environmental assessment process? That is because—does the member understand this—we believe you can do both. You can be good stewards of the environment while building the Ontario of tomorrow. Does the member understand that that is the intent behind this bill?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I'm going to share from the Environmental Defence's letter to Minister Guilbeault as they are requesting an impact assessment. They said, "The 413 project is now ... proposed to be exempted from the provincial EA process and would entail 'early works,' which would include bridge crossings that would impact values under federal jurisdiction."

Speaker, this government does not have a good track record on environmental protections. Certainly with this pet project there is no exception.

“Because of the proposed exemption ... it appears that there would never be a final report on the environmental impacts of the project carried out by Ontario prior to construction of early works and that a final report may never be required to assess fish habitat, species at risk and migratory bird impacts. Mitigation measures have not been proposed for federal effects.

“There has been no detailed public assessment of the potential impacts on species at risk, fish or fish habitat or migratory birds for the project along the preferred route.”

Certainly, we have not seen any evidence of environmental protection or priorities.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Next question?

MPP Jamie West: Thank you to the member for Oshawa for her debate. She spoke at length about how there is a bit of a culture war about bike lanes and getting people frustrated with bike lanes.

When we talk about gridlock, what a lot of people see, especially when I drive to northern Ontario, is the incredible gridlock along the 401. She had mentioned the Ontario NDP's opposition day motion to allow transport trucks to go onto the 407, thereby freeing up the 401. If she'd like to expand on what that would do, what it would accomplish; also, if she could make a comment on how many bike lanes are on the 401, slowing down traffic on the 401.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Certainly there aren't any bike lanes slowing down traffic on the 401. Not to be too flip about this, but with their 401-nel: underground, subterranean tunnel plan, I wonder if their plan is—maybe they can make the top level be all bike lanes. I have no idea what they are doing. I don't think they do either.

Listen, the 407 is underutilized. We can talk about the time that the plane landed and whatnot, but on any given day it is underutilized. We could be differently approaching this. We could be problem solving, but the government is like, “Shh, don't use the word '407.' We've made promises about the 413.”

This is something that could help people today and tomorrow: to redirect trucks from the 401 to the 407 by removing the tolls. Everyone thinks this is a good idea. I would guess that the government members also think it's a good idea, but they're not saying anything because right now the only thing they're allowed to talk about, it would appear, is the 413.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): It is now time for members' statements.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

YWCA WEEK WITHOUT VIOLENCE

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: On Saturday, the YWCA Canada's annual Week Without Violence campaign against intimate partner and gender-based violence came to a close.

I had the privilege of speaking at a panel event that YWCA Niagara hosted, where we heard from local service providers and experts in the field. Eye-opening statements were made and horrifying statistics were shared.

Feeling called to take action, I rise today to recognize Elisabeth Zimmermann from the YWCA Niagara Region, Nicole Regehr from Gillian's Place, Jennifer Gauthier from Birchway Niagara, Nyarayi Kapisavanhu from TOES Niagara and Mary Ellen Simon from Niagara Regional Native Centre for their leadership and commitment to providing a safe haven for women and gender-diverse people across the Niagara region.

From strengthening enforcement to infusing much-needed funding into our legal aid system to increasing social supports and focusing on funding court services, we need effective solutions that focus on prevention rather than dealing with the consequences of violence after it has been perpetuated. We need culturally sensitive supports that put racialized Indigenous women and gender-diverse individuals first. We need to invest in housing, social supports and education.

Let's be clear: Prevention is better than cure. It's not about creating the next innovative project, it's about ensuring the essential supports are strong. Intimate partner and gender-based violence is everyone's problem. Acknowledging the problem exists is the first step in saving lives.

BROCK UNIVERSITY

Ms. Natalie Pierre: Good morning, everyone. At the end of the summer, I had the pleasure of touring the new Brock University campus that is currently being built in my riding of Burlington. I was greeted by Dr. Mary-Louise Vanderlee, the dean for the faculty of education. Dr. Vanderlee and other faculty members have been recognized as contributing to one of the highest institutes of education in the country. With almost 28,000 alumni, Brock University has been actively training educators to serve the next generation.

I was happy to see the progress of the new Brock campus that will play a crucial role in shaping future generations of educators, equipping them with the tools they need to inspire and lead in diverse and dynamic learning environments. The new campus is not just a new building, it's an example of the advancement of educational excellence and innovation.

As the only university in the GTA west corridor offering teacher education programming, I'm excited for the opportunities this new space will provide for students, faculty and the broader community.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Recently, children in a grade 6 French immersion class at Withrow school in my riding were preparing to meet the 20th teacher assigned to their class since the school year began. The school has not been able to provide a permanent teacher for this class this school year. As you can imagine, the students are demoralized and the parents are completely frustrated.

This is a not a new problem or an isolated problem in our public schools. In the spring, I raised a similar issue faced by students at Earl Grey school in my riding to the Minister of Education. No one in this room will be surprised to learn that the response was superficial and led to no action that would help the students.

As one parent put it to me, “Underfunding and removal of supports in the classrooms mean that teachers are leaving the profession, burning out or choosing not to enter teaching at all.” Parents, where they can afford it, are paying for after-school tutoring to try and get an education for their children.

I ask the Minister of Education to provide the funding and support that our schools need to provide the education that our children deserve.

MOUNT FOREST CHAMBER
OF COMMERCE AWARDS

Mr. Matthew Rae: It’s my honour to rise today to recognize two outstanding individuals from my riding of Perth–Wellington.

Recently, I had the pleasure of attending the Mount Forest Chamber of Commerce awards, where we recognized the Mount Forest Citizen of the Year, Crystal Steffler. Crystal may not have grown up in Mount Forest, but got involved in the community shortly after making her new home there. She’s an outstanding active member of the Lions Club, volunteers with the Mount Forest Firework Festival and is a personal support worker. In addition, she founded an initiative called the Child Cancer Blanket project, which involves community members making blankets or quilts and donating them to children’s hospitals across Ontario. As one of her nominators put it: “Crystal—she’s always there.”

The second individual I want to recognize is a bright young man named John Ray—no relation, Speaker. John was awarded the youth citizen of the year award. He can be found on Saturdays during the summer at the Wellington North Farmers’ Market selling fresh produce from his family’s farm.

1020

Both John and Crystal have a passion for volunteering and giving back to the community they love.

Congratulations, John and Crystal, and thank you for all that you do for Mount Forest.

PROPOSED HOSPITAL MERGER

Ms. Catherine Fife: There’s a growing level of excitement in the region of Waterloo, especially on the 100th anniversary of St. Mary’s General Hospital.

Grand River Hospital and St. Mary’s General Hospital have put forward a plan to merge and bring the much-needed care to the region. This merger will help meet the needs of one of the fastest-growing regions in the province and take pressure off an already underserved population. We recognize, as a community, that this is a needed hospital, and it will not only meet the health care needs but also the economic needs of our community.

Building on their 40 years of strong partnership, Grand River and St. Mary’s will be redeveloping two existing sites and opening a new state-of-the-art hospital site in Waterloo region by 2034. This new site will be built on the campus of the University of Waterloo David Johnston Research + Technology Park. It is an ambitious plan that needs to be resourced. Working so closely with the University of Waterloo will also help spur innovation, attract talent and support the continued economic growth, prosperity and, most importantly, the health of the people of Waterloo.

I am sure that St. Mary’s General Hospital and Grand River Hospital will continue to live by their belief that it is an honour to care for the sick, as they move forward and continue to deliver outstanding health care for the people of Waterloo region.

I want to emphasize that Waterloo region is truly building the future of care together.

AYR CURLING CLUB

Mr. Brian Riddell: Mr. Speaker, the Ayr Curling Club just celebrated 175 years on October 5—that’s longer than Canada has been around.

The Ayr Curling Club has provided a safe space for people of all ages to be healthy and active while enjoying a sport they love—and those stones are pretty heavy.

The curling club has gone above and beyond what is expected of a recreational facility. Outside of curling, they have provided a space for community groups and businesses to meet, and hosted food distribution for those experiencing homelessness.

I was very pleased to see our government award a \$38,500 grant through the Ontario Trillium Foundation. Funding is to be used for some much-needed roof repairs and a new ice scraper.

I want to say, again, a very happy belated 175th anniversary to Ayr Curling Club as they continue to grow for another, probably, couple of hundred years.

LANDLORD AND TENANT BOARD

Mr. Vincent Ke: Many of my constituents come to my office distressed because their tenants have been living rent-free and utility-free for long periods of time. Meanwhile, small landlords in my constituency are struggling

with mortgage payments and fear losing their lifelong investments.

Last year, 20% of tenants in Toronto were in rent arrears. Some of them are exploiting the processing delays at the tribunal. These bad actors are taking advantage of the system without facing any consequences.

The majority of tenants honour their lease agreements. However, the professional tenants are committing theft. They are not only stealing from landlords but are also undermining the rule of law and eroding trust in the system. If we allow this bad behaviour to continue unchecked, we encourage its recurrence.

Speaker, I was encouraged to hear the Premier mention potential reforms to the Landlord and Tenant Board, in collaboration with the Attorney General. I hope the upcoming reform could help restore confidence among small landlords and law-abiding tenants, and rebuild a healthy rental market.

ÉVÉNEMENTS DIVERS À GLENGARRY– PRESCOTT–RUSSELL

M. Stéphane Sarrazin: Aujourd'hui, nous débutons la deuxième semaine du retour en Chambre ici à Queen's Park. Comme on pourrait dire, on revient dans la routine.

Beaucoup de travail nous attend. Nous travaillerons sur beaucoup de différents dossiers et de projets de loi d'ici la période des fêtes.

Hier, lors de mon voyage en train de Cornwall à Toronto, je regardais mon calendrier en me demandant qu'est-ce que j'avais fait pour ne pas avoir vu le temps passer lors des 18 semaines que nous étions dans la circonscription. Comme le voyage en train est d'une durée de quatre heures, et ce, deux fois par semaine, c'est souvent une opportunité pour moi de réviser les dossiers et de passer à travers beaucoup de documentation.

En regardant mon calendrier, j'ai conclu que j'avais pris part à 145 réunions, 66 événements communautaires, 14 annonces de subventions, neuf entrevues, huit conférences, et ce, depuis juin. C'est sans compter plusieurs discussions que j'ai eues avec les gens des quatre coins de ma circonscription lorsque je m'arrêtais pour faire des emplettes dans des commerces locaux ou lorsque j'arrêtais pour faire le plein dans les stations d'essence.

J'ai vraiment apprécié les belles discussions que j'ai eues avec les gens de ma circonscription et j'ai bien hâte de rencontrer plusieurs centaines d'entre eux à l'Expo Hawkesbury qui aura lieu du 9 au 10 novembre prochain au Complexe sportif Robert Hartley. Les événements comme l'Expo sont vraiment une excellente opportunité pour moi et mon équipe d'expliquer ce que notre gouvernement fait pour améliorer le sort des Ontariens, et de pouvoir répondre à leurs questions et éclaircir certains dossiers qui ont un impact sur leurs vies de tous les jours.

Moi et mon équipe avons bien hâte de rencontrer les gens de Glengarry–Prescott–Russell à Hawkesbury le 9 et 10 novembre prochain.

RIDING OF SIMCOE–GREY

Mr. Brian Saunderson: It is my pleasure to rise this morning to speak about the critical and unprecedented investments our government is making to ensure that the residents of Simcoe–Grey have a bright and sustainable future.

It is no secret that my riding of Simcoe–Grey is one of the fastest-growing ridings in our province as the release valve for growth pressures in the GTA.

Starting in July, I announced the investment of \$120 million to build three much-needed new schools in Wasaga Beach and Essa township, as well as an addition to a high school in Tottenham. These new schools will ensure our students have access to state-of-the-art facilities in their own neighbourhoods.

This September, I announced \$95 million of direct investment through the Housing-Enabling Water Systems Fund, starting with \$25.4 million to the town of Blue Mountains for waste water infrastructure to unlock over 2,000 new housing units. The next week, I announced \$69.99 million in investment in Collingwood to expand the water treatment plant, a joint project with the town to New Tecumseth that will unlock 24,000 new housing units.

In August, Speaker, I was at the Stevenson Memorial Hospital in New Tecumseth to announce its capital expansion project is entering the tender process with a commitment of \$350 million for this much-needed project. Shovels are expected to be in the ground by late 2025.

Speaker, these investments, totalling \$565 million, are tangible proof of our government's commitment to investing in critical projects to build our communities and improve the lives of our residents for generations to come. And, Speaker, there's more to come.

STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

Mr. Ric Bresee: As MPPs, we all have an opportunity to engage with a lot of different people, but some of these opportunities really stand out as positive signs for the future.

Recently, I had the wonderful opportunity to engage with some of my local secondary school students. At North Hastings High School in Bancroft, I spent time with the students in Mrs. Waterbury's period 2 and period 4 civics classes.

And this last week, for Local Government Week, I was joined at NDSS by Limestone school board trustee Tiffany Lloyd and both the mayor and deputy mayor of Greater Napanee as we presented to students in three different classes, led by Ms. Klaassen, Ms. Carmichael and Mr. Heaton.

Speaker, it was a distinct pleasure to share insights on how different levels of government work and how students can get involved now, even if they're too young to vote. We had great discussions and some insightful questions about local issues, health care, homelessness, transportation and so much more.

As a side note, I have done a lot of these types of classes before and it was awesome to have the students fully engaged with us and not on their smart phones.

Overall, the level of intelligent questions and, in some cases, challenge to myself and my municipal colleagues clearly demonstrates that the next generation of voters and leaders are prepared to handle all of the challenges they face. If these kids are a representative sample, our future is very bright indeed.

1030

To the students at NDSS and NHHS, I say thank you very much.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Hon. David Piccini: It gives me great pleasure to welcome some guests to the Legislature today, instrumental in our latest Working for Workers bill: from the Ontario Professional Fire Fighters Association, Greg Horton and Gavin Jacklyn, along with rock star Meaghan Martin, who worked in our office on this.

I'm also very pleased to welcome, from my riding, Mike Robinson, fire chief from Hamilton township; Ric Ash, retired firefighter from Hamilton township; Pete Fisher from Today's Northumberland; and Jeff Briggs from the Cobourg fire service. They are the reason we do all this, Speaker, and I'd like to welcome them warmly to the Legislature today. Welcome.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: It gives me very great pleasure this morning to be able to welcome my sister, Bethany Pasma, to the Legislature—a resident of Oxford, so it's nice for us to be able to meet in the middle. Thanks for coming to spend time with me today, Beth.

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: Today, I would like to welcome our great friends Heather Kenny, Katrina Dollano, Ron Ross and Mark Holmes from Traditional Chinese Medicine Ontario. Thank you for being here today.

MPP Jill Andrew: It's my great pleasure to introduce Mischka Crichton, the chief executive officer of the Toronto Caribbean Carnival, as well as—I don't see them; maybe they're coming in—Adrian Charles, the general manager of the Toronto Caribbean Carnival, to your House. Welcome, and thank you for all the wonderful work you've been doing since 1967.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: I know that there's a very large group of students who are making their way through the security protocol. They're here for a tour. They are three classrooms, grade 4 and 5, of Gabrielle-Roy elementary school from the great riding of Toronto Centre.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I see in the visitors' gallery we have Charlie the chaplain. Welcome to Queen's Park, Charlie Lyons.

Mr. Chris Glover: I'd like to add my welcome to Mischka Crichton, the CEO of Toronto Caribbean Carnival, as well as Adrian Charles, the general manager. Welcome to your House.

MPP Jill Andrew: I'd also like to welcome Charlie the chaplain to the House. Thank you for your care and support of all of us members in this House.

QUESTION PERIOD

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Ms. Marit Stiles: Good morning, Speaker. This question is for the Premier. If there's one thing that I hear all across this province, from Timmins to Windsor to Ottawa, it's the need for mental health care and addiction services. I hear it from young people who are struggling with anxiety and depression in rates higher than we've ever seen. I hear it from parents who are just desperate and would do anything for their children, but wait-lists are months, even years long for mental health services. Children and youth are waiting up to two years—two years, Speaker—to get the care that they need. Things can change a lot over two years. Kids cannot wait.

Does the Premier agree that everyone deserves access to publicly funded, publicly delivered mental health services?

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

Ms. Natalie Pierre: It's a pleasure to have the opportunity to talk about our government's record on mental health. When we took office in 2018, Ontario's system of care for people with mental health and addiction challenges was broken, because the previous government, supported by the NDP, never made it a priority. We, on the other hand, have developed and implemented the province's first long-term strategy for improving mental health and addictions care through the Roadmap to Wellness.

Since then, we've increased annual funding for mental health and addictions by over \$800 million, introducing new programs like the structured psychotherapy program, which provides free cognitive behavioural therapy for adults struggling with anxiety and depression.

Mr. Speaker, we are the only government in this province's history that has ever treated mental health with the seriousness it deserves, and we are proud of our record of expanding services and helping vulnerable people get the care they need.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: That's embarrassing. That's an embarrassing response.

The number of children and youth on mental health wait-lists has more than doubled under this government's time from 12,000 to 30,000 children on those waiting lists. That is on this government.

It is getting worse every day, Speaker, but I want to talk about a call that was made by Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler back in 2016. Nishnawbe Aski Nation asked the government to declare public health a state of emergency. And I

remember when Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler called an emergency meeting because young people are dying by suicide in their communities. No one from this government even showed up.

Does the Premier agree that delivering mental health care, like counselling, like psychotherapy, at no cost to patients in Ontario is the government's responsibility?

Interjections.

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

To respond, the member for Burlington.

Miss Monique Taylor: Might want to change your notes over there.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order. The member for Burlington has the floor.

Ms. Natalie Pierre: We won't take lessons from the NDP or the Liberals about running an effective mental health system, because they wouldn't know anything about it.

We are the ones who designed the Roadmap for Wellness. We are the ones who created the Ontario Structured Psychotherapy Program. We are the ones who began collecting data so we can make evidence-based decisions—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

Ms. Natalie Pierre: —and we are the ones who created the first cabinet portfolio in Ontario's history specifically for mental health and addictions.

Mr. Speaker, our government has made unprecedented investments in mental health. We've created 60 mobile crisis response teams. We've opened mobile mental health clinics and funded 32 youth mental health clinics across the province, including in rural and remote communities, so our young people can access the supports they need.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: Speaker, health care does not end here at the neck, right? Mental health care is health care. If people in Ontario aren't able to access it free of cost, that is a problem, and it is a failure of this government and their responsibility to deliver the basics.

When 2.5 million people don't have a family doctor, Ontarians are that much further from accessing publicly funded mental health care supports. There is a simple solution: Fund the community mental health sector and connect thousands more Ontarians to mental health services in their communities.

1040

So back to the Premier: Will the Premier support the official opposition's motion this afternoon to accept that mental health care is health care?

Interjections.

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

The member for Burlington.

Ms. Natalie Pierre: Mr. Speaker, each program that I have talked about so far is free for access to all Ontarians. The member opposite may be behind the curve, but since

day one we have been expanding access to mental health and supports for everyone in this province.

After decades of neglect by previous governments, mental health is finally taken seriously, and it's our government that is doing the hard work building a continuum of care. We listened to the needs of our communities and have developed a strategy that's working, no thanks to the parties opposite who voted against every single measure along the way.

Mr. Speaker, it's easy to criticize but it's harder to do the work of building an evidence-based system, and that's exactly what we're doing. Our approach is breaking down barriers and we're getting more people than ever before the help they need where and when they need it.

Interjections.

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

HOME CARE

Ms. Marit Stiles: I want to go back to the Premier. In the last few weeks we have heard from home care patients and from caregivers about what the shortage in supplies means to them: people with serious illnesses, severe pain, unable to get the supplies they need and no end in sight.

It is not enough to say they will get reimbursed eventually; it is not enough. These families need answers about how the government let this happen and when this is going to end. When did the government first learn about the shortages that were impacting so many people across this province?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Essex and the parliamentary assistant.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: Mr. Speaker, everybody who requires medical assistance and medical supplies at home must receive them at home. This government insists that it is absolutely necessary that these supplies be delivered. It is unacceptable, in the province of Ontario, that anybody who requires medical supplies at home should go without.

That is why the minister has already communicated with the CEO of Ontario Health atHome and authorized and directed that any and all means should be taken to ensure that those medical supplies reach their destination, and that those supplies, which are so importantly needed, are in abundance in the province of Ontario and they must be delivered.

Mr. Speaker, anybody who has had to seek assistance through another means may be reimbursed, and we are making sure that that is already happening.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: Speaker, how's that working? Because, I've got to tell you, I was in communities across the province this weekend and I'm hearing directly from providers and people who are ill and they are not seeing those supplies, so something is still not working.

With this government, Ontarians always come last. Their first priority is catering to their insider friends and to

the corporations. They will never stand up to corporations on behalf of Ontarians.

They are dismissing these stories that are coming out of home care: doctors and caregivers under distress, patients suffering unnecessarily with no end in sight.

I want the Premier to answer: How many people are still being impacted by these shortages and when can they expect—exactly—for these supply distribution problems to be solved?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Hamilton Mountain will come to order. The Associate Minister of Auto Theft and Bail Reform will come to order.

The parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Health and the member for Essex.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: Mr. Speaker, in the province of Ontario, people who need medical supplies at home absolutely must and deserve to have them delivered as they were requested and on time. We absolutely insist that this must be done and it is utterly unacceptable that there be any interruption in the delivery of these supplies.

The supplies are abundant. There is no difficulty with supply. There has been an interruption in some areas with the delivery of these supplies.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Health has already communicated with the CEO of Ontario Health atHome, and if anybody in the province of Ontario has had any difficulty receiving these supplies and has had to seek them through an alternative, they are entitled to reimbursement. I can advise this House that 83% of these reimbursement requests have already been processed.

Interjection.

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

Leader of the Opposition, final supplementary?

Ms. Marit Stiles: I can tell you that the people of Ontario need and deserve real answers to these questions, not just spin. They want to know who knew for how long and what did they do to fix the problem. We know there was a sudden change. Our MPPs here contacted the Minister of Health with example after example as it was coming in.

We know that Bayshore, the company that's responsible for the shortages, is a long-time donor to the PC Party. Once again, it all comes down to who knows who in this government and Ontarians will always come last.

What is this government doing to hold Bayshore to account, to get people the supplies that they really need right now? Or is this another case of insiders continuing to get off easy while Ontarians pay the price?

Interjections.

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

Mr. Anthony Leardi: It is absolutely important that people in the province of Ontario who need their supplies at home should receive them at home, on time and as ordered.

Already, the Minister of Health has contacted the CAO of Ontario Health atHome and authorized that any and all means be taken to ensure that there is no interruption in the delivery of these supplies. In addition to that, we've activated a special telephone number, which is 1-866-377-7567. Anybody who requires reimbursement for an order should call that number and seek reimbursement.

In addition to that, the minister has activated a special assistance team to make sure that those deliveries are made on time and as required. That special assistance team is already being activated.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mr. Jeff Burch: Through you to the Minister of Health: It has now been 1,027 days since Welland hospital lost its after-hours surgical services, and we have yet to hear a plan from this government as to how they will be restored. This government is failing to deliver on the basics for the people of Welland.

We have proposed a plan to rebuild the aging Welland hospital as a full-service hospital, including 24/7 emergency and after-hours surgical services.

Will the minister support a planning grant to Niagara Health so that we can begin work today on the logistics of this project?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Health and the member for Essex.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: Of course, when this government took office in 2018, the health care budget was \$60 billion. It is now \$85 billion for a 41% increase to the health care budget. With regard to providing more primary care, which actually keeps people out of the emergency room, this government has extended an enormous expansion of the nurse practitioner-led program across the province of Ontario, adding thousands and thousands of people to primary care.

In addition to that, we've added a program especially designed for emergency rooms which is the offload delay program, which provides assistance and other staff to make sure that ambulances who arrive at a hospital are able to unload their patient and get back on the road as required. All of these programs are provided by the government of the province of Ontario.

Interjection.

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

The supplementary question?

Mr. Wayne Gates: My question is to the Premier. Over the summer, while the Premier and his government chose to take a five-month-long break, we continued to experience a crisis in MRI wait times in Niagara. The average provincial wait time for MRIs is 97 days, which is still unacceptable. Think about it: In Niagara, it is a whopping 349 days. My constituents, including seniors, have travelled as far away as Mississauga and to the United States of America to get an MRI, and they had to pay out of their own pocket.

1050

People are suffering because of the crisis the Premier created in health care staffing with Bill 124 and the ongoing underfunding. Speaker, when is the Premier going to properly fund health care services and ensure my constituents in Niagara Falls, Fort Erie and Niagara-on-the-Lake get the MRI services they need, when and where they need them?

Interjections.

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

Once again, the Minister of Auto Theft and Bail Reform will come to order.

The member for Essex.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: Mr. Speaker, we all know how important it is for people to get their tests, such as MRI tests and CT scans, and that's why the health care budget in the province of Ontario, which started in 2018 at \$60 billion, has now gone to \$85 billion in 2024. That's a 41% increase in the health care budget, providing services that have been in place in the province of Ontario in all locations. Let me give you one fantastic example. In my area, the greater Essex county area, we've added a new MRI machine at Erie Shores HealthCare, which has now completed its 1000th test since this government put it in place—and in addition to that, an additional MRI at Windsor Regional Hospital that's doubling the number of MRIs in the region of Essex county.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Niagara Falls will come to order. The member for Don Valley East will come to order.

The next question.

ENERGY POLICIES

Mr. Rick Byers: My question is for the Minister of Energy and Electrification. The people in my riding of Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound remember the negative impact the Liberals had on our province when they were in power. Businesses and homeowners remember that under the Liberals, they had to pay some of the highest energy bills in North America. Life has unfortunately become more expensive for those same families and businesses because of the Trudeau-Crombie carbon tax.

That's why our government needs to take action to reverse the damage the Liberals created to our energy system and ensure that the cost of energy remains affordable as we plan for future growth. Speaker, can the minister please explain how our government's recent reforms will make energy more affordable for new homeowners and job-creating businesses?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The parliamentary assistant and the member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke.

Mr. John Yakubuski: Thank you to the member for Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound.

Unlike the previous Liberal government, which left families burdened with unaffordable energy costs, we are committed to putting affordability at the forefront of On-

tario's energy future. Extending the amortization period for electricity infrastructure investment from 25 to 40 years will lead to savings for homeowners and businesses, making life more affordable. We are streamlining the connection process with a pay-for-what-you-use model, keeping energy affordable.

On Sunday, the Minister of Energy joined the Premier and Minister of Finance to announce the extension of the Ontario gas tax cut, again providing immediate savings for families at the pump. This is real, direct support for the people of Ontario, as the Liberals raise the carbon tax by another 24%.

Speaker, these reforms are laying the foundation for a future where energy is both affordable and reliable for the people of Ontario, something the previous Liberal government failed to do.

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

Mr. Rick Byers: I thank the parliamentary assistant for that excellent response.

Speaker, access to clean, reliable and affordable energy is crucial for the economic prosperity of our province. Past Liberal policies made electricity unaffordable, but our government must work to change that. As we continue to build for the future, we must implement measures that provide for more stable and affordable energy costs for all Ontarians. Our government recently introduced legislation that would, if passed, enable the implementation of Ontario's first-ever integrated energy plan.

Speaker, can the parliamentary assistant please explain how the Affordable Energy Act will ensure long-term energy affordability for Ontarians, while supporting the increasing demand for clean and reliable power.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The parliamentary assistant and member for Mississauga–Lakeshore.

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: Thank you to the member for that question. The Affordable Energy Act, if passed, is a critical part of our strategy to keep energy costs low for families and businesses while meeting the projected 75% increase in electricity demand by 2050. Unlike the previous Liberal government, which neglected affordability, we are taking a long-term approach to ensure Ontarians are not saddled with the high costs they faced in the past.

Nuclear energy is at the heart of this strategy. Nuclear currently provides more than 50% of Ontario's electricity, and the Ontario Energy Board regulated price plan confirms that nuclear energy is cheaper than wind and solar.

This government understands that families want clean, reliable and affordable power. By expanding nuclear and cutting red tape we ensure families have continuous access to affordable energy that supports our economy and reduces emissions, unlike the cost increases of the Liberal era. We are building a strong energy future for Ontario—

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

The next question.

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: In Ontario, over 30,000 children and youth are waiting for mental health treatment, up from 12,000 in 2017. That has nearly tripled since the Conservatives formed government. The average wait for children and youth to receive mental health care is 67 days for counselling and therapy, and 92 days for intensive treatment. Some children wait up to two and a half years.

Chronic underfunding of community health teams and interdisciplinary teams with mental health specialist staff has led us here. The government is failing to deliver on the basics that Ontarians need, and we are living with the dire consequences.

Why does the Premier think spending nearly 650 million taxpayer dollars on a foreign-owned luxury spa in Toronto is more of a priority than investing in children and youth having immediate, community-based, universal mental health care supports?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Once again, the member for Burlington and parliamentary assistant.

Ms. Natalie Pierre: Children and youth need accessible and reliable services if they are to grow into healthy adults. Since 2019, we've increased annual funding for children and youth mental health by \$130 million through the Roadmap to Wellness. Over the last two budgets, we've added another \$43 million.

Unlike previous governments, we're actually innovating and collaborating with partners to support services that are specifically tailored to the unique needs of young people. We've opened 22 youth wellness hubs across the province with another 10 on the way, including a youth wellness hub in Windsor.

The \$330-million pediatric recovery fund also includes expanded funding for virtual supports, like the One Stop Talk program, a new live-in Step-Up Step-Down Program and training for clinicians on youth-specific issues.

Children and youth are our future, and our government will continue to make investments in their mental health.

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

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: Maybe the member opposite didn't hear what I said: The wait-list for children and youth waiting for mental health supports has tripled under your government—tripled.

They've also cut funding. They haven't provided base funding increases to community mental health agencies in decades. Liberals and Conservatives are failing in the mental health file.

Mental health care is health care. Data shows that when Ontarians are unable to find a family doctor, community health team or interdisciplinary team of mental health care specialists like psychologists, social workers and mental health nurses, or Ontarians can't afford to pay for the mental health care, their mental health challenges become more severe and complicated.

This government is failing to deliver the basics needed to keep all Ontarians healthy. Investing in community-

based mental health support is much less costly than hospitalization or incarceration.

I ask the Premier: Will you support our NDP motion to deliver mental health care at no cost to individuals as part of Ontario's universal health care plan, yes or no?

Ms. Natalie Pierre: The NDP are asking for a 5% base funding increase for the community mental health sector, but when we gave the sector that exact increase in last year's budget, they voted against it. They said that mental health is an afterthought, but we are the first government to ever create a long-term strategy for mental health and the first to create a ministerial portfolio for this file.

1100

They asked for evidence-based investments, and we're the first government to begin collecting data on mental health programs precisely so that we can make evidence-based decisions. They talk about counselling for adults and youth; we've created the Ontario Structured Psychotherapy Program to provide cognitive behavioural therapy for adults struggling with depression and anxiety. We've opened 22 youth wellness hubs, including one in Windsor, Ontario, with another 10 on the way for youth to access similar supports.

We've done more for mental health in this—

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

Interjection.

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

The next question.

HIGHWAY CONSTRUCTION

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: My question is for the Minister of Transportation. Peel region is a rapidly growing part of our province, with new homes, businesses and schools being built every day. That is why this region must have the roads and highways we need to keep up with this growing demand.

The previous Liberal government knew there was a need for Highway 413. In fact, they spent millions to study the highway before they turned their backs on the people of Peel and abandoned the project altogether. The results of those studies were clear, Mr. Speaker: Our highways are at capacity and things will only get worse in the next decade. We cannot afford to wait any longer for new roads and highways to be built.

Speaker, can the minister please share how our government is getting it done and building highways like Highway 413?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The parliamentary assistant and the member for Hastings-Lennox and Addington.

Mr. Ric Bresee: Thanks for that question from the hard-working member from Brampton West.

Speaker, our population is growing, and we need more infrastructure to support the families moving to our great province. Under the Premier's leadership, our government is focused on getting people out of gridlock. That's why we're building critical projects like Highway 413 and the

Bradford Bypass. These new highways will make it easier for you to get to where you need to go.

And we know that after 15 years of Liberal inaction and endless gridlock, Ontarians need relief. That's why the Minister of Transportation introduced the Reducing Gridlock, Saving You Time Act, which will allow 24/7 construction on priority highway projects. By cutting red tape and streamlining the construction process, we will get Ontario moving again.

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

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: Bonnie Crombie and her Liberals do not have a plan to tackle gridlock. They keep saying no to investments that will keep our province moving. They said no to Highway 413. They said no to the Bradford Bypass.

In Bonnie Crombie's own words, she has "never supported" Highway 413. And the NDP are no better, Mr. Speaker. Some of their members want to tear down the Gardiner Expressway. That would be a disaster for GTA drivers already stuck in bumper-to-bumper traffic. The people of Ontario deserve better.

Unlike the Liberals, our government needs to be focused on common-sense actions that will help tackle gridlock and provide Ontarians with transit relief. Speaker, can the parliamentary assistant please explain to the House what our government is doing to get drivers in Ontario moving again?

Mr. Ric Bresee: Thank you again to the member from Brampton West. Speaker, it's true that some members of the NDP want to tear down great highways like the Gardiner. Under our plan to tackle gridlock, we accelerated the construction of the Gardiner Expressway, and Ontarians are already seeing the real effects of 24/7 construction. The Gardiner's accelerated timeline is now four months ahead of schedule—ahead. That's why, in our new legislation, we will designate priority highway projects so that we can build faster and keep people moving.

Priority highways projects will connect previously underserved areas, meaning goods will be delivered quicker, faster services and less time for commuters to be stuck in gridlock, so they can spend more time with their family. Speaker, our government will get Ontarians moving.

Interjection.

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

The next question.

HOMELESSNESS

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: My question is to the Premier. After years of planning, this month the University Health Network, as well as the city of Toronto, the federal government, and in partnership with Fred Victor, converted a parking lot into a 51-unit supportive housing project. They are now housing unhoused patients who have been ending up in our emergency rooms. But this project had to go ahead without the support of the provincial government, because they had waited too long.

There is a solution on the table to build supportive housing. It will reduce ER visits. It will end chronic homelessness. Why is the government failing at the most basic step of this process and not at the table with them? Why is this province not committed to long-term funding so that they can build more supportive housing to end chronic homelessness?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: I appreciate the opportunity to answer the question. The member, of course, will know that we are supporting the Homelessness Prevention Program. It's at its highest level in history. In addition to that, we have committed well over another \$600 million to both the cities of Toronto and Ottawa for the homelessness prevention programs in both those cities.

Ostensibly, Mr. Speaker, we truly understand how important it is. That's why we're working very closely with Ontario Big City Mayors. That's why we're working with—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

Hon. Paul Calandra: —to ensure that the maximum amount of resources are put in place to help us address this problem province-wide.

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

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: I did not hear an answer in the minister's response.

Getting people off the streets who are sleeping rough, people who are setting up in tents in parks, is a very good investment. It is much cheaper to house people than to confine them to an expensive hospital bed. Supportive housing is needed to end chronic homelessness. We know that it requires 24-hour support, nursing care and a virtual link to emergency health services on site. This kind of care is not radical; it's actually critical and proven to work.

People on the wait-list for supportive housing are literally passing away—dying—while they are on this wait-list. They are waiting for this government to step up. Ontarians are dying. Cities are broke. They need this government to be a partner.

My question once again is: When can the University Health Network, the city of Toronto, the federal government and Fred Victor expect a long-term funding commitment from this government for one of the most innovative supportive housing projects that we have seen in Ontario?

Interjections.

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

Minister.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Look, we've provided significant additional resources not only to the city of Toronto, of course, but to the city of Ottawa and across the entire province. We increased the budget for our Homelessness Prevention Program under the previous Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing by over \$200 million, bringing

that level of support to the highest level in provincial history.

When it comes to our supposed partners at the federal level, this is a federal government that was supposed to sign a deal with us on Thursday and decided to walk away from the table, ostensibly because they didn't want to fund homelessness programs in some of our other cities. London, Oshawa, Windsor: These are cities that the federal government did not want to fund. We said that that was unacceptable, that we would stand up for all Ontario cities that are dealing with homelessness, and that is why we're providing the level of funding that we are, the highest—

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

The next question.

HOME CARE

Mr. John Fraser: My question is to the Premier. We all know that since 2018, the gaps in our health care system have grown wider: 2.5 million Ontarians don't have a family doctor; 11,000 people died on a wait-list for something last year; and now patients at home in palliative care, at the end of their lives, are not receiving the pain medication that they need, and people living at home with a chronic illness, or frail seniors, are not getting the basic medical supplies that they need. We all know that. We all have heard that in here. We've all read it.

Yesterday, the Premier said, "I'm going to get to the bottom of this." So, Speaker, my question to the Premier is will the Premier join our call to have the Auditor General look at the situation at Ontario Health atHome?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): To reply, the parliamentary assistant to the Minister the Health and member for Essex.

1110

Mr. Anthony Leardi: We all know how important it is for people in Ontario to receive the medical supplies they need at home, including people who are receiving palliative care. Those medical supplies are absolutely essential and it's utterly unacceptable that there be any interruption in the delivery of those supplies.

The minister has already contacted Ontario Health atHome and given the directive to make sure that they take any and all means necessary and required to deliver the medical supplies that have been requested. The supplies are there; they need to be delivered.

In addition to that, the minister has activated a call line where people can seek reimbursement for any costs that they have incurred seeking supplies by alternative means.

In addition to that, the minister has already activated a special assistance team to make sure that the logistics system that delivers these supplies does so as required. All of those steps have already been taken, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. John Fraser: The member is right: It's utterly unacceptable, just like it's unacceptable that 13,000 people in his riding don't have a family doctor.

I know that the other party leaders on this side of the House will join us in this call. The Premier should as well.

My sisters and I cared for both our mom and dad at home at the end of their lives. It was hard. It was difficult. So when I think about the suffering that's happening right now and what these families are going through, it makes me angry. It makes me want to get to the bottom of this. It should make all of us angry and want to get to the bottom of this.

If the Premier is truly a man of his word and he wants to get to the bottom of this, then he will join us in asking the Auditor General to look at the situation at Ontario Health atHome. Will the Premier commit to do that today?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: It's very admirable that the member and his siblings have taken care of their parents. That is a very good and proper thing to do. All of the people at home that require delivery of medical services at home, such as palliative care medical assistance, deserve to have that delivered at home and on time. The delivery service for that is called Ontario Health atHome and the minister has already communicated with Ontario Health atHome to make all the necessary means necessary to get those deliveries made.

In addition to that, the minister has already activated a call line for anybody who needs to be reimbursed for medical supplies that were ordered or ordered by alternative means, and that has already been activated. Furthermore, there's also a special logistics team that has been set up to make sure that those supplies are made and delivered where they're supposed to arrive.

ASSISTANCE TO FARMERS

Ms. Laurie Scott: My question is for the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness. Lindsay recently hosted the International Plowing Match. It was a very good show, and I want to thank everyone involved for putting on the show and thank the members here that attended.

You can imagine, there were a lot of farmers there. And you know what the number one thing I heard was? How hard the Trudeau-Crombie carbon tax was on them. It increases the cost of everything a farmer does, which increases the cost of food for everyone.

Recently, our government announced new investments focused on improving farmland. This is an important step forward toward strengthening our food supply and supporting our local farmers facing rising costs. Can the minister please explain our government's recent support to our farmers?

Hon. Rob Flack: Thank you to the member from Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock. We all enjoyed going to the plowing match. Thank you for hosting us—well done.

Our government secured a 25% increase in the Sustainable Canadian Agricultural Partnership program, and \$569 million will be coming our way to support our farmers with important investments in the resilient agricultural landscape program, AgriStability program, Agricultural

Drainage Infrastructure Program and the Grow Ontario Strategy.

Why, Speaker? We're supporting our farmers to get the job done. From soil health to biodiversity to water quality, we are creating the environment for our farmers to improve their productivity—the gains that they've shown so well in the last 20 years.

We have a thriving agri-food sector in Ontario: 871,000 people employed from the farm gate to the consumer's plate—30,000 more since 2018. Our farmers are getting it done.

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

Ms. Laurie Scott: Speaker, I want to thank the minister for his hard work on this file because helping our farmers is indeed crucial and seeing our government take decisive action is encouraging.

Ontario farmers continue to face ongoing challenges, and they need our government's full support. Rising land costs, labour shortages and the negative impacts of the Trudeau-Crombie carbon tax are all intensifying issues. Farmers have called for increased supports, clear policies and sustainable practices to secure their livelihoods and to contribute to Ontario's food supply.

Speaker, can the minister further tell us how our government will continue supporting our farmers, especially amid the rising operational costs?

Hon. Rob Flack: First of all, I want to thank the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing for the reforms he made to the provincial policy statement recently. The expansion in use of agricultural impact assessments is an important tool that municipalities will use and our ministry will support. Putting an agri-food lens on land use is very, very important.

I'd also like to thank the Minister of Energy and Electrification for the largest energy procurement in our history and banning the use of solar farms on prime agricultural lands. These initiatives are important to supporting our agri-food sector. We are striking that delicate but important balance in ensuring that we support our agri-food industry along with thriving economic growth throughout the province, in Stellantis, at Volkswagen—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Response.

Hon. Rob Flack: The bottom line is this, Speaker: The carbon tax coalition opposite, they offer a carbon tax. We will always say no to that punitive, terrible tax that has hurt farmers—

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

JOB CREATION

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: My question is to the Premier. Workers need this government to step up. Since Conservatives took office, Ontario has lost more than 13,000 manufacturing jobs. That's on the top of the 300,000 jobs lost under the last Liberal government. Ford doubled down on Liberal incompetence. When he was running for office, the Premier said he guaranteed he

would bring back the jobs lost under the previous Liberal government, but his failures are even worse.

Premier, why have you failed so miserably at bringing back manufacturing jobs to Ontario?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Come to order.

The Associate Minister of Small Business to respond.

Hon. Nina Tangri: I'd like to thank the member opposite for the question because it allows us to really talk about our record. Speaker, since we took office, more than 860,000 good-paying jobs have been added, including nearly 200,000 this year alone. Just last month, Ontario added 43,200 good-paying jobs across the province, and that works out to 92% of all the jobs created in Canada.

But let's remind the opposition of their record. Under the Liberals, supported by the NDP, our manufacturing sector was on the brink of collapse. They willingly chased away 300,000 manufacturing jobs, but today, with this government, manufacturing employment is at one of its highest levels in 15 years. We've landed tens of billions of dollars of new auto and manufacturing investments. But, Speaker—

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

The supplementary question?

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: After the Liberals lost 300,000 jobs, Premier Ford said, "Hold my beer." Congratulations on not only taking away more jobs but destroying services at the same time. Look at StatsCan.

This government has handed out massive corporate subsidies, yet is failing to bring manufacturing jobs back to Ontario: 13,400 fewer jobs because of Premier Ford's failures. Ontario's unemployment rate is higher than the national average.

1120

Instead of cooking up schemes and dodging scandals, this government needs to invest in workers. Ontario needs to improve wages and working conditions, to improve access to public services and truly affordable housing that workers and employers need. Why has Premier Ford made Ontario a have-not province?

Interjections.

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

Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development.

Hon. David Piccini: You know, Speaker, I thought we got rid of discovery math, but it's alive and well with these guys.

Let's zero in on the manufacturing jobs. Let's zero in on those jobs. Let's talk about Windsor, for example. Thanks to the leadership of this member in Windsor, MPP Dowie, we're attracting incredible investment. Let's talk about over 2,000 men and women in building trades taking home a combined weekly salary that's into the millions—millions—\$14 million in payroll that wouldn't have happened under that party. We know we were scheduled for zero investments, zero manufacturing.

Let's talk about—because I've got some constituents here today—Premier Tech in my riding, expanding; Custom

Plastics, expanding. This party wants a service economy. They want nothing more than misery for Ontarians. We'll create hard-working construction jobs, build a stronger province, no thanks to them.

BOATING SAFETY

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: It's an honour to rise and ask my first question as an independent MPP on behalf of the people of Carleton.

My question is to the Premier of Ontario. There are many things the good people of Carleton want me to ask about, including what this government is doing to combat the drastic rise of anti-Semitism and violent behaviour on the streets of Ontario; however, my question today is on a topic that lies close to my heart. I ask this question on behalf of the children of Ontario and, in particular, in memory of Joshua McNulty, an 11-year-old boy who tragically passed away in a drowning accident in 2018.

On April 3, 2023, I introduced Joshua's Law, my PMB which requires parents and guardians to ensure children 12 and under wear a personal flotation device or life jacket. My question is, why did this government promise to pass Joshua's Law before summer 2024 but then shut down the Legislature one week early, while ignoring their promise to protect the children of Ontario?

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

Mr. Steve Clark: I want to thank the member for Carleton for the question. I certainly am aware of her private member's bill, and I certainly understand the situation, given that the terrible tragedy occurred in my riding.

We talk about private members' bills and, really, it's up to the member to move things forward. I'd be more than happy to sit down with the member for Carleton and discuss the situation.

However, this place operates in a situation where not every private member's bill passes. When I first was elected to the House in 2010, legislative research told me that, at the time, since Confederation, only 3% of private members' bills actually make it into legislation.

Again, Speaker, I don't want to couch the success of the member, but I'd be pleased to have a discussion with you and discuss this further.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary?

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: My question is again to the Premier. Accidents are the leading cause of death for children in Canada, and not wearing a life jacket is the number one risk factor for drowning by boating. Life-saving Society's 2024 edition of the Ontario Drowning Report shows 68% of drownings occurred from May to September—a.k.a. boating season—and 60% of drowning accidents happened in lakes, ponds and rivers. Drowning Prevention Research Centre's study showed that 67% of children aged five to 14 who died from drowning were not wearing a life jacket or personal flotation device. The Ottawa Drowning Prevention Coalition says that drowning

is one of the leading causes of injury-related incidents for children under the age of five.

Mr. Speaker, life jackets save lives, full stop. Will the Premier live up to his promise and pass Joshua's Law as soon as possible and make life jackets mandatory for children 12 and under in Ontario, especially since this bill has been passed already and is waiting to go to third reading?

Mr. Steve Clark: Again, Speaker, I'm not going to preclude how legislative committees deal with private members' business. That's up for committees. But I do want to say to the member very clearly, there's no one in this House who understands more about safety on the water than someone who has the words "Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes" in their riding name. I have a long history with the area's boating community. I understand the importance of safety. Any tragedy on the water that could be prevented is something that I think all legislators, no matter what political stripe, should put their mind to.

Again to the member, I want to congratulate her on bringing this forward as a private member's bill. I want to congratulate her on it making the next step into going to legislative committee. And, again, I offered a conversation with her in my response to the first question, and I'll leave it at that.

UNDERGROUND LOCATES

Mr. Lorne Coe: My question is for the Minister of Public and Business Service Delivery and Procurement. Our government is working hard to build and expand critical infrastructure across the province. This work is essential to our economy and quality of life, from roads and bridges to broadband networks that connect communities. Under the previous Liberal government, projects were often delayed due to the slow completion of locates through Ontario One Call. These delays put unnecessary strain on contractors, who saw their timelines extended and their ability to take on new projects affected.

Our government must address these issues and deliver a faster, more efficient locate system that supports timely infrastructure development. Speaker, could the minister please explain what our government is doing to streamline the locate process?

Hon. Todd J. McCarthy: Mr. Speaker, I thank the excellent member from Whitby for that very important and timely question. He is indeed a champion for Whitby and Durham region and a model parliamentarian.

There was a serious problem under the previous Liberal government with unacceptable delays in regard to the One Call process, and so we took action. Under this government, in this provincial Parliament, we tabled the Building Infrastructure Safely Act, and it received royal assent March 6, 2024, after unanimous passage in this House. We saw that there were expenses, lost time and delays under the Liberal government. But thanks to the reforms guided by our BISA, our Building Infrastructure Safely Act, we have now tripled the daily volume of locate requests

compared to 2018. We're getting it done, we're building it safely and we're making great progress.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary?

Mr. Lorne Coe: Thank you to the minister for that response. My constituents will be pleased to know about the improvements to Ontario One Call and how they'll speed up infrastructure projects in Whitby.

Speaker, Ontarians expect our government to make the most of every tax dollar, especially on large-scale projects. Delays and budget overruns caused by confusion about underground utility markings or poorly managed timelines hurt the value of those investments. Unlike the Liberal members in this House, our government must remain committed to protecting taxpayers' dollars and ensuring efficiency in infrastructure projects.

Speaker, can the minister please explain the steps being taken through Ontario One Call to reduce locate costs for construction projects while ensuring the highest safety standards?

Hon. Todd J. McCarthy: Mr. Speaker, our government was elected and re-elected on a plan to build, a plan to build safely, the Ontario of tomorrow. We have accelerated the building of roads, transit and critical infrastructure faster across Ontario. We've cut red tape. We've introduced accountability through penalties for slow work at all stages, from timely locates to responsible construction management. That is our plan as we look forward to building responsibly and safely and faster.

ARTS AND CULTURAL FUNDING

MPP Jill Andrew: My question is to the Premier. Toronto Caribbean Carnival, the largest festival in North America, is in desperate need of emergency and sustainable multi-year funding. Carnival contributes nearly half a billion dollars, Speaker, to Ontario's GDP and creates roughly 4,000 direct jobs, supporting approximately 3,000 small businesses. Its reach is unparalleled in this country.

1130

The annual festival costs roughly \$3 million to produce, and this government's investment this year was \$125,000. The festival management committee is asking for \$2.5 million annually for the next three years to survive, and they needed this investment yesterday. Without this funding, the very existence of the Toronto Caribbean Carnival is in jeopardy.

My question is to the Premier. The Premier promised in person at the carnival this year that they could count on him for the funding support they needed. Will the Premier step up, adequately invest and save Toronto Caribbean Carnival today? Yes or no?

Interjections.

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

The Minister of Tourism, Culture and Gaming.

Hon. Stan Cho: I love Caribbean culture, and my seatmate knows I love Caribbean food. In fact, this year at carnival, it was a little awkward because I was following my nose for some jerk chicken, and when I got to the stand,

the operator informed me, "Sir, you're about an hour and a half early." I won't make that mistake again this year when we're on time for carnival.

The member is correct: It is an important economic driver, it is important for cultural enrichment, it is important for the Caribbean community and it is important for visitors to our great city.

I was there when the Premier made a promise, and we're working on that promise as we speak. I know Mischka is here and I know Adrian is chatting with my team as well. As I said, those supports are ongoing and those supports will come. We're going to continue to invest in the Toronto Caribbean Carnival. We look forward to next year's carnival being bigger and better than it was even this year.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary question? The member for Spadina–Fort York.

Mr. Chris Glover: I've got to say, that is a really disappointing answer. We've got the CEO and the director of the Toronto Caribbean Carnival here. The Toronto Caribbean Carnival welcomes 2.3 million visitors to Ontario. It generates \$500 million in economic activity, and from this government they get what the Premier called a paltry \$125,000 in funding.

It's not just the Toronto Caribbean Carnival that's at risk. Ottawa Festival Network reports that most festivals in Ottawa had their funding cut by this government by 50% to 75%. The tulip festival in Ottawa had their funding cut in half. This government cut Orillia's Mariposa festival funding by \$100,000, and the Taste of the Danforth was cancelled last year because of a lack of funding. The Toronto Outdoor Picture Show reports that most Toronto festivals are at the breaking point.

My question is to the Premier. Why is this government failing to provide basic funding and threatening these festivals and the thousands of jobs and small businesses that they support that are part of Ontario's \$86-billion tourism industry?

Interjections.

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

The Minister of Tourism, Culture and Gaming.

Hon. Stan Cho: Disappointing? You want to talk about disappointing? That member has voted against every single measure of support for all the festivals he just mentioned, including the Toronto carnival. I'll reiterate: I was there, that member was there when the Premier said there will be increased funding for next year's carnival. Why won't they take yes for an answer? I already said we're working with my team. I already said we're working the Premier's office. All they do is spin negativity in this chamber.

Let's do things a little bit differently. Let's be positive. Let's think about the great festival for next year with increased supports. As the Premier said, fire up the fryer. Let's get that bacon sharp. Heat up the doubles. We're on our way for the Toronto carnival.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Stop the clock. Order. We're not quite finished. Start the clock. Next question?

SPORTS AND RECREATION FUNDING

Mr. Andrew Dowie: My question is for the Minister of Sport. Children and youth across the province deserve access to opportunities that help them be more physically active and engaged. Speaker, we know that investing in organizations that promote physical and mental well-being means helping our children develop the confidence and leadership skills that they need. That's why our government needs to continue supporting Ontario families, ensuring they have access to vital resources that deliver high-quality, tailored and active recreational programs in their communities.

Speaker, can the minister please tell this House what our government is doing to help kids stay active in Ontario while keeping costs down for families?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Burlington.

Ms. Natalie Pierre: The member is absolutely right: Sport and recreation keeps our kids active and provides a huge boost to local economies. That's why our government is working to build a better Ontario through sport, and this year, we are investing \$14.6 million in Ontario's After-School Program. This investment supports over 110 organizations that are helping to provide sport and recreation activities for more than 13,000 children and youth in communities across the province.

It should come as no surprise that the opposition voted against this program in the 2024 budget, proving they don't care about the needs of their own constituents. That's in stark contrast to our government, who is using every tool at our disposal to fund programs and initiatives that make a huge difference for families, and that's what we'll continue to do.

VISITOR

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): We have with us in the members' gallery a special guest who is the global CEO of IPSOS Public Affairs and the best-selling author of many books, including *The Big Shift* and *Empty Planet*, Dr. Darrell Bricker. Welcome to Queen's Park. We're delighted to have you here.

BIRTH OF MEMBER'S GRANDCHILD

Mr. Vincent Ke: I'm delighted to inform this House that my granddaughter, who is also my first grandchild, was just born yesterday. I know she is healthy, and I'm excited to go see her soon.

NOTICE OF DISSATISFACTION

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Pursuant to standing order 36(a), the member for Carleton has given their notice

of dissatisfaction with the answer to their question given by the parliamentary assistant to the Premier regarding life jackets and Joshua's Law. This matter will be debated tomorrow following private members' public business.

DEFERRED VOTES

KEEPING PRIMARY CARE FAIR ACT (RESTRICTING PRIVATE PAYMENTS FOR NURSE PRACTITIONER SERVICES), 2024

LOI DE 2024 VISANT À MAINTENIR DES SOINS PRIMAIRES ÉQUITABLES EN RESTREIGNANT LE PAIEMENT PRIVÉ DE SERVICES FOURNIS PAR DU PERSONNEL INFIRMIER PRATICIEN

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

Bill 203, An Act to amend the Commitment to the Future of Medicare Act, 2004 with respect to payments to nurse practitioners / *Projet de loi 203, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2004 sur l'engagement d'assurer l'avenir de l'assurance-santé à l'égard des honoraires à verser aux infirmières praticiennes et aux infirmiers praticiens.*

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

The division bells rang from 1138 to 1143.

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

On October 24, 2024, Mr. Shamji moved second reading of Bill 203, An Act to amend the Commitment to the Future of Medicare Act, 2004 with respect to payments to nurse practitioners.

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

Ayes

Andrew, Jill	Glover, Chris	Sattler, Peggy
Armstrong, Teresa J.	Gretzky, Lisa	Schreiner, Mike
Bell, Jessica	Harden, Joel	Shamji, Adil
Bourgouin, Guy	Hsu, Ted	Shaw, Sandy
Bowman, Stephanie	Jama, Sarah	Stevens, Jennifer (Jennie)
Clancy, Aislinn	Karpoche, Bhutla	Stiles, Marit
Collard, Lucille	Kernaghan, Terence	Tabuns, Peter
Fife, Catherine	McCrimmon, Karen	Taylor, Monique
Fraser, John	McMahon, Mary-Margaret	Vaugois, Lise
French, Jennifer K.	Pasma, Chandra	West, Jamie
Gates, Wayne	Rakocevic, Tom	Wong-Tam, Kristyn

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

Nays

Allsopp, Tyler	Grewal, Hardeep Singh	Pinsonneault, Steve
Anand, Deepak	Hamid, Zee	Quinn, Nolan

Babikian, Aris	Hardeman, Ernie	Rae, Matthew
Bailey, Robert	Harris, Mike	Riddell, Brian
Barnes, Patrice	Hogarth, Christine	Romano, Ross
Bethlenfalvy, Peter	Jones, Trevor	Sabawy, Sheref
Bouma, Will	Jordan, John	Sandhu, Amarjot
Brady, Bobbi Ann	Kanapathi, Logan	Sarkaria, Prabmeet Singh
Bresee, Ric	Ke, Vincent	Sarrazin, Stéphane
Byers, Rick	Kerzner, Michael S.	Saunderson, Brian
Calandra, Paul	Kusendova-Bashta, Natalia	Scott, Laurie
Cho, Raymond Sung Joon	Leardi, Anthony	Skelly, Donna
Cho, Stan	Lece, Stephen	Smith, David
Clark, Steve	Martin, Robin	Smith, Graydon
Coe, Lorne	McCarthy, Todd J.	Surma, Kinga
Crawford, Stephen	McGregor, Graham	Tangri, Nina
Cuzzetto, Rudy	Mulrone, Caroline	Thanigasalam, Vijay
Dixon, Jess	Oosterhoff, Sam	Thompson, Lisa M.
Dowie, Andrew	Pang, Billy	Triantafilopoulos, Effie J.
Downey, Doug	Parsa, Michael	Wai, Daisy
Flack, Rob	Piccini, David	Williams, Charmaine A.
Gallagher Murphy, Dawn	Pierre, Natalie	Yakubski, John

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

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

Second reading negatived.

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

The House recessed from 1147 to 1300.

PETITIONS

ADDICTION SERVICES

MPP Lise Vaugeois: This petition is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, entitled “Save Path 525 Overdose Prevention Site!” As you can see, I have quite a few petitions here. The government has decided to close down the safe consumption treatment centres. We know that 465 lives were saved in Thunder Bay alone by this centre. We know that people who sometimes overdose go to these centres several times, recover and live full lives, so this petition is in support of keeping the site open. It’s a critical piece of addiction care.

I fully endorse this petition and will give it to Blythe, if I can find a pen.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

MPP Jill Andrew: This petition is entitled “Petition to Raise Social Assistance Rates,” and it is, of course, to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. I’d also like to thank Dr. Sally Palmer from McMaster University, who has certainly been doing quite an extraordinary job in organizing and encouraging Ontarians to sign this petition from across our province, including my community of Toronto–St. Paul’s.

Said very frankly, Speaker, this petition is asking for people on ODSP and OW to be respected. Currently, in St. Paul’s and in other communities across this province, people who are on ODS poverty and OW are, in some

cases, unable to afford food, their medicine or even a home, and that’s very discouraging, considering that all of us here, as MPPs, have access to food and we have access to a home. I’d like to think it could be the same for all Ontarians.

This petition recognizes that during the height of the pandemic, CERB was offered, which was a basic income of sorts of about \$2,000 per month, and the petition says, “Well, if that was recognized by our country as needed during the pandemic, how is it that people on ODS poverty and OW are being made to starve, like literally being legislated to starve by this Ontario government?”

On behalf of Dr. Palmer, on behalf of the many people, including the person whose celebration of life I attended this weekend, who has signed up for MAID and will be gone from us on November 2 because they are on ODS poverty and battling all kinds of illnesses, I’d like to call on this provincial government to at least double—and I want to stress, at least double—the ODS poverty and OW rates. It still wouldn’t be enough to have a rental in St. Paul’s, but it would be a start. But after six years of this, we need more than a start.

So, please, government, at least double the ODSP and OW rates.

Ms. Christine Hogarth: Point of order.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Point of order, the member for Etobicoke–Lakeshore.

Ms. Christine Hogarth: I believe it’s beyond its point, but the reason for these petitions is not to give a whole diatribe on your thoughts; it really is about getting to the point.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Etobicoke–Lakeshore has a valid point of order, reminding us of the standing order which asks members to briefly summarize their petitions without getting into an elaborate explanation of the merits of the petition. That’s what the standing order says. I’ll remind all members that that’s what the new standing order says, and I ask the members to keep their explanations of their petitions as brief as possible.

LABOUR LEGISLATION

Mr. Joel Harden: I have a petition today on a very important subject. It’s about asking the province of Ontario to pass anti-scab-labour legislation. The government will not allow me to read this petition, Speaker, because I think if they heard the words, they may start to realize that their federal counterparts in Ottawa have voted in favour of such a rule. But why—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Again, to the member for Ottawa Centre, I’m going to ask you not to get into a political explanation of your view on the petition but ask you to briefly summarize the petition itself. You could also indicate the number of signatures, if you wish to do so.

Mr. Joel Harden: Yes, thank you, Speaker. Thanks to my friend from Sudbury, this petition has thousands of signatures across the province of Ontario, because unlike

the provincial Conservatives, New Democrats in Ontario value workplace rights.

So I'm happy to rise today to say that anti-scab legislation should be a priority here in the province of Ontario. I agree with Fred Piquette from Sudbury. I agree with Frank Bue from Hanmer. And I'm disappointed that, six years later, after this government pats themselves on the back for working for workers, we do not have anti-scab legislation in the province of Ontario, because when employers are allowed to use scabs, they drag out labour disputes and people have to suffer without incomes. Their kids go hungry. And the Conservative government of Ontario doesn't seem to—

Mr. Anthony Leardi: Point of order, Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Essex has a point of order.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: Mr. Speaker, I'm wondering if the Speaker might give a gentle reminder to all the honourable members of how to properly present a petition.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I thought I had done so. Once again, I will ask members to briefly summarize their petition and, the member for Ottawa Centre, ask you not to go into an elaborate political explanation of your view of the issue that's being raised by the petition.

Mr. Joel Harden: Thank you, Speaker. I would, through you, tell my friends opposite, maybe if you let us read petitions in the first place, we wouldn't have to play this game of whack-a-mole. The fact of the matter is—

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

SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND HARASSMENT

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Hoisted by their own petard.

I have a petition here entitled "Justice for Sexual Assault Survivors"—

Mr. Anthony Leardi: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Essex has a point of order.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: I'm wondering if the Speaker might give another gentle reminder to all the honourable members of how to properly present a petition.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I believe I have, and I think they all heard it. Thank you very much. Not a valid point of order.

Hamilton West–Ancaster–Dundas has the floor.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Thank you, Speaker. I appreciate the floor. This is a very serious matter, and I do hope that the government side will take the time to listen to this. It's a petition entitled "Justice for Sexual Assault Survivors," which is Bill 189—that was Lydia's Law.

We will remember in this House that Lydia was a constituent of MPP from Waterloo Catherine Fife, who brought this bill forward because Lydia's sexual assault case was thrown out of the courts, so she was not able to seek justice in the court system. There are almost 1,500 cases of sexual assault in 2022 that were withdrawn or stayed before trial. This is a result of the backlog that we're seeing in the courts in Ontario.

So this petition is calling on the government, essentially, to make sure that the independent legal advice program, which is now insufficient in meeting survivors' needs, is increased, rather than, as this government has done, send this petition directly to committee without allowing us to debate this here.

I would like to say to the government, Lydia did not see justice in the courts. She did not see justice here because we weren't allowed to debate her case. I would hope that the government will bring this law to committee and make it the law of the land so that Lydia, finally, and all sexual assault survivors, can see justice in this province.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): One more time, I'll remind the members to briefly summarize their petition—if they wish to indicate the number of signatures, that would be appropriate as well—without adding additional editorial content.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I'd like to thank members of the Guelph and Wellington Task Force for Poverty Elimination for bringing forward thousands of signatures for this petition. The petition notes that Ontario's social assistance rates are well below Canada's official Market Basket Measure poverty line.

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The petition also notes that 230 organizations have signed a letter calling on the government to increase social assistance rates as a way to end legislated poverty.

The petition explicitly asks the Ontario Legislative Assembly to at least double social assistance rates as a way to end legislated poverty.

I fully support this petition. I will sign it and ask page Sophie to bring it to the table.

EDUCATION FUNDING

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: I'm proud to rise to present this petition on behalf of the Elementary Teachers of Toronto. They're calling on the government to stop the cuts, to invest in the schools and to give the students the education that they deserve. They highlight the fact that the massive cuts from the government have resulted in larger class sizes and a reduction in special education and mental health supports as well as resources for students. Many of the buildings are now unsafe and neglected. They are calling on the government to reverse the cuts to the schools, to adequately fix the education funding formula, to ensure that the students have everything that they need to be successful.

I will proudly affix my signature to this petition and send it back to the table with page Lily.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I thank the member for Toronto Centre for briefly summarizing the content of her petition and indicating the number of signatures. Thank you very much.

ENDOMETRIOSIS

Mr. John Fraser: I have a petition here regarding endometriosis awareness and action. Essentially, what they are calling on the government to do here is to invest more into research.

Also, currently, there's a wait time of seven to 10 years for treatment, so the government needs to improve not only that but the medical education and education inside our secondary schools so that people are aware of this disease and how it affects people.

I'm signing this and giving it to page Alessandro.

NORTHERN HEALTH TRAVEL GRANT

MPP Jamie West: This petition is entitled "Fix the Northern Health Travel Grant."

In summary, the Northern Health Travel Grant is outdated, and what happens is, people in the north, when they're accessing health care and have to travel to southern Ontario, end up out of pocket more than I think was ever intended. For example, the cost of hotels has skyrocketed and is a lot more expensive, and so you're not fully reimbursed for the hotel rates. As well, for any sort of transportation, you're not paid for the first 100 kilometres, which seems unfair to somebody else whose hospital would be within driving distance.

Basically, what they're asking for in this petition is, they would like changes—changes that the health minister is aware of—but also to have a committee put together to figure out how we get this done, essentially, in a timely fashion.

I support the petition. I'll affix my signature and provide it to page Jakob for the table.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mr. John Fraser: I have a petition here to support access to spine care in Ontario. Essentially, again, these families are asking for a lower wait time for complex spinal surgeries—that complex spinal surgeries not be funded from the general envelope of spinal surgeries, and a lot more attention paid to individuals with chronic spine conditions here in Ontario.

I agree with this petition. I'm signing it, and I'm giving it to page James.

OPPOSITION DAY

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Ms. Marit Stiles: I move that whereas mental health care is health care;

Therefore, in the opinion of the House, the Ontario government must deliver mental health care at no cost to individuals as part of Ontario's universal health care plan.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Ms. Stiles has moved opposition day number 1.

I look to the Leader of the Opposition to lead off the debate.

Ms. Marit Stiles: In every corner of this province, people are stuck facing the consequences of a government that has neglected the basics. We have a housing crisis. We have a family doctor shortage, crumbling schools and a cost-of-living crisis with no relief in sight.

Last week, how did this Premier respond to the crisis in health care? He looked Ontarians in the eye and told them the solution to long ER wait times was simple: "Stop going to the ER," he said. "Visit your family doctor first."

Two and a half million Ontarians know there is no family doctor to turn to, and this is a province where people are reaching their breaking point. This isn't the Ontario they deserve, and it's certainly not the Ontario they want. That feeling of being stuck, of having nowhere to turn, is having a lasting impact as well on people's mental health. But here's the reality: Mental health care, as critical as it is, remains out of reach for millions and millions of Ontarians. We have long wait-lists, out-of-pocket costs and a lack of public funding that makes mental health support a distant hope when it should be a reality.

Today, we're asking this House to support a simple but vital truth: that mental health care is health care, and it's time we treated it as such. We need mental health care now. The demand in Ontario has never been higher. Right now, there are 30,000 children and youth waiting for mental health support, a staggering number that's more than doubled in just a few years under this government.

I want you to imagine being a young person today. You're facing pressures from school, and from home and from an uncertain world. The stress for so many of them is overwhelming. We see it in our own families. They should be able to reach out for help without a price tag or a year-long wait in the way.

In northern and rural Ontario, people are waiting not just months, but sometimes years to see a mental health professional. When they can't access timely care, where do they end up? They end up in emergency rooms, which are really already stretched beyond capacity. In some hospitals in the north, over 10% of emergency room visits are tied directly to mental health and substance use issues.

The cost of this crisis is not just personal; it impacts our entire health care system. Hospitals and emergency rooms are stretched to the limit, and for many people, untreated mental health issues are the root cause. When people don't receive early support, issues escalate, leading to crises that strain our public resources even more.

We need to recognize the high cost of leaving these mental health issues unaddressed. When people suffer, our province pays the price. The economic impact of untreated mental illness is enormous. It affects productivity, it fills up emergency rooms, and it creates broader public health and social crises. Study after study after study has shown that investing in mental health care saves public dollars in the long run. When we help people early, we prevent crises, we reduce hospital visits and we build a healthier Ontario.

Providing universal mental health care is compassionate, yes, but it is also responsible. This motion is about solutions rooted in empathy and backed up by evidence. It's about addressing mental health before it becomes a life-threatening issue. It's about taking real steps to help people achieve stability, healing and hope.

The thing is, we're not reinventing the wheel. This isn't about building a whole new system from scratch. Here in Ontario, we already have community health agencies, interdisciplinary health teams and mental health professionals who are ready to deliver these services right now, but for years, these agencies have been left underfunded, stretched beyond capacity, and—let's face it—frankly, unsupported. It's not a new story. It's been under consecutive Liberal and Conservative governments that we've seen Ontario's community mental health organizations fighting for scraps just to keep the lights on.

These organizations know what to do. They know how to deliver quality care. They're just starved of the resources to do so. I want you to imagine what it would look like if we gave our community health centres, mental health agencies and interdisciplinary care teams the support they need. Imagine if we made the investments that allowed every Ontarian to access mental health services in a timely way.

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Our motion is very, very simple. It calls for a 7% base budget increase for mental health and addiction services and a 5% increase for community health organizations. This isn't some abstract wish list; it's a necessary investment to stabilize our mental health care infrastructure and meet that rise in demand. Let's get behind these proven community organizations, let's give them the resources they need and let's start to fix the mental health crisis that is impacting so many people in our province.

We're asking Ontario to live up to the Canadian promise of universal health care. When Tommy Douglas pushed for universal health care in Canada, he didn't do it because it was easy. He did it because he believed that no one should suffer without access to care, and mental health care is no different. It is time that we treated mental health with the same urgency and funding as physical health, because the two are inextricably linked.

In fact, there should be no separation between the two when it comes to public funding, because we know that untreated mental health issues affect physical well-being, increase rates of chronic disease and, of course, have so many other far-reaching consequences. Universal mental health isn't an add-on; it's an essential extension of our health care system.

I want to talk a little bit about how this connects to social justice, because when we deny people access to mental health care, we are also ignoring the impacts of intergenerational trauma, particularly when we're talking about Indigenous and Black communities across this province. These are communities that have borne the brunt of systemic inequality in health care and in other public services. Underfunding of mental care only reinforces this cycle of trauma. When people are denied access to treat-

ment, we see the consequences in higher incarceration rates, in increased substance use across all communities, and then trauma is passed from one generation to the next.

Ontario's future shouldn't be compounding trauma and deepening inequality. We have the opportunity, today—and I look to the members opposite—to make sure that mental health care reaches everyone in our province, especially those communities that have been most affected by systemic neglect.

This government has a choice to make today: They can choose to invest in real solutions to address the mental health crisis in Ontario, or they can ignore it and they can leave our communities, children and elders to continue to struggle. When Ontarians are mentally well, they're able to contribute more fully to society. They can take care of their families, work in their communities and build a future that they can look forward to.

Once again, I can't say it enough: Health care doesn't stop at the neck, but the funding for health care does. Mental health care is health care. So let's support our community organizations, let's invest in the future that Ontarians deserve and let's pass this motion to deliver mental health care at no cost to Ontarians as part of our universal health care plan.

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

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: Today, I rise to discuss our NDP motion that reads:

“Whereas mental health care is health care;

“Therefore, in the opinion of the House, the Ontario government must deliver mental health care at no cost to individuals as part of Ontario's universal health care plan.”

The reason that we needed to bring this motion forward is because the Conservatives are failing to deliver on the basics that Ontarians need to stay prosperous and healthy in this province—things like universal mental health care.

Speaker, we know that mental health is an integral part of our overall well-being. It influences how we think, how we feel, how we act. It shapes relationships, our ability to cope with stress and our capacity to maintain employment and contribute to our communities. Mental wellness can be a life-or-death situation, yet despite its great significance, mental health care remains one of the most overlooked and underfunded aspects of health care by this Conservative government and, frankly, the Liberals before them.

It's important to note that the Ministry of Health does not track and report on therapy wait times, but thanks to the work of community-based organizations and coalitions, we know in Ontario over 30,000 children and youth are waiting for mental health treatment—up from 12,000 in 2017. That wait-list for supports has nearly tripled under the Conservatives since they formed government.

Right now, the average wait time for children and youth to receive mental health care is 67 days for counselling and therapy and 92 days for intensive treatment, but some children wait up to two and a half years. Some kids don't make it that long and die by suicide.

In Ontario, it is estimated that one in five individuals will experience a mental health issue in their lifetime, and

this statistic is not just a number; it represents some of us, our friends, our family, colleagues, community members, many of whom are struggling in silence. And the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the importance of every Ontarian having access to universal mental health care in community when and where they need it without any out-of-pocket cost. Many faced isolation, uncertainty and loss, leading to increased anxiety, depression, suicidal thoughts and other mental health conditions.

Speaker, it is crucial that we recognize these challenges and ensure that community health teams and interdisciplinary teams of care have the resources and investments they need to provide mental health care through specialists.

When you invest adequately in mental health preventative measures, the supports and services people need on the front end, not only is it the right thing to do morally, in my opinion, but it produces a much larger return, or savings, in our health care, education, justice, emergency service and municipal sectors.

Speaker I'll quote from a community mental health provider:

"The most economical and impactful care happens in community. Prevention happens in community. We need to ensure equitable investment happens for primary care, mental health, and addictions care, or risk downstream care pressures such as in hospitals."

Speaker, providing access to public universal mental health care is compassionate, it's evidence-based, but it is also the fiscally responsible thing to do, which is why New Democrats are calling on the Conservative government to deliver mental health care at no cost to individuals as part of Ontario's universal health care system.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Matthew Rae): Further debate?

Mr. Chris Glover: When I come to this Legislature, I think about the incredible opportunity we have to transform people's lives in a positive way. In 1965, after a decade of fighting, Tommy Douglas brought universal public health care to Canada. At the time, in this Legislature here in Ontario, the Robarts Conservatives actually fought against it; they voted against it. There were many right-wing groups that were fighting against public health care.

But what it showed afterwards, over the last few decades, is that public health care costs less and delivers more, and when you compare our public health care system to the United States, we spend 10.2% of our GDP on public health care. In the United States, they spend 16% of their GDP on health care, largely privatized.

So it's cost-effective, and we need to expand it. And in the NDP at the federal level, we've been expanding it. We've been fighting for universal pharmacare, because it's not enough just to be able to go to a doctor or the hospital, you have to be able to get the medication you need to get better. Again, it's cost-effective. The Parliamentary Budget Officer says that we will save \$2.2 billion with universal pharmacare.

In this House today, the NDP is asking for an expansion of mental health care to be included in our universal public health care system, and it will again be cost efficient, it will save lives and it will make us all healthier.

There are 30,000 children on the wait-list for mental health care services in Ontario, and they wait for up to 2.5 years. That's absolutely shameful, and it can be addressed by making mental health part of our universal public health care system. Some 234,000 people are homeless in this province; 30% have mental illness. We need to address that. We can help to bring an end to homelessness by addressing mental health issues.

I hope the Conservative government will be supporting this motion of the NDP today to expand universal public health care to include mental health services.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Matthew Rae): Further debate?

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Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: We are seeing a growing need for mental health care in many communities across Ontario, and we really are on the brink of a crisis. In Ontario, patients can only access free mental health services through in-patient services in hospitals or through community health centres. Publicly funded psychiatry services are limited and difficult to access, even through referrals from a family doctor—and that's if you have a family doctor to get a referral. Counselling, therapies and services are not covered through OHIP.

When that happens, we want to explain to this government how that translates and who is affected. Who is affected are young people aged 15 to 24. They are more likely to experience mental illness and/or substance use disorders than any other age group. That's people like Vanessa, in my riding. She has aged out of her pediatric care from her doctor and could not find a new doctor. Therefore, she stopped going to university, because she's afraid of not having the care she needs to get through that milestone. That perpetuates mental health, when you can't access those services for health care.

Mental health and physical health are linked. People with long-term physical health conditions, such as chronic pain, are much more likely to experience mood disorders. That's like Carolyn Pratt, from my riding. She had a stage 4 single prognosis of prolapse, and now she's had to wait a year and a half to get surgery. She still hasn't had surgery, and she's now got a double prolapse, stage 4, which is bladder and uterus. That's creating havoc on her mental health.

The ultimate, awful outcome that happens is a fatality, when people don't have access to mental health. In Ontario, about 4% of adults and 14% of high school students report having seriously contemplated suicide in the past year; 4% of high school students report having attempted suicide.

I'm going to quickly wrap up my debate. A few years ago, a mother came to my office, sobbing profusely, because her son reached out for mental health, went to the emergency department and came home. They found him in the basement. Do you know, when services came to the

rescue—ambulance, police, fire—they all showed up when it was too late.

This government can help everyone in Ontario and not make it too late. I ask this government to support this motion and vote in favour to deliver mental health care at no cost to individuals, as part of Ontario's universal health care plan today.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Matthew Rae): Further debate?

MPP Lise Vaugeois: Taxes are how we pool our resources to look out for ourselves and each other. There is no greater responsibility for a provincial government than to use those resources to properly fund public health care and education. But let's look at where this government is spending our pooled resources: \$800 million to gut Ontario Place and pay for parking for a luxury spa no one asked for; \$2.5 million to get booze into corner stores; \$4.3 million to fight workers in court for their unconstitutional Bill 124; double the cost to pay for OHIP services in for-profit clinics; and now \$3.2 billion to buy votes in the next election. What if this money was spent instead to fund mental health care?

The level of mental health and addictions crises is through the roof in Ontario. Those providing publicly funded mental health services in our northern communities are stretched to the point of exhaustion, and they're doing it on low wages. In the ONDP, we know that it is critical to establish wage parity across the health care system to address the severe crisis in recruitment and retention. But with all this money getting thrown around by the government for their pet projects and boondoggles, I have to ask: Why have the family health teams that serve people in communities across northern Ontario had their budgets frozen for the last 10 years? In other words, because of inflation, they have been cut every year. Why is this government cutting one of the four pillars of addiction support by shutting down Path 525, Thunder Bay's consumption treatment site that has reversed 465 overdoses? That is 465 people who would have died on the streets and are alive today.

We in the ONDP have very different priorities for how public money is spent. Instead of boondoggles and rewarding their donors, public money must be spent to serve the public good, and that includes all levels of health care, including mental health care.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Matthew Rae): Further debate?

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: I'm really proud to stand here today to speak to this motion, which I fully support. I want to be absolutely clear that we have to get two things right in Ontario: We need to recognize that mental health care is health care, and it should be covered under our public, universal system. People in Ontario are struggling. They deserve our support as they navigate Ontario's broken and disconnected mental health care system, and they're getting little to no support from this Conservative government.

But, Speaker, I want to be clear that this Conservative government is not the only one who we need to wag our

finger at. The Liberals have also failed Ontarians. Between the Liberals and Conservatives, we have seen the mental health system absolutely disintegrate: emergency wait times, court backlogs, chronic homelessness and addictions, the violence in our schools. What would have happened if we'd adequately invested in the system? The blame has to be shared, but we have to be able to look forward as well. Before I do so, we need to also recognize that for 15 years, the Liberals did not step up to delivering the programs that we needed. Under the Liberals, the wait times got longer and longer. They failed to establish mental health standards in Ontario, and today, there are more people who are now needing mental health supports than ever before.

The Liberals worsened the funding crisis in children's mental health services. They failed to provide base funding for care agencies for more than 10 years, and they coupled this with chronic underfunding. Under the Liberal government, wait-lists for children to access mental health services ballooned up to 12,000 and it took up to 18 months for a child to get service. What we also know is that the Conservatives have made it worse: 30,000 kids in Ontario now are waiting and languishing on wait-lists that will take them 2.5 years to get any type of service. Can you imagine, if you're in crisis? The government has failed so horribly.

The Liberals have failed to act on the 2010 recommendations that came from an all-party resolution on how to create one umbrella organization to address this and coordinate the service. They failed to do so. We now are asking the Conservative government to step up and do what the Liberals failed to do and support this motion.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Matthew Rae): Further debate?

MPP Jill Andrew: Today, we, the NDP, are asking the Conservative government to say yes to our motion demanding universal access to mental health services like counselling and therapy in Ontario. You should only need your health card for mental health supports, never your credit card. That's why we are calling for humanity, as well as a policy that will not only save lives but is actually good for our economy.

I want to draw everyone's attention to two examples of groups of folks desperate for mental health care who can't always afford it. The government eliminated the compensation program that provided victims of violent crime and sexual abuse life-enhancing supports they desperately needed, like counselling. They can no longer get the counselling and therapy services they need or that were previously awarded when the compensation program was slashed. In other words, survivors are already violated by their perpetrators and oftentimes denied their day in court due to underfunding and understaffed court rooms had to also experience having the rug pulled out from underneath them immediately by this government.

The Victim Quick Response Program? That shuts out victims who don't visit a victim service agency or go to the police within six months to report their attack. Who puts a time period on a victim's healing? Who puts a time

period on a victim's access to mental health care they need? Apparently, this government. Survivors of historical sexual abuse like child molestation are left out in the cold.

I also want to say, my Bill 61 declaring Eating Disorders Awareness Week passed unanimously, formally recognizing February 1 to 7 each year as Eating Disorders Awareness Week. Eating disorders impact your mental health, your physical health and your economic health, quite frankly. We know that it is the most lethal mental health issue, with the highest mortality rate. I say people with eating disorders, folks who are survivors of violence, need to be able to access the mental health care they need, not have to wait years, not have to wait months to access that care.

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So please, Speaker, I'm asking this government: Let's remove the barriers. Let us say yes to universal access to mental health, so that people who are living with eating disorders or people trying to piece together their life after being sexually violated can get the mental health supports they need for free, with their health card and not a credit card.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Matthew Rae): Further debate?

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: Today, the Ontario NDP is giving the Conservative government an opportunity again to say yes to making sure people can access mental health services like psychotherapy, like counselling. Since the pandemic, the need for these vital services is greater than ever and it's reaching a crisis point in many of our communities. It is no longer a question of whether we can afford to provide mental health care; it's about whether we can afford not to.

Look around and you will see the cost. You see it in the 30,000 Ontario children and youth who are currently waiting for mental health treatment—waiting up to two and a half years. This affects families and schools, it shows up in the ERs and in the court systems, but above all it affects kids' lives. That is why I brought forward legislation to secure a right to timely mental health and addiction services for Ontario's children and youth.

You see it in the huge vacancies in the community mental health sector, driven by low wages and compensation. Just a few weeks ago, a constituent from my riding, a child and adolescent psychologist, wrote to me saying the community-based mental health care centre where she works has faced "significant challenges with hiring and retention of staff" over the last few years, due in large part to compensation disparities with other sectors in the community health care sector. This is creating a shortage of workers and setting up major barriers for patients seeking access to publicly funded mental health services.

We see the cost of inaction in homelessness and addiction crises, and again, we see the deep interconnection of housing and mental health. We know that affordable housing improves mental health outcomes and can decrease the need for emergency treatment services for individuals with serious mental health conditions. We need to do more on housing—supportive housing, deeply

affordable housing, rent-geared-to-income, reinstating real rent control measures—because without housing, there can be no mental health care.

Finally, Speaker, I've tabled legislation calling on this Conservative government to declare Maternal Mental Health Day, which has passed second reading and is at committee and has been sitting at committee for over a year and a half. This is such a small step, so I urge the government to take action and pass that bill as well, because mental health care is health care, and it's time we treat it as such.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Matthew Rae): Further debate?

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Today, this House can affirm that mental health care is health care. There's an ever-growing need for mental health care in Ontario, particularly for vulnerable Canadians, including children. Data from the CMHO shows that 36% of Ontario parents have sought help for their child; of those who did, four in 10 didn't receive the help they needed or are still awaiting treatment. Some 30,000 children are waiting and possibly on a 2.5-year wait-list.

Mental health care is compassionate, but it's also an upstream investment. The average wait time for subsidized counselling has grown to six months, with some waiting as long as 12 months for access to these essential services. What are parents supposed to do when they can't access services? In London, nine children were surrendered to CAS because they couldn't access mental health supports in the community.

I was honoured to table legislation in this House in 2021, Bill 277, to recognize the groundbreaking work of Dr. Cheryl Forchuk and her smart devices for mental health. It was an upstream investment which would empower people with mental health care supports in their hands. It costs \$16,000 per year, as opposed to \$150,000 to \$200,000 per year for a mental health care bed, and this government voted it down.

CMHA in my city has grappled with having to lay off 80 jobs and slash their leadership team as funding from this government has not kept up with demand. They have a \$2.6-million shortfall.

It's important to note as well that workers in this sector earn 30% less than other health care workers. These mental health care workers often see their own clients at the food bank.

I just want to quote Tischa Forster, president of OPSEU Local 133: "There is no health without mental health. There is no health for people who have nowhere to go to get help. Mental health care workers save lives."

I urge this House to vote that kids can't wait and that mental health care can't wait.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Matthew Rae): Further debate?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: I'm glad to have this opportunity this afternoon to address the opposition day motion on behalf of the government side. As we all know, the government already funds mental health. I'm proud to

share with you the many examples of investments that the Ontario government has made to fund mental health.

I want to start with the area of mental health for youth and children, and I'll start with a quote from Dr. Jo Henderson. Dr. Henderson is the executive director of Youth Wellness Hubs Ontario, and this is what Dr. Henderson has to say about the youth wellness hub in west Toronto:

"I'm thrilled to welcome Yorktown Family Services and their network partners into the Youth Wellness Hubs Ontario network. I am grateful to the government of Ontario and the collaborative community partnerships that have made the development of this hub possible. This critical investment provides young people in west Toronto with an inclusive, welcoming space where they can walk in and access a full range of integrated mental health, substance use health, primary care, housing, employment, recreation, and other support services that meet their individual level of need. Together we continue to work towards positive outcomes with and for all youth in Ontario."

That's just one example of one youth wellness hub in Ontario. In fact, there are 22 youth wellness hubs across the province, and here they are: Algoma, central Toronto, Chatham-Kent, eastern Champlain, Haliburton county, Kenora, KFLA regional, London-Middlesex, Malton, Niagara region, North Simcoe, Renfrew county, Sagamok Anishnawbek First Nation, Sarnia Lambton, Scarborough, Sudbury, Thorncliffe Park, Timmins, Toronto east, Wellington-Guelph, west Toronto, and Windsor and Essex county.

There are so many youth wellness hubs because, as we know and as I said, the government of Ontario already funds mental health. At a youth wellness hub, you can get all kinds of services. For example, you can get primary health care, you can get peer support, you can receive services for employment or education, but most importantly for the purposes of this debate, you can receive health services that are mental health services, including substance abuse services.

Here's what you won't get at a youth wellness hub: you won't get free needles and you won't get free illegal drugs, because that's not how you treat mental illness.

Now, we know the opposition will disagree with us. We know that the opposition wants to treat mental illness in that way, but we've heard from the moms and dads of Ontario. They don't want the dangers of drug injection sites near their children, and they don't want the danger of drug injection sites near their schools. That is why the government is proposing to impose a 200-metre protection zone around every school and child care centre in Ontario, because we don't want drug injection sites near our schools and we don't want them near our daycare centres.

Let's talk a little bit more about what the government is doing in the area of mental health. About two weeks ago, the government announced that it is partnering with the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health to expand access to the provincial early psychosis intervention programs. Psychosis is a condition which causes people the inability

to distinguish between what is real and what is not. This program treats people between the ages of 14 and 35 who are experiencing early-phase psychosis. It helps provide them with the care they need, and this program is offered in partnership with the Slight Family Centre for Youth in Transition.

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Let's talk about another example: the London-Middlesex Youth Wellness Hub. The main office is at 332 Richmond Street in London, but services are not limited to that location. It's a hub, and that means it has spokes, so services are offered at the main centre but also at other locations. There are structured activities, such as educational programs, and there are unstructured activities, such as drop-in recreation. You can get education, housing, training and even referrals to employment opportunities. There is a peer support program and there is counselling for mental health issues.

Originally, there were only 10 youth wellness hubs, but under this government, the original 10 were expanded, and now they've grown to at least 22 fully funded networks. Youth wellness hubs are fully funded by the province of Ontario. However, as with many health-related organizations, the youth wellness hubs are also supplemented by generous donations.

Philanthropic donors to the youth wellness hub organizations include the following generous organizations and people: the Gramm Boeckh Foundation, CAMH Foundation, the JP Bickell Foundation, the Daymark Foundation, the Bell-Graham Boeckh Foundation Partnership, the Graham Burton Foundation, the Gordon and Ruth Gooder Charitable Foundation, the Longo family charitable foundation, Medavie Foundation, McConnell Foundation, Unilever-Dove, the Slight Family Foundation, Jamie and Patsy Anderson, the Balsam Foundation, the Joyce Family Foundation, the Moffat family and RBC Foundation.

In addition to direct funding through the Ministry of Health, the youth wellness hubs also get funding through the Ontario Minister of Education, Ontario's Mental Health and Addictions Centre of Excellence, and the Knowledge Institute on Child and Youth Mental Health and Addictions.

Let's now turn our attention to the dedicated Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions. Premier Ford is the first Premier in the history of the province of Ontario to create a ministry specifically dedicated to mental health and addictions. Our first Minister of Mental Health and Addictions has tackled his responsibilities with zeal. Not content to rest on his remarkable experience as a lawyer, the minister has recently completed a doctorate in the area of mental health and addictions. He is not only the first Minister of Mental Health and Addictions, he is also the first such minister to have a doctorate degree in mental health and addictions.

Let's talk about another great example of how the Ontario government is creating more and more teams to assist people who are suffering from mental health issues. In September, the government announced a \$2.7-million investment to create a new mobile crisis response team for

the city of Barrie. This new mobile crisis response team was one of three created. The mobile response team in Barrie will make it easier for people suffering from a mental health crisis to avoid an unnecessary emergency room visit. Instead, people facing a mental health crisis can get the help they need through the mobile response team. This will provide assistance where and when it is needed.

The new mobile response team in Barrie is called the Community Alternative Response Engagement, or CARE for short. The team consists of paramedicine and mental health crisis workers who can provide immediate support during a mental health crisis. The support might come in the form of an intervention or a de-escalation. It might come in the form of connecting people to the community-based supports for primary care. It might also come in the form of connecting people with the Canadian Mental Health Association and giving follow-up care within 72 hours of an intervention.

According to Lynne Cheliak, the Simcoe county branch director of service operations for the Canadian Mental Health Association—she says the following: “The launch of the Simcoe County Community Alternative Response Engagement (CARE) program marks a pivotal moment for our community. With the Ministry of Health’s support and our close collaboration with Barrie Police Services and the County of Simcoe Paramedic Services, we’re creating a future where mental health and addiction services are accessible, responsive and deeply integrated into the fabric of our community. This program is more than just a service—it’s a promise to our residents that they will receive the care they need precisely when they need it.” That is a quote from Lynne Cheliak, the Simcoe county branch director of service operations for the Canadian Mental Health Association.

Speaker, the CARE team will benefit from the addictions recovery fund, which is \$8 million over three years for three mobile crisis response teams: one in Lambton county, one in Thunder Bay and the one in Simcoe county. These three mobile response teams are in addition to whatever other emergency response teams are already available in those areas.

During these comments, I’ve only provided a few examples of the mental health response from the government of Ontario. It’s all part of the Roadmap to Wellness, which includes an investment of over \$3.8 billion over 10 years to provide mental health and addictions care and to create new services for people in Ontario who might suffer from mental health issues.

In the 2024 budget, entitled Building a Better Ontario, an additional \$396 million was visited over three years to expanding existing mental health and addictions services and programs. It’s also intended to improve access to such programs.

Speaker, during this brief speech, I’ve only been able to touch on what the government has done so far, and in the near future the government will introduce legislation regarding HART Hubs. HART stands for Homeless and Addiction Recovery Treatment Hub. This will be one

more remarkable step in the progress that this government is making in the area of mental health. This government will establish 19 HART Hubs across the province of Ontario, modelled on the very successful youth wellness hub program.

I look forward to helping introduce more initiatives from this government, and I look forward to the debate that I am sure that we intend to have on that piece of legislation.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Matthew Rae): Further debate?

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Let me start by saying that was some shameful conflation by the parliamentary assistant for health. We can support people with substance abuse in the province and support children’s mental health needs without pitting people in need against one another.

I’m very pleased to rise on behalf of the constituents of Ottawa West–Nepean today to speak to this NDP motion calling for mental health care to be universally accessible and publicly funded, because I think we need to start by acknowledging that mental health is health and mental health care is health care.

In Canada, we believe in and we support the idea that health care should be publicly funded and that it should be accessible to everybody, with no account paid to your income without having to produce your credit card, but that’s just not true for mental health care, even though it is health care.

We know that mental health is a significant challenge for everybody right now. I saw that knocking on doors in 2022. It didn’t matter the type of neighbourhood, the income level or the age level; as I was speaking to people across the riding, many people were expressing that they have mental health challenges. But we know it has a particular impact on our youth, and we are just not seeing the supports that our children need. They are definitely not available in schools, Speaker. Only one in 10 schools has regularly scheduled access to a mental health professional and half of our schools have no access at all. Kids are expressing their need to see a mental health professional, and they are waiting, in some cases, to the end of the following school year, which is shameful. When our kids say they need help, that help should be there.

But that help is also not available in the community. We have wait lists of 30,000 children and youth who have said they need help, and that help is not available for them. They are waiting up to two and a half years to receive that help. There are 200,000 children and youth in Ontario who have serious mental health challenges, who are not connected in any way to a doctor, a psychologist, counselling or therapy of any kind. That’s why it’s incredibly important that we invest in our community organizations and interdisciplinary health care teams in Ontario with the appropriate level of funding, so that every person, every child, every senior, every adult who says they need help gets the help that they need.

1400

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Matthew Rae): Further debate?

Miss Monique Taylor: I'm honoured to be able to join today's debate asking the Conservatives to recognize mental health as health and to ensure that the funding is available.

Speaker, I have been the critic for children since my time here in 2011, and I have fought the Liberals on mental health—I have now begun fighting the Conservatives for the past six years, and things have only gone from bad to worse. When the Liberals were in power, we had 12,000 kids on wait-lists, with an up-to-18-month wait. Now, after six years of the Conservative government, we have over 30,000 kids on the wait-list, with an up-to-two-and-a-half-year wait.

This affects each and every one of our families. The statistics are quite stunning, right across the province. As many as one in five children in Ontario will experience some form of mental health problem. These are the same kids who are not able to get the services they need, and as these children grow, mental health continues to grow with them. And 17% of children ages 2 to 5 start to meet the diagnosis criteria at that time. So we can get to these kids quite early, instead of watching these mental health disorders continue to grow. If we were to provide early-onset care for our kids and families, we would ensure that the spaces were there and available to them.

I want to be clear: Per capita investment in health care is \$1,361 per person, but for mental health care it's only \$16.45. Speaker, \$16.45 per capita is not near enough to ensure that we're investing in our kids—and if there is nothing that you think is more important than investing in our children, we are going to continue to fail.

We are watching what's happening in our communities when it comes to the teenagers, when it comes to adults. This is a growing problem, and COVID made it worse. There were no investments to ensure that there were intense services for families, and now we're seeing what's happening in our communities getting worse and worse every day.

Thank you for the opportunity.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Matthew Rae): Further debate?

Mr. Wayne Gates: Today I rise on behalf of the people of Niagara to address the crisis that's harming our families, our youth and our entire community: the lack of adequate mental health care across Ontario. This crisis doesn't discriminate by age, income or, quite frankly, by party lines. It impacts every one of us.

In Niagara, we're feeling this pain first-hand. The wait-list for children's mental health services stretches out far too long, and it's unacceptable wait times for families who are desperate for help.

This didn't happen overnight. It's the direct result of years of neglect. That responsibility lands squarely on the Premier's desk.

That's why when I tabled a mental health bill a few years ago, we got all-party support to secure funding to operate 24/7 counselling programs for mental health and addictions—and it was in Niagara Falls, it was in St. Catharines, it was in Welland. The government supported

it. All parties supported it. Guess what, four years later, we don't have? We don't have the funding—they still don't have the 24/7.

I want to talk about an issue that we had with young people. We have a bridge in St. Catharines—by the way, it's called the Bill Burgoyne bridge. Young people—as young as 15, 16, 17, 18, 19—were going to this bridge and they were taking their lives because they couldn't get any help; they couldn't get anybody to sit down with and talk to them because they didn't have 24/7. They went to the emergency, and they left the emergency because they couldn't get help, and they walked to the Bill Burgoyne bridge, and do you know what they did? They jumped off the bridge. And do you know what they did to fix it? They made it higher on the Bill Burgoyne bridge, so people can't jump off the Bill Burgoyne bridge. They can go to the Garden City Skyway. They can go to any bridge.

What should they have done? They should have invested in health care, mental health.

My time's up; I've got 25 seconds. So I want to say that it made no sense to me, and I want to say to the minister—the minister is here today, and I'm glad he's here, but I'll tell you where he should be: He should be here, right here, in this Legislature listening to the mental health issues that we are raising today, not sitting in the Legislature.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Matthew Rae): Further debate?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I support this motion because, in my 11 years as an MPP, I have seen too many Londoners who have been failed by the gaps in our mental health system. Every day, we see the consequences of not providing universal coverage for mental health care services. We see it in overwhelmed ERs, in rising demands on emergency services, in our classrooms; we see it in unnecessary suffering and sometimes suicide.

Community-based mental health services are underfunded and simply cannot meet the demand. In London, CMHA Thames Valley is facing a \$2.6-million deficit this year, which has led to staff layoffs and longer waits. The agency is seeing more people seeking mental health services, people whose needs are more acute because they have gone too long without. Many do not have work benefits and can't afford to pay \$200 a session for a private therapist. Those with benefits will get partial coverage for maybe six sessions. There are two London agencies that provide subsidized counselling only because of the generosity of the United Way. They can't serve the rising number of people who walk through their doors. Daya Counselling and Family Service Thames Valley told me that only 15% to 20% of their clients are able to pay the regular rate; the rest must wait for subsidy, which can take anywhere from six to seven months to a year or more.

The consequences are especially dire for children and youth, when early intervention is the most critical. Teachers are reporting more violence in classrooms, often because students are not getting the community mental health supports they urgently need. Parents are surrendering their kids to the CAS, desperately hoping their kids will get into treatment.

No Londoner, no Ontarian, should have to wait for vital health care services or be forced to pay out of pocket. Mental health care is health care.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Matthew Rae): Further debate?

M. Guy Bourgouin: Vous le savez : la santé mentale fait partie de la santé. Je remercie ma chef d'avoir amené un plan pour la santé universelle en Ontario, de proposer un système de santé universel.

Ce que je veux porter à votre attention c'est que très souvent, on oublie—moi je les appelle le peuple oublié—les personnes du Nord, les Premières Nations, quand on parle de toutes les personnes qui vivent dans des communautés isolées. Et ce que je veux porter à votre attention c'est, imaginez encore—vous avez entendu souvent mon collègue et moi parler de la qualité de l'eau potable. Qu'on parle du monde qui est sans-abris dans des conditions de moins 30, moins 40 et plus; ou bien donc, qu'on parle des loyers ou des maisons qui sont bâties pour six personnes, puis qu'on vit deux ou trois générations là-dedans avec de la moisissure, avec des conditions affreuses.

On voit aussi qu'on a tellement « d'issues » sociales que les communautés demandent que dans chaque communauté—écoute, dans mes communautés, ils demandent tous d'avoir un centre de santé mentale.

Mon collègue de Kiiwetinoong a parlé des enfants qui ont fait un pacte de suicide avec—à toutes leurs dates d'anniversaires, qu'ils se suicidaient. On a vu des jeunes qui voyaient tellement en noir—des enfants, des jeunes hommes, des jeunes dames qui voyaient tellement en noir que la seule solution était le suicide. C'est une réalité qui se passe en Ontario puis dans le nord de l'Ontario. Je dis souvent « loin des yeux, loin du cœur », mais c'est une réalité qui se passe ici, puis c'est un peuple oublié.

Je demande au gouvernement de faire la bonne chose. Votez pour cette motion parce que ça peut changer des vies. Ça va sauver des vies.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Matthew Rae): Further debate?

Mr. Joel Harden: I want to thank the Leader of the Opposition for putting this motion on the table, and I want to underline a particular thing she said. I want to salute the community organizations right now on the front line in Ontario's mental health crisis. They are the ones holding it down, and the mental health workers, at the outreach points. They are the ones holding it down, and, frankly, Speaker, I'm worried about them. I'm worried about them because the amount of burnout in street outreach work and mental health work alarms me.

1410

Despite that, I want to talk about a success story. I want to talk about a group called Soul Space in Ottawa. It's a grassroots network of harm reduction and street outreach workers who got together to fund respite services for themselves, to have excursions, to have workshops, to simply talk over coffee about the people they had lost, clients they had lost, friends they had lost who worked in this field.

I wanted to say for the House that we are all going to agree, I think, that it is a tragedy that every single second of this day, there are people, our neighbours, who are thinking about ending their own life. That is a tragedy, that we lose people to suicide and we lose people to addictions and overdose. But the double tragedy, Speaker, is that for those people who step forward to work in the field of mental health, if we are losing them to burnout, that is a preventable problem this House can solve—a preventable problem.

Soul Space is an organization supported by First United Church back home in Ottawa Centre. It is a grassroots network of harm reduction and street outreach workers, but it needs to be funded by Health Ontario, just like another fabulous organization I want to mention: Counseling Connect, an organization that right now, in our city, is supporting over 700 people a month. When someone is in mental health crisis, all you need to do is pick up the phone or write an email, and this organization can get you access to cognitive behavioural therapy within 24 to 48 hours of intake, because they're networked to 20 different community organizations that are stretching the resources they have as best they can to offer people support. They have saved lives. I heard about a mom and a son who had gone to our children's hospital. They had actually been helped at the point of crisis, and the son is making a recovery.

But let's fund those community solutions. Let's not make them work on shoestrings and let's make sure everybody wakes up tomorrow wanting to continue their lives to make Ontario a great place.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Matthew Rae): Further debate?

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's a pleasure to join the debate this afternoon. I'm bringing the voices and the stories of two families to the floor of this Legislature: Kaitlyn Roth, who died by suicide in 2022—the help was not there when she asked for it—and Jaqui McDermott, who also died by suicide because the help was not there. It wasn't affordable. It wasn't accessible. It wasn't there—just absent.

I've been working with both of these young women's parents, who are working hard to turn their grief into advocacy, and they're watching here today. They want to see a response from this government that would prevent future parents from going through this kind of pain and this kind of anguish.

The wait-list data from Ontario alone in 2020 found that the average wait time for counselling and therapy was 67 days. That was in 2020. In some cases, wait times for intensive treatments are now up to two and a half years. Researchers called this “essentially irrelevant.” There's no help. There's no help when you have the courage to ask. There's no help or assistance when you actually have to struggle to get through a day. There's no help or assistance for parents who are watching their children and waiting for them to self-harm or for them to not to be here anymore.

We have an opportunity here as legislators. This is why we get elected. This is why we come to this place. This is what our communities want. They want leadership on mental health. This is a motion that you can say “yes” to

today. It would be the right thing to do. You would be applauded for doing so. Then we could get together as legislators, working across the aisle to make sure that mental health is a priority.

The cost to our economy is one thing, and the research is profound on this: The return on investment for ensuring that people have access to timely, accessible and trauma-informed mental health services is exponential. Let's do the right thing today. Let's start off this Legislature in a spirit of camaraderie in keeping people alive, because it is definitely worth fighting for.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Matthew Rae): Further debate?

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Today I rise on behalf of St. Catharines residents, on behalf of those stuck on waiting lists for mental health services and for those who experience barrier after barrier in trying to access the help they need. In St. Catharines, like much of the province, access to mental health services is highly fragmented, leaving families to navigate a complicated system that often fails to deliver care in a timely manner.

Just last week, the CEO of Pathstone Mental Health, a major service provider that assists families across the whole Niagara region, stated that we're seeing the beginnings of a major upswing in the need for children's mental health support. This is highly alarming. He went on to say that 70% of all the mental health and addictions issues stem from childhood trauma and mental health concerns that are treatable and, with early intervention, can change the course of a young person's life.

Since January 2023, Pathstone's walk-in clinics alone saw just over 1,500 children and youth walk through their doors for services, and those numbers are steadily increasing.

It's no secret that accessing mental health services is a costly endeavour, one that families, especially with multiple children, cannot afford. It is ridiculous to expect the family to dish out hundreds of dollars after paying \$2,500 or more for rent, \$2,000 or more for groceries and extra activities, utility bills, day-to-day necessities—this list goes on and on.

All children deserve consistent, reliable and equitable mental health support, regardless of the economic circumstances that are out of their control. We need a comprehensive system to support the wonderful providers, like Pathstone, who are doing their absolute best with the resources they have. Universal mental health care is a non-sense, practical solution to reduce strain on health care systems and build healthier, more resilient communities.

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

MPP Jamie West: I rise today in support of the motion that mental health is health care. It's time that the Ontario government delivered mental health care at no cost to the people of Ontario, because right now, most people in the province can't afford to pay for services like counselling and psychotherapy, and cost shouldn't be a barrier to accessing care. As the Leader of the Opposition has said

many, many times, "Health care should not stop at the neck."

Free mental health care helps our children and our youth, our workers and our workplaces. It helps our overflowing emergency rooms. It helps all of us, Speaker. It helps us be better partners, better parents, better friends, better neighbours.

For men in particular, mental health care can be extremely difficult. Statistically, in Canada, four of every five suicides are male. And before I became an MPP, I worked in traditionally male-dominated fields like construction and mining, and these are fields where, in the old days, we "rubbed dirt in it." We didn't talk about our feelings. We didn't ask for help.

But over the last decade, there have been a lot of movements to talk about health. I'm reminded everyday about Howie Mandel saying we need to talk about mental care the way we talk about dental care. And that's worked, but the system isn't there—isn't funded and available—so as we learn to talk about our feelings, we learn to talk about the need for mental health. If we're hiding it—that's a strategy, hiding. It's a strategy that works until it doesn't, until the facade crumbles, until people break, or the people withdraw, or they self-medicate with drugs or alcohol, or they harm themselves, and until their families and friends also bear the consequences.

It can be hard to ask for help. It can be hard to know when you need help. It can be hard to figure out where to get help. But those are barriers that already stand in the way; let's not allow cost and access to be another.

And just in closing, Speaker, I want to say that I'm distracted while speaking because as we're talking about mental health today, my friend Karen is burying her son, who died by suicide.

This is urgent. We're all feeling it—all of us around the province. We need access to mental health care. Mental health care is health care.

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

Mr. John Vanthof: I rise in support of the motion put forward by the opposition NDP that that government provide full, barrier-free mental health care to all people in this province.

Our current health care system has some problems. We all recognize that, but the principle which we fight for everyday still remains: You don't have a barrier if you have a broken leg or you have a bad heart; the health care system, regardless of your income, will take care of you. We don't currently have that for mental health. We don't. And as a result, people in this province die from mental health complications. That should never be.

1420

One other point I'd like to bring forward: A few nights ago—some of my colleagues attended too—we attended the Mining Matters reception at the Sheraton. I was talking to a couple of reps from the biggest mining company in my riding, Agnico Eagle—a great company. I asked them, "Barring whatever the government's doing now for mining, what's the one thing that could make your com-

pany better?" Her reply was, "You can't build a healthy company without healthy workers. If you look where your riding is, John, in Kirkland Lake, in Cochrane, the services don't exist. They're not there."

There are good programs—the member opposite mentioned some of them—but they're here and there, some great services. But the rest of the province? They're not there. That's what this motion is trying to fix. That's what the NDP would do as a government to make sure that mental health isn't a barrier to someone's life to be a success, to help this province and to help their families.

Mental health should never be a barrier and right now it is in this province. We have the ability and the power, and I believe we need to fix it.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: I want to thank my colleagues, first of all, for their contributions this afternoon. My goodness, we heard some very difficult but also some very important things here today in this debate.

One of the things we heard over and over again is that heartbreaking story for so many when you finally have come to that place of courage and realization to ask for help, and there's no help to be had. This is an opportunity to make change by passing this motion, literally life-saving legislation, I would argue, legislation and a change that would make a difference in people's lives—not maybe, not some day, not some time, but now.

I've talked a lot in the last few weeks and have been thinking a lot about what makes good policy and good laws in this place. I always think about two things: one, empathy; and secondly, evidence. That's when we make good law and good policy and good changes.

We've heard here today a lot of empathy. Also, from the government side, we hear a lot of empathy. I think probably not one person in this House doesn't have some experience in their own family or in their own life with mental illness, with mental health issues and with the difficulty of accessing that care. I think people are empathetic in this place to what folks are going through around this province.

There's evidence too—and we heard about that here as well today—plenty of evidence that says that the sooner somebody can get help, the better, that says very clearly that the longer you have to wait, the worse the outcomes are.

We talked as well about the impact on our health care system, the costs that are going up every day of more and more people ending up in emergency rooms, the cost to our economy—our House leader here just spoke to that, about the economic cost that industry is experiencing across this province of people not being able to access mental health services. There's lots of evidence out there, there are dollars that you can actually see, if that's what it takes to make an argument that others will accept, but the empathy I think is there as well.

I want to urge the government members opposite to work together with us in the official opposition to do something truly transformative. There are very few oppor-

tunities, I think, in this place to do something that, as I said earlier, is going to change people's lives—not some time, not some day, not maybe, but absolutely. This is one of those things.

I meet people all the time—and I know that you do, too—who tell me that they sought care. They looked for it. They went looking for that support when they needed it, and they could not find it. It was not there. I, myself, have had to sit in a parking lot outside of an emergency room with a child who needed desperate care and there's nowhere to get it except in those doors. When you get there—and that is the desperation you're feeling as a parent. There is nothing else like it, that helplessness. I don't want anybody to feel that way, and I know way too many people who do right now.

I want to ask the government to work with us to pass this motion. It's simple; it's straightforward; it makes sense. Health care does not stop at the neck. Our health issues don't stop at the neck. Our funding for health care shouldn't stop at the neck either.

I want to leave folks who are watching us perhaps with a few final words because the government doesn't sound like they're going to support this motion, but I don't want you to give up hope. I don't want you to give up hope because we, on this side, are going to keep fighting to make sure that this is a reality—to make this change.

And in the words of the great founder of our universal health care system in this country, "Courage, my friends; 'tis not too late to build a better world." We can do it. We can do it together. We just need your help.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): MPP Stiles has moved opposition day number 1. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

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

All those opposed will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

Call the members in for a 10-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1427 to 1437.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): MPP Stiles has moved opposition day number 1. All those in favour of the motion will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Andrew, Jill	Glover, Chris	Schreiner, Mike
Armstrong, Teresa J.	Gretzky, Lisa	Shamji, Adil
Bell, Jessica	Harden, Joel	Shaw, Sandy
Bourgouin, Guy	Hsu, Ted	Stevens, Jennifer (Jennie)
Bowman, Stephanie	Karpoche, Bhutla	Stiles, Marit
Clancy, Aislinn	Kernaghan, Terence	Tabuns, Peter
Collard, Lucille	Mantha, Michael	Taylor, Monique
Fife, Catherine	McMahon, Mary-Margaret	Vanhof, John
Fraser, John	Pasma, Chandra	Vaugeois, Lise
French, Jennifer K.	Rakocevic, Tom	West, Jamie
Gates, Wayne	Sattler, Peggy	Wong-Tam, Kristyn

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): All those opposed to the motion will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Allsopp, Tyler	Hardeman, Ernie	Riddell, Brian
Anand, Deepak	Harris, Mike	Romano, Ross
Babikian, Aris	Hogarth, Christine	Sabawy, Sheref
Bailey, Robert	Jones, Trevor	Sandhu, Amarjot
Bethlenfalvy, Peter	Jordan, John	Sarrazin, Stéphane
Bouma, Will	Kanapathi, Logan	Saunderson, Brian
Bresee, Ric	Kerzner, Michael S.	Scott, Laurie
Byers, Rick	Kusendova-Bashta, Natalia	Skelly, Donna
Calandra, Paul	Leardi, Anthony	Smith, David
Cho, Stan	Lecce, Stephen	Smith, Graydon
Clark, Steve	Martin, Robin	Smith, Laura
Coe, Lorne	McCarthy, Todd J.	Surma, Kinga
Crawford, Stephen	Mulroney, Caroline	Tangri, Nina
Cuzzetto, Rudy	Oosterhoff, Sam	Thanigasalam, Vijay
Dixon, Jess	Pang, Billy	Thompson, Lisa M.
Dowie, Andrew	Parsa, Michael	Tibollo, Michael A.
Downey, Doug	Piccini, David	Triantafilopoulos, Effie J.
Flack, Rob	Pierre, Natalie	Wai, Daisy
Gallagher Murphy, Dawn	Pinsonneault, Steve	Yakabuski, John
Grewal, Hardeep Singh	Quinn, Nolan	
Hamid, Zee	Rae, Matthew	

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Trevor Day): The ayes are 33; the nays are 61.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): I declare the motion lost.

Motion negatived.

ROYAL ASSENT

SANCTION ROYALE

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): I beg to inform the House that in the name of His Majesty the King, Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor has been pleased to assent to a certain bill in her office.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Julia Douglas): The following is the title of the bill to which Her Honour did assent:

An Act to amend various statutes with respect to employment and labour and other matters / Loi modifiant diverses lois relatives à l'emploi et au travail et à d'autres questions.

HOUSE SITTINGS

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): I beg to inform the House that, pursuant to standing order 9(g), the Clerk has received written notice from the government House leader's office indicating that a temporary change in the weekly meeting schedule of the House is required. Therefore, the afternoon routine on Wednesday, October 30, 2024, shall commence at 1 p.m.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

TIME ALLOCATION

Mr. Steve Clark: I move that, pursuant to standing order 50 and notwithstanding any other standing order or special order of the House relating to Bill 197, An Act to

amend the Highway Traffic Act, and Bill 194, An Act to enact the Enhancing Digital Security and Trust Act, 2024 and to make amendments to the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act respecting privacy protection measures;

That when Bill 197 is next called as a government order, the Speaker shall put every question necessary to dispose of the second reading stage of the bill without further debate or amendment; and

That, upon receiving second reading, Bill 197 shall be referred to the Standing Committee on Heritage, Infrastructure and Cultural Policy; and

That the Standing Committee on Heritage, Infrastructure and Cultural Policy be authorized to meet on Wednesday, November 13, 2024, at 11 a.m. until 12 p.m. to receive a 20-minute opening statement on Bill 197 by the Minister of Transportation or designate, followed by 40 minutes of questions and answers, divided into two rounds of 7.5 minutes for the government members, two rounds of 7.5 minutes for the official opposition members, and two rounds of five minutes for the independent member of the committee; and

That the committee be authorized to meet on Wednesday, November 13, from 1 p.m. until 5 p.m. for the purpose of public hearings on Bill 197; and

That the Clerk of the Standing Committee on Heritage, Infrastructure and Cultural Policy, in consultation with the committee Chair, be authorized to arrange the following with regard to Bill 197:

—That the deadline for requests to appear be 5 p.m. on Tuesday, November 5, 2024; and

—That the Clerk of the Committee provide a list of all interested presenters to each member of the subcommittee and their designate following the deadline for requests to appear; and

—That, if not all interested presenters can be scheduled, each member of the subcommittee or their designate provide the Clerk of the Committee with a prioritized list of presenters to be scheduled, chosen from the list of all interested presenters, by 2 p.m. on Wednesday, November 6, 2024; and

—That witnesses shall be scheduled in groups of three for each one-hour time slot, with each presenter allotted seven minutes to make an opening statement followed by 39 minutes of questioning for all three witnesses, divided into two rounds of 7.5 minutes for the government members, two rounds of 7.5 minutes for the official opposition members, and two rounds of 4.5 minutes for the independent member of the committee; and

—That the deadline for written submissions be 6 p.m. on Wednesday, November 13, 2024; and

—That the deadline for filing amendments to the bill with the Clerk of the Committee shall be 7 p.m. on Wednesday, November 13, 2024; and

That the committee be authorized to meet on Friday, November 15, from 10 a.m. until 12 p.m., from 1 p.m. until 6 p.m., and from 7 p.m. until midnight for the purpose of clause-by-clause consideration of Bill 197; and

That on Friday, November 15, 2024, at 7 p.m., those amendments to Bill 197 which have not yet been moved shall be deemed to have been moved, and the Chair of the committee shall interrupt the proceedings and shall, without further debate or amendment, put every question necessary to dispose of all remaining sections of the bill and any amendments thereto; and at this time, the Chair shall allow one waiting period, if requested by a member of the committee, pursuant to standing order 131(a); and

That the committee shall report Bill 197 to the House no later than Monday, November 18, 2024, and if the committee fails to report the bill on that day, the bill shall be deemed passed by the committee and shall be deemed reported to and received by the House; and

That upon receiving the report of the Standing Committee on Heritage, Infrastructure and Cultural Policy on Bill 197, the Speaker shall put the question for adoption of the report forthwith; and

That upon adoption of the report, Bill 197 shall be ordered for third reading, which order may be called the same day; and

That when the order for third reading of Bill 197 is called, 55 minutes shall be allotted to debate, with 25 minutes for members of His Majesty's government, 25 minutes for members of His Majesty's loyal opposition and five minutes for the independent members as a group; and

That at the end of this time, the Speaker shall interrupt the proceedings and shall put every question necessary to dispose of the third reading stage of Bill 197 without further debate or amendment; and

That when Bill 194 is next called as a government order, the Speaker shall put every question necessary to dispose of the second reading stage of the bill without further debate or amendment; and

That, upon receiving second reading, Bill 194 shall be referred to the Standing Committee on Justice Policy; and

That the Standing Committee on Justice Policy be authorized to meet on Thursday, November 14, 2024, at 10 a.m. until 11 a.m. to receive a 20-minute opening statement on Bill 194 by the Minister of Public and Business Service Delivery and Procurement or designate, followed by 40 minutes of question and answers, divided into two rounds of 7.5 minutes for the government members, two rounds of 7.5 minutes for the official opposition members and two rounds of five minutes for the independent member of the committee; and

That the committee be authorized to meet at the following times, for the purpose of public hearings for Bill 194:

—on Thursday, November 14, from 11 a.m. until 12 noon, and from 1 p.m. until 5 p.m.; and

1450

—on Friday, November 15, from 10 a.m. until 12 noon, and from 1 p.m. until 5 p.m.; and

That the Clerk of the Standing Committee on Justice Policy, in consultation with the committee Chair, be authorized to arrange the following with regard to Bill 194:

—That the deadline for requests to appear be 5 p.m. on Wednesday, November 6, 2024; and

—That the Clerk of the Committee provide a list of all interested presenters to each member of the subcommittee and their designate following the deadline for requests to appear; and

—That, if not all interested presenters can be scheduled, each member of the subcommittee or their designate provide the Clerk of the Committee with a prioritized list of presenters to be scheduled, chosen from the list of all interested presenters, by 2 p.m. on Thursday, November 7, 2024; and

—That witnesses shall be scheduled in groups of three for each one-hour time slot, with each presenter allotted seven minutes to make an opening statement, followed by 39 minutes of questioning for all three witnesses, divided into two rounds of 7.5 minutes for the government members, two rounds of 7.5 minutes for the official opposition members and two rounds of 4.5 minutes for the independent member of the committee; and

—That the deadline for written submissions be 6 p.m. on Friday, November 15, 2024; and

—That the deadline for filing amendments to the bill with the Clerk of the Committee shall be 5 p.m. on Tuesday, November 19, 2024; and

That the committee be authorized to meet on Thursday, November 21, from 9 a.m. until 10:15 a.m., from 1 p.m. until 6 p.m., and from 7 p.m. until midnight for the purpose of clause-by-clause consideration of Bill 194; and

That on Thursday, November 21, 2024, at 7 p.m., those amendments to Bill 194 which have not yet been moved shall be deemed to have been moved, and the Chair of the committee shall interrupt the proceedings and shall, without further debate or amendment, put every question necessary to dispose of all remaining sections of the bill and any amendments thereto; and at this time, the Chair shall allow one waiting period, if requested by a member of the committee, pursuant to standing order 131(a); and

That the committee shall report Bill 194 to the House no later than Monday, November 25, 2024, and if the committee fails to report the bill on that day, the bill shall be deemed passed by the committee and shall be deemed reported to and received by the House; and

That upon receiving the report of the Standing Committee on Justice Policy on Bill 194, the Speaker shall put the question for adoption of the report forthwith; and

That upon adoption of the report, Bill 194 shall be ordered for third reading, which order may be called the same day; and

That when the order for third reading of Bill 194 is called, 55 minutes shall be allotted to debate, with 25 minutes for members of His Majesty's government, 25 minutes for members of His Majesty's loyal opposition and five minutes for the independent members as a group; and

That at the end of this time, the Speaker shall interrupt the proceedings and shall put every question necessary to dispose of the third reading stage of Bill 194 without further debate or amendment.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): The government House leader has moved government notice of motion number 25.

I recognize the government House leader.

Mr. Steve Clark: Standing order 50 allows the government House leader to move a motion with notice providing for the allocation of time to proceedings of a government bill or a substantive government motion.

This morning, for example, Bill 190 that we just heard received royal assent—at the six-and-a-half-hour mark, I moved that closure be on that bill. The official opposition and other members of the House agreed with the government. The debate closed; we actually had a third reading debate that closed on a voice vote.

This is a very similar procedure. At six and a half hours for both Bill 197 and Bill 194, we closed debate and provided a substantive motion that both programmed committee time for these two bills and also programmed third reading debate in the House. It's a measure within the standing orders—as I said at the start of the motion, under standing order 50—and New Democratic governments, Liberal governments and Conservative governments have all used this as part of getting the job done.

With that, I'll allow for debate.

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

Mr. John Vanthof: It's always an honour to speak in the House, today on a time allocation motion. This is my first opportunity to speak in the House since we've been back, and we haven't been here for so long, I almost had to consult my GPS. Getting from Cobalt to Barrie and to Toronto isn't bad, but we've been gone long enough that a few things have changed.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: The House leader.

Mr. John Vanthof: Yes, the House leader, for one. Thank you for reminding me of that. The government has appointed a different House leader. I wasn't going to do this, but since it was brought up, I would like to thank the former House leader for his service. I can honestly say this from the bottom of my heart: There is no one who has made me so angry as the former House leader and no one who I've enjoyed having a laugh with more. It's not an easy job being government House leader or opposition House leader. When the former House leader was the House leader, it certainly wasn't an easy job being an opposition House leader—he wore out a few of us—but I'd just like to thank him for his service.

So the House leader has—I'm a bit rusty; it'll take me a while. I wasn't going to start with this. The House leader has put forward a time allocation motion, basically curtailing debate. Judging from the length of the motion, actually, debate might have ended naturally in the time that he spent reading that motion.

I'm going to back up a little bit about what actually causes time allocation, because it used to be—long before any of us were here, I think—that a bill could be debated until you ran out of speakers. That didn't always happen, because the party of the government and the parties of the opposition, if there was more than one, would meet and

discuss which bills they could agree to pass through the House more quickly, and on which bills they obviously disagree. The way to express your disagreement was on the bills that—I can give you one that we would have, if there was no such thing: the greenbelt, right?

Past governments have introduced the ability to do the time allocation motions; have made time allocation motions stronger, basically to curtail debate on bills that were egregious. But it's somewhat perplexing—although I'm not saying these are the greatest bills in the world, and we are going to discuss them as part of this. But the need for time allocation on these—the government House leader said it in his remarks that a previous bill just passed through this House, so it's not that we couldn't work together to avoid the need for time allocation.

The most egregious part about this time allocation motion is limiting third reading debate to—an hour?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: One hour.

Mr. John Vanthof: One hour. When you bring people forward for committee to actually talk about—our job as legislators is to know a little about a lot of things. The reason why committee is so important is that you bring people who have extensive knowledge in the issues that are being discussed. You bring these people to committee, and then, hopefully, if there are changes that need to be made in the bill, the government puts amendments. Hopefully, actually, the government would at some point accept an opposition amendment, you know? Then, once the bill is amended, it comes back to the House for another debate, so you can make sure that everyone understands it—so the people who are watching understand it, so our constituents understand it when we go to explain it to them. But this bill, with this time allocation motion, on two bills, it limits that to an hour. So that kind of tells you that the government isn't really planning on taking the people who come to committee seriously. Now, I can't foretell that, but just the way that the time allocation is put forward kind of shows that.

1500

It's not just myself and our NDP colleagues who are opposed to unneeded, unnecessary time allocation. No, it's not. Actually, we have some pretty influential people who have, in the past, been opposed to time allocation. One of them is the current government House leader. How things change. It seems that the principles stay on the opposition side of the House and the power moves over.

Here is a prime example: November 14, 2017. This is much more eloquent than I could ever put together, Speaker. I'm not known for my eloquent speaking style, so that's why I have to quote it to oblige the member from Leeds–Grenville. November 14, 2017: “It's an honour to speak, normally, on behalf of my residents of Leeds–Grenville. I wish it wasn't yet another guillotine motion”—guillotine motion. He referred to a time allocation motion as a guillotine motion. I continue: “Another guillotine motion brought forward by a government hard-wired to conduct business through time allocation.” He was speaking about the Liberals at the time, but Liberal, Tory, same old story.

Back to the quote: “I guess, Speaker, it’s what we have come to expect from a government that refuses to work cooperatively with the opposition”—and again, this is not me saying this, so, please—“and has no clue on how to manage their business. In fact, they didn’t even put up a speaker after they moved this guillotine motion.”

“Guillotine motion” is a very, very strong word. I remember the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke used it and he did the slash at the same time. He was excellent at it.

But the fact is that the government House leader, on November 14, 2017, was right. It was unnecessary, unwarranted—

Ms. Catherine Fife: Undemocratic.

Mr. John Vanthof: —undemocratic. Because we just passed a bill this morning—was it this morning?

Interjection: Yes.

Mr. John Vanthof: And the government House leader used that as an example of how the government can work. And then he tried to say that the time allocation motion was an example of the same—it’s not. It’s the exact opposite, and it’s totally unwarranted. But unfortunately, it sets a precedent that, even on bills that—we may not be supportive of the principle behind all the bills, but even on bills that we could work with, the government chooses to silence the democratic process by which our Parliament should work. I hope in the future that the government House leader reconsiders this path because we could meet. On a personal basis, we actually get along. We could meet and discuss which bills that we could accelerate and which bills that we want to spend more time debating. That would be a much better way to manage the time of this House.

And I believe the government House leader said something about—we’re already a month late. If the government was so intent on passing this legislation as quickly as possible, they could have called the government back when the traditional time is to call the government back: after Labour Day. We could have had this all done by now. We could have had other bills too.

But as I said—and I can’t leave this unsaid—it is a double-edged sword, having the government come back early or late. Because considering that this government has had to pull back five—five—pieces of major legislation, perhaps less time for the Ford government to come up with ideas is perhaps a good thing for the people of Ontario. Because a lot of the things that the government should be focusing on, like people’s health, like people’s housing, they don’t seem to be.

I often hear the government—I’ve heard it several times in the last week—say that we are economic powerhouse of the country, of North America. But I will take back the words from the representatives of Agnico Eagle: You can’t build a healthy business without healthy people, and you can’t build a healthy province without healthy people. Homeless encampments, closed emergency rooms, those things—business looks at those as well, and those things aren’t healthy.

The fact that our current Ontario can spend billions on vanity projects like Ontario Place—you know, billions—and yet can’t seem to keep emergency rooms open across the province. That tells you where our government’s priorities are.

Perhaps before you call me out of order, Speaker, I’m going to revert back to time allocation, because it’s just such a great subject. And I’m going to have to revert to another quote, again by the illustrious government House leader. On November 28, 2017—it wasn’t that long ago; it was back when the Tories had principles: “Is this the first government that ever used a time allocation motion or a closure motion? No. But this government has consistently used these motions to pass legislation through this House even after this government imposed upon the Legislature drastic changes to the procedural rules of this House to grease the skids for legislation that it deems appropriate for the province.”

“Grease the skids for legislation?” I’ve got to say, Speaker, I need to read more quotes from the government House leader just to increase my vocabulary. And if I do recall, I believe this current administration—not the current House leader, but the current administration holds the record for changes to the standing orders. So whether that was to “grease the skids” or not, we will leave for other people to decide. But it’s obvious that, in 2017, the government House leader, when he was on the opposition benches, understood that time allocation—when you use words like “grease the skids” and “guillotine”—was pretty egregious. Yet now, in 2024, as the government House leader, he doesn’t seem to have the same reservations with time allocation.

1510

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Is he greasing the guillotine?

Mr. John Vanthof: I don’t know what he’s greasing the skids to do, and I don’t think he’s greasing the guillotine.

But to understand, perhaps we’ll take just a short look at the bills. Because one thing with time allocation—for these bills, I believe the debate was both adjourned at six and a half hours. I know on our side, on both bills, we had people who wanted to speak to these bills, for whom these bills were important to their constituents, whose constituents had contacted them to talk about these issues.

And there are some very important issues that the government is trying to address with these bills. Whether or not they’re going to be successful is a whole different story. But the fact remains—I’ll back up for a second. One of the common pro-time allocation arguments is that there is nothing new anyway; we’re just regurgitating the same speaking notes, and that’s why we decide to time-allocate. I can assure that with these two bills, that wasn’t the case. There were members who, on behalf on their constituents, wanted to bring issues to this House that the government could, if they so desired, look at to see how the legislation would impact those Ontarians and, perhaps, make the legislation better. But they decided that with the six and a half hours, they’d had enough.

Actually, I'm trying to word this a bit calmer than "greasing the skids" of legislation. I think it's kind of indicative of the lack of respect that the current government actually has for this place. Some government members have ultimate respect for this place, but as a whole, the fact that you start a month late, you close early, and then, on bills that obviously could be debated more—actually, when I listened to the debate on these bills, I learned a few things, and I hope that the people on the government side learned a few things as well. That's what this House is for. It's not here to always agree. It's not here to always yell at each other. It's here to exchange views. We all come from different parts of the province, and there are things that are happening in Leeds–Grenville—is it still Leeds–Grenville, the riding?

Mr. Steve Clark: Leeds–Grenville–Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes.

Mr. John Vanthof: Oh, okay. It got a bit longer. There are things I don't know that are happening there, and there are things in Timiskaming–Cochrane that probably no one else in this House realizes. I'm going to cover a couple of those things.

The first one I'm going to cover is Bill 197, Safer Roads and Communities Act. One of its main things is—hopefully we'll hear about this in committee—auto theft. Auto theft is a huge problem across the province, even in northern Ontario. I can give you a couple of examples. We don't have the population in northern Ontario that you have here, so we don't have the concentration of auto theft that we have here. It makes sense, right? If your business is stealing cars, you're going to go to a place where there's more cars, more selection.

What it does impact is our insurance rates. A resident of Iroquois Falls—and I'm going to mention him by name, Roger Parent; I speak with him on a regular basis—he bought a new pickup. He got a good deal on the pickup, he felt. He really liked the pickup. He called me up, he was just in shock because his insurance skyrocketed, and he couldn't understand why. He had a great driving record; he couldn't understand why.

Why? Because that pickup was on the list of the 10 most popular stolen vehicles in the GTA. Even though the likelihood of someone going to Iroquois Falls to snag that pickup was relatively low—probably not impossible, but relatively low, and I'm going to get back to one of those reasons—it did have a direct impact.

Getting back to that issue, although the chance of someone going to Iroquois Falls to steal Roger's pickup is fairly low, the fact remains that, often, people in northern Ontario, we need to travel to southern Ontario for services. For medical services, for a lot of things, we have to travel to southwestern Ontario.

I don't have permission to use the name, so I won't use the name, but I know someone who lives in my riding whose vehicle has been stolen twice here. Then they go, "Why don't you drive a smaller vehicle?" Well, anyone who says that has obviously never driven on some of the roads in northern Ontario. Maybe in Toronto you don't need the Dodge Ram or the Chevy Silverado or the Ford

F-150 to circumvent the city streets here, but where I'm from, you need a truck—you need a truck.

You come down here, and if your family vehicle, the vehicle that you take your kids to hockey in, is not a Toyota Yaris, it's a Chevy Suburban, they get stolen quickly here. That makes a difference. It does make a difference to us.

I got the opportunity in this debate to bring this up, but I'm sure the member from Niagara Falls wanted to speak to this bill. He was cut off. I was sitting here; he was quite upset about it, if I recall. I'm sure he had stuff to bring forward, issues to bring forward, that would have been relevant to the debate.

One thing I would like to bring forward about the Safer Roads and Communities Act is that I understand the government is trying to curb car theft and I understand how serious car theft is, but quite frankly, not everything in this bill, when I thought about it for a while, is that serious.

If I remember exactly, if you're convicted of car theft once, how many years do you lose your driver's licence? Ten? Fifteen? I think it's something like that. I can look it up, but anyway, if you're convicted the second time—convicted—you lose your driver's licence for 20 years. If you're convicted the third time—convicted the third time of car theft, that's it; it's public transit for life. You're never going to be able to drive a car again.

I'm sure that flies when you're talking about it in Tim Hortons, but if you really think that through, someone who's involved in an international crime ring to steal cars or someone who's forced to steal cars through that international crime ring, losing their G licence is not the first thing that comes to their mind as a deterrent, even if it is for life. Seriously, that is pure to-get-votes-in-Tim Hortons stuff. It has really, in our opinion, minimal impact.

1520

If you are already at the point where you're stealing cars, threatening people to steal cars, which happens—this is an incredibly serious issue. That is not a serious response. Those were the responses, press releases and media statements. If you really think it through, that's not a serious response.

The first thing that came to my mind is: There are international crime rings now who are wondering if they're going to have to use Uber to get their carjackers around, because they won't have licences. Come on. There has got to be stronger solutions than that. Hopefully, at committee, stronger solutions will be put forward. Hopefully, the government will actually take the time to listen, because this is an incredibly important issue. It's more than just collecting votes and getting people angry at each other. That's what we're doing here. That's what you're doing. Because losing your licence for life after you've been convicted of theft three times is not a deterrent anymore.

It leads to the question: How much does the Conservative government dislike public transit? It's obvious. They're also not very pro-bicycle. Maybe the thought process is the thought of having to ride a bicycle for the rest of your life, because you can't get a G licence, is

enough to turn you away from car theft forever. Maybe that's the thought; I don't know. I'm hoping, at committee, that that and other things can be discussed and the government will listen.

Now, the other bill that's being time-allocated is Bill 194, the Strengthening Cyber Security and Building Trust in the Public Sector Act, 2024. I don't think anyone can truly appreciate how important strengthening cyber security is. I don't think anyone is going to counter that. I can give you a couple of examples that I don't think were brought up in the House, which I would have brought up if I had been given the time during regular debate.

This summer, there was a cyber attack on the parts distribution system of major agricultural companies. There was a period this summer when their systems were all down and you couldn't get parts. If you were harvesting and your equipment broke, the people throughout the system were doing everything they could to find the parts manually, but it was a cyber attack. No one heard about it. That could, can—and in the future, will—have an impact on our food supply. If you think about that, it's incredibly serious.

There is also—and this comes up often. Well, the cyber part doesn't come up often, but whenever we talk about dairy farming—and we do; there are quite a few members in this House who have dairy farmers in their ridings. I'm a former dairy farmer, and there has been a revolution in dairy farming and in many parts of agriculture. In Ontario, many cows now are milked with robots, which are also vulnerable to cyber security threats. If you rely on robots to milk the cows, and the robots are corrupted and no longer function as they should, it's not good for the farmer, but it's especially not good for the cows. Again, nobody brought this up, and it's not something you'd think about on a daily basis, but cyber security is extremely, extremely important.

Does this bill hurt cyber security? No, this bill is a step in the right direction. But was this bill important enough to warrant an actual, full debate in the Legislature? I think the government didn't think so, and that surprises me. Cyber security is one of the biggest threats in our country, in our province, and yet the government doesn't feel it's worthy of a fulsome debate. If they really appreciated what the threat would be, they would have brought the government back sooner and afforded the time for a fulsome debate, but they chose not to. They could have chosen not to time-allocate, could have chosen to talk to the opposition, see how big a threat—what the opposition could see as a way forward on this bill. They could have done that but chose not to.

I'm going to repeat this because I think this is worth repeating: that the government chose to cut debate on something as important as cyber security—no one else chose to; the government chose to. The government has messaged that they don't really appreciate how important cyber security is, because they don't even take the time to have a full, exhaustive debate here, don't even take the time to go to eight hours, seven hours, have a closure motion. No, we're just going to go through the motions—

because they know best. In their minds, they know best. There is lots of knowledge on the other side, but there's also knowledge on this side.

I'm hoping that, in committee—and there's not that much committee either, and that really surprises me. On something like cyber security, something that no one really has a handle on, because every time the security part is amped up, then the people who want to hack it amp up too—so nobody has really got a handle on it. You would think that they would want to bring forward as many people to committee as possible to actually try and get a handle and, actually, to inform people, because that's one of the other things that we do. This debate, hopefully—maybe not my speech, but the debate over the whole issue also informs people.

1530

Again, the government doesn't seem to be—they're just going through the cyber security motions. This bill—not the bill, the issue, because I think we've already established that the government doesn't even think this bill is important. They either don't think the bill is important or the House is important. That's the only thing that I can deduce from this, one of the two: The bill isn't important enough for the House to spend time on it, or the House isn't important enough, the democratic process isn't important enough for the government.

It used to be. Back in 2017, when the government House leader was in the opposition, the House used to be important enough. Because he said the same thing. He said it in much stronger words than I ever do about time allocation. The member from Nipissing-Pembroke, who's just on the outside here, said it in much stronger words yet. They were like the tag team of anti-time allocation. And now it's all gone—now it's all gone.

What's even more interesting is that this government, having gone through the experience of having to rescind at least five major pieces of legislation—if there was ever a government that could use some sober second thought, ever. They've actually had to fight people in court. They've spent millions fighting people in court, trying to defend their unconstitutional legislation. That shows the failure of the process, a true failure of the process, and this shows that the government hasn't learned. Once bitten, twice shy. These people, five times bitten, just keep right on going. That shocks me, actually. It does.

Every government puts forward legislation that the opposition doesn't like. Every government puts forward good legislation. There is a saying I was taught by someone I respect dearly; the first person I heard say it was Kevin Modeste: Even a broken clock is right twice a day. So even this government once in a while gets stuff right.

But this government holds the record for getting stuff wrong: five major pieces of legislation. Remember the Men in Black bill? They rescinded the bill so it never existed. You'd think the government would have learned from that and would have said, "You know what? Let's step back and see if we can first save the people of Ontario a lot of grief," and at the same time, save themselves some

grief and actually use the Legislature for what it's designed for. It wasn't designed for time allocation.

Again, the former government House leader was fond of saying that the NDP, when we were in government, were the fathers of time allocation. He's not wrong, but it was a mistake then. Even the NDP government made mistakes.

Again, I would make, probably, a much better speech on legislation that was really, really egregious. This legislation isn't that egregious. We don't understand why you don't use the full potential of the Legislature. We don't understand why, to date, you haven't used the full potential of the committees, why you don't accept amendments when they're good. When they're not—maybe some amendments are meant to wedge. But no, there are good amendments. There is not a piece of legislation that can't be made better. That's the nature of the beast. This government doesn't seem to believe that. There's not a piece of legislation that doesn't benefit from a fulsome debate. This government obviously doesn't believe that either.

Especially, the cyber security bill. There is no one in this Legislature, and no one in this province—other than the people who are trying to hack the system for their own benefit—who is opposed to making the best legislation possible for cyber security—no one. So why you are trying to cut off debate—again, in the words of the current government House leader, “I wish it wasn't yet another guillotine motion, brought forward by a government hard-wired to conduct business through time allocation.”

Now, he was talking about the Liberal government who made all kinds of mistakes. There is no one here, except the one Liberal member over there, who might defend this, but the Liberal government made all kinds of mistakes. People were tired of the Liberal government, and the government House leader at the time noticed, correctly so, that the government of the day was using time allocation time and again as a way to circumvent the Legislature and, at the end, it was to their own peril. It was certainly to the peril of the people of Ontario, and at the end, it was also to the government's own peril. I could say that this government is following the same path—that you are also hard-wired to time allocation, hard-wired to ramming your own philosophies through the Legislature.

You won a majority; I get that. If you win a majority, you get to put your own agenda through the Legislature. We get that. But the Legislature, if it's used correctly, can actually make sure that, although we may not agree with some of your philosophy, we certainly can help to make the legislation—where there are faults—less egregious. That's the job of the Legislature, and that is what you're circumventing by using time allocation needlessly.

I can see, honestly, with the difference between these two bills, wanting to time-allocate a bill where one of the main tenets of the bill is that you lose your licence for life after you're convicted of car theft three times. I can see wanting to time-allocate that because the longer you talk about that, the more ridiculous it sounds. The fact that it's not a deterrent—the longer you talk about it, the more

ridiculous it sounds. I can see you wanting to curtail debate on that.

I don't understand—and I know I'm a broken record on this, but the cyber security threat is not going away. It's going to get worse and worse and worse. I think we all know that. For whatever reason, it almost looks like this current government wants to kind of shove it under the rug: “We know better. We're just going to get it through the Legislature as quickly as humanly possible—one day at committee and then a perfunctory debate at the end, and bam, yes, we fixed that problem.” That's not how it's going to go down.

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The fact is that it's one issue where there's not really a partisan side to this. It's not really: “I'm pro-cyber security”; “No, I'm anti-cyber security.” Come on. That doesn't exist with this one. How often do we get something to talk about that is actually relevant—relevant to our parents, relevant to our kids and relevant to ourselves? That's so important.

Why? Maybe it's a case of wait and hurry up, right? They were so busy campaigning for the last month and a half. Perhaps the announcement of the tunnel under the 401 seized the government over cyber security. I don't understand.

In closing, the fact that I get to stand here and speak at no risk to my life, no risk to my family—that's incredible. That doesn't happen in many parts of this world, even in parts of this world that call themselves democratic. It's incredible and it's something that we shouldn't waste.

And no, this single time allocation motion isn't changing the course of democracy, but the continued erosion of the use of the Legislature does. So when the Premier makes an announcement outside of this House—for instance, the \$60-million or \$100-billion or whatever tunnel; he's going to “get it done”—that's a debate that should be had in this House. But they don't want to have it in the House, because it's all about sound bites. It's all about votes, and less and less about this Legislature.

At the end of the day, it's this Legislature, the other Legislatures in the other provinces and the federal Legislature. The fact that we have the ability to stand here on behalf of our constituents; the fact that we can go back to our ridings and, at some point, will have an election, and none of us have to fear, hopefully, for our lives during that election campaign; that we can have open and honest conversations: That's what keeps these places safe. And the fact that there are so few people who seem to understand that, who seem to care, frightens me a bit.

It's funny that it frightens me especially on the cyber security bill, because this isn't about votes. I may be wrong, because I don't think we have polled this, but I don't think “I'm a champion of cyber security” is going to be a big winner at the doors. I don't think so.

This should be a very serious bill, and perhaps it is. There are things in it that are, but the fact that it has been rammed through the Legislature, so far without even a vote—you haven't voted. That tells me that it's not a

serious bill—it could be; maybe it is. I'm sure the minister is very serious about this; I'm not sure his government is.

That's why we continue to be opposed to time allocation. I don't think we're ever going to be—

Mr. Wayne Gates: They used to be.

Mr. John Vanthof: I'm not ever going to be speaking in favour of time allocation.

I like to read quotes from the former opposition House leader, who is now the government House leader, but it's not just about reading quotes. This is a serious issue. It's bit by bit by bit that this place is more pomp and show than it actually is the Legislature of Ontario—and we all lose by doing that.

If we could make a conscious effort—the government could. I can't propose time allocation motions. Right now, I'm on the opposition side. But if we could make a conscious effort to actually talk between ourselves to see if we could get things through without time allocation—and sometimes we won't be able to, because sometimes we are that diametrically opposed to a bill, like the green-belt legislation, like Bill 124, which was ruled unconstitutional.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Bill 28, Bill 160.

Mr. John Vanthof: There are all kinds of them. On those ones, we're not—but there are bills where we actually could make this Legislature work and make the bills better for everyone in Ontario, and the fact that this government isn't taking the time to do that is very disappointing and continues to be disappointing.

I hope that we have maybe made a little bit of a dent, so that next time, they will actually reach out and at least try to see if we can make this place work a little bit better.

With that, I'd like to thank you for your time, Speaker.

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

Mr. Clark has moved government notice of motion number 25, relating to allocation of time on Bill 197, An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act, and Bill 194, An Act to enact the Enhancing Digital Security and Trust Act, 2024 and to make amendments to the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act respecting privacy protection measures.

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

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

All those opposed to the motion will please say “nay.”

In my opinion, the nays have it.

A recorded vote being required, it will be deferred until the next instance of deferred votes.

Vote deferred.

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

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REDUCING GRIDLOCK, SAVING YOU TIME ACT, 2024

LOI DE 2024 SUR LE DÉSENGORGEMENT DU RÉSEAU ROUTIER ET LE GAIN DE TEMPS

Resuming the debate adjourned on October 28, 2024, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 212, An Act to enact two Acts and amend various Acts with respect to highways, broadband-related expropriation and other transportation-related matters / Projet de loi 212, Loi visant à édicter deux lois et à modifier diverses lois en ce qui concerne les voies publiques, les expropriations liées aux projets d'Internet à haut débit et d'autres questions relatives au transport.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): We left off at questions for the opposition lead. Questions?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: I think that it is fair to say—at least I'm going to say it's fair to say—that this government has an incredible record with respect to the building and advancement of infrastructure in the province of Ontario, particularly when it comes to highways.

Right in my own riding of Essex, we have the expansion of Highway 3 from two lanes to four lanes, which is necessary to get goods and services to market—in particular, goods which are leaving Leamington, passing through Essex county and going to the border to get to markets in the United States, markets as far away as places like the southern states and even Florida. I think that's really important. I think it's important that the steps taken in this bill that's before the Legislature today are important steps, particularly to get our goods to market. As I've said, in our area, it's important for those goods to get to the border, and you get to the border using the highways that are being expanded by this government.

So my question to the member across is, would she like to be part of that? Would she like to be part of getting the goods to the border and expanding our markets, especially agribusiness markets, which are reaching something in the neighbourhood of \$26 billion of exports today?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: As someone who is very excited about getting goods to market and keeping the traffic flowing, reducing traffic; as someone who fought deliberately and tabled the private member's bill that then became government legislation to remove the tolls from the 412 and 418; as someone who has called for the removal of truck tolls from the 407 to move trucks from the 401 to the 407 in order to reduce gridlock; as somebody who absolutely thinks that that portion of the 407 that the province still owns—I would like a fair deal for Durham region. As someone who does indeed support all of these things, I'm so disappointed that in this bill, this government is again refusing to actually reduce gridlock, get the trucks off the 401 and onto the 407, and that they voted against the NDP opposition motion.

So we can talk a good game, but if you're not willing to do the work, then we stay stuck in traffic.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Questions?

MPP Jamie West: Thank you to the member from Oshawa for her debate.

Every time I hear our House talk about highways, I'm reminded that, for the last six years, no action has been done on Highway 69. There are 68 kilometres that are still unpaved. The chamber of commerce is calling for it, the people from Sudbury are calling for it, and people in northern Ontario, who want to expand businesses, are calling for it.

We know that people are killed every year on Highway 69, yet every year since the Conservatives took power, there has been no action on the highway. If they're so serious about expanding the economy and delivering goods and services and protecting the people of Ontario, why isn't Highway 69 a priority?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Highway 69 absolutely should be a priority for this government. I've been coming to this place now for 10 years, and it has been a priority that has constantly been raised by the NDP and by the northern members—not just about traffic flow or getting people moving, but about safety.

If this government isn't willing to tackle northern roads, either the infrastructure side—or, we just saw on CBC Marketplace an exposé of just how bad things are with truck driver training and fraud in that sector. We're not ensuring that northern roads are safe by any measure.

There's a lot of work that could be prioritized in this bill. Again, it's a missed opportunity. Hopefully, behind the scenes, the government actually cares and is doing something, but I see no evidence of that. When it comes to Highway 69 or other provincial roads, this government really is falling short.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Next question?

Hon. Sam Oosterhoff: I want to thank the member for Oshawa for her participation this morning to debate. I have had the privilege now of going to the member's riding a couple of times over the past few months and appreciate the representation that she brings to this chamber for that place.

But, Speaker, I want to ask the member: I recall, not that long ago—I guess five or six years ago—when we came forward with the plans for the Ontario Line. I remember the Leader of the Opposition in those days and the members opposite saying essentially, "This is a plan that has been drawn on the back of a napkin. It will never happen. We'll never see the Ontario Line come to fruition here in Ontario."

Of course, we see that construction well under way. We see the tunnelling completed for most of those aspects of the Ontario Line, and since that time, we've come forward with a number of significant infrastructure projects in every corner of this province, to ensure we're building bigger, that we're building better. My question, because none of these have been supported by the NDP, is: When

did the member opposite and the NDP stop daring to dream big?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I appreciate the question. He started out by saying nice things about the hard work that I invest in my community. I will say that that member has come to Oshawa a couple times, and I have thanked him for his attention and also invited him not to break anything when he's in town.

Speaker, we dream big on this side, but we also support those who make plans to make it happen. When we look at the mess that is Metrolinx and we see all sorts of commitments and we see there's no follow-through—we see some weird love affair with Phil Verster. Maybe it's the cute accent; I don't know. But they are not holding Metrolinx to any standard of actually getting things accomplished.

This is a member who is highlighting projects that—I'm eager to see something finished in this province, and finished well. I will continue to have hope, but I'm not optimistic.

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

Interjections.

MPP Zee Hamid: I was waiting for the applause.

It's an honour to speak on the Reducing Gridlock, Saving You Time Act, which will help millions of drivers across the province. We know that time away from family and loved ones can be challenging wherever we live. I know that this commute used to take me just under an hour, and now I can spend over two hours one way just coming from my riding to Queen's Park and back.

Our government believes in protecting drivers while they're on our roads. One issue that many smaller municipalities faced—when I was first elected to the council, my municipality of Milton was a small municipality at the time—was not having adequate resources or financial ability to repair and maintain the roads properly. A pothole can go from being a mild annoyance to becoming a severe safety issue. There have been many accidents that have occurred because drivers are either swerving to avoid a pothole or they hit a pothole, resulting in the cars being damaged to the point they cannot be safely driven. When that happens at night, or with a young or an elderly driver, or in winter, it becomes even more worrisome, because we know that our loved ones can get stuck.

When you live in a smaller municipality, it can take a lot longer than in larger municipalities for help to arrive. Our government wants to ensure that drivers in small municipalities feel safe as well, and we have a plan to get it done.

Our government will proceed with creating a pothole prevention and repair program that will support smaller municipalities. This program could include provincial funding to assist municipalities with preventing and repairing potholes, providing technical support to municipalities, and establishing common standards and specifications to ensure quality roadwork.

Speaker, we know that safe roads matter. Our government is doing our part to keep roads in good repair, which

allows for safer trips back to our families, our friends and our loved ones. We want to ensure we keep traffic moving and we keep roads in good repair in every part of the province. We remain vigilant about putting drivers first, no matter where they live within our province and no matter where they're going.

There are numerous benefits that can be attributed to a pothole prevention and repair program for small municipalities. Developing ministry-approved standards and specifications for roadwork would help ensure drivers in small municipalities enjoy smooth and stress-free rides. Municipalities would have access to much-needed support for routine maintenance to prevent potholes, such as pavement inspections, routing and sealing. Drivers will be less distracted swerving to avoid potholes or hitting potholes, traffic would flow freely and the chances of drivers damaging vehicles would be greatly diminished.

A pothole prevention repair program would mean that municipal roads would be safer for drivers across our beautiful province. Our government seeks to make life easier for drivers across Ontario. Over the next 10 years, we're investing close to \$28 billion to expand and repair the highways, roads and bridges that connect Ontarians to housing, jobs and other opportunities.

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The Ontario highways program features an online interactive map providing the latest information on 635 different highway projects across the province. This information includes 42 expansion projects and 593 rehabilitation projects. This project will directly improve the ability for people to move across Ontario. Our government, this year alone, is committing \$3.9 billion on expansion and repair and expansion projects. This means that our drivers will be able to reach their destinations not only quickly but safely as well. By getting construction under way on these much-needed upgrades, we're standing up for drivers and shortening commute times for thousands, hundreds of thousands, of Ontarians.

We're repairing concrete on two bridges between Sydenham Road and Highway 15 and are resurfacing all four ramps at the Sir John A. Macdonald interchange. In August, we completed major improvements to the Bay of Quinte Skyway Bridge. This bridge is a vital connection for communities in Prince Edward county to access Highway 401.

Not long ago, we got our shovels to the ground to begin much needed work resurfacing sections of the westbound and eastbound lanes of Highway 401 near Kingston from Westbrook Road to Highway 15. The eastern portion of Highway 401 is an essential part of the province's highway network that connects Ontario, Quebec and the U.S. for travel, international trade and economic development. We'll continue to move forward with vision and purpose to improve and expand our highway infrastructure across the province.

Our highway expansion projects take into account that all communities deserve safe access, and we're ensuring and supporting beyond southern Ontario as well. We had a priority to widen more than 100 kilometres of the Trans-

Canada Highway from Thunder Bay to Nipigon and we're well on our way to getting there. We've now completed seven sections of the project. Last summer, we widened 8.6 kilometres of the Trans-Canada Highway between Ouimet and the Dorian East Loop from two to four lanes. We're also moving forward to widen Highway 17 between Kenora and the Manitoba border. Highway 17 is a strategic link in the Trans-Canada Highway system with no alternative routes in the event of a collision or road closure. We know that by widening this vital corridor, we're promoting safety and reducing travel times. We are also protecting critical trade links, which will help our economic development. All these initiatives are fundamental and vital for northern Ontario.

When you are driving long distances, it's imperative to have a safe place to stop and rest. Both commercial drivers and drivers driving a personal vehicle need to know they can pull over safely. This is why we're carrying out the largest expansion of rest areas in the province's history. In 2021, our government introduced a five-year plan to expand the province's rest area network. This expansion included the creation of 10 brand new rest areas and restoring 14 others. It also included adding 165 new truck parking spaces to four ONroute locations. Our government, time and time again, has demonstrated our commitment to providing the trucking industry and, in fact, all drivers across Ontario, a safe place to stop and rest. We're working hard to make strong progress and expand our rest area network to support the drivers and passengers of their vehicles. To date, we've finished construction of three new rest areas and completed major improvements at seven other locations across the province. These upgrades include new parking, enhanced washrooms and improvements to other amenities.

This summer, we started an expansion project at the Batchawana Bay rest area on Highway 17 north of Sault Ste. Marie. We're adding new constructed entrance and exit lanes, giving truck drivers year-round access to heated washrooms and building a separate parking area with nine spaces for commercial vehicles. We're adding underground infrastructure that will allow for electric vehicle charging stations in the future. Many drivers use WiFi for driving directions. Drivers will benefit from free WiFi and personal device charging stations.

Our government is embracing innovation to improve traffic flow and road safety in northern Ontario. We're currently working to increase passing opportunities on highways in northeastern Ontario. This includes consideration of innovative designs such as a 2+1 highway. I want to talk about the 2+1 model, which is a three-lane featuring a centre passing lane with a median barrier that changes direction every two to five kilometres, helping vehicles pass safely. We know that these highways have been successfully utilized in other countries around the world, including Australia, Ireland and Sweden.

No other jurisdiction in North America has built a true 2+1 highway. The preliminary work conducted by our government will be the foundation to determine the

sustainability of the 2+1 model in other parts of the province. This will be the first for Ontario.

We know that it's imperative to look at our counterparts from around the world, so that we can continually determine innovative ways to enhance the transportation network in the years ahead. We're taking a bold step forward to get people moving quickly, but we refuse to compromise on road safety. Our government is committed to reducing travel times while ensuring our provincial highways remain the safest in North America.

Since 2022, our government has used an evidence-based approach to raise the speed limit on sections of provincial highways across the province where it was safe to do so. That year, we raised the posted speed limit to 110 kilometres per hour on six stretches of highways in southern Ontario and two pilot sections in northern Ontario. This summer, we raised the speed limit on 10 additional sections of highway, saving drivers valuable time and helping goods move quickly.

We're about to take our efforts to the next level. Our data analysis from the past two years revealed that highways that are designed or upgraded to accommodate higher speed limits stayed just as safe. We will now expedite work to raise the limit to 110 kilometres an hour on additional sections of provincial highways where it is safe to do so. Prior to the 1970s, speed limits on selected provincial highways were higher than 110 kilometres per hour. Our government has maintained a responsible and measured approach. It has demonstrated that raising the speed limit on sections where it is safe to do so does not compromise the safety of Ontarians. In fact, that safe increment means we can all get to our destinations faster without compromising safety, and it allows everyone to spend more time with their friends and family at home.

Our government is proud that some of the safest roads in North America are in Ontario. For over the last 20 years, Ontario has ranked among the top five jurisdictions with the lowest fatality rate per 100,000 licensed drivers. We take pride in that track record, and we continually work to make our roads even safer. That's why we tabled the Safer Roads and Communities Act earlier. We know that raising speed limits where it's appropriate is the right thing to do for drivers. We know that we must put our drivers first. Building highways, reducing congestion and keeping our roads maintained is a good start, but our government wants to do more.

Making life easier for drivers also means protecting their pocketbooks. We have to keep costs down, and we have done this. Since 2020, our government, to support all drivers, has temporarily frozen fees for driver knowledge tests and road tests. Freezing these fees has saved Ontario drivers \$35 million to date. We know this is a great start, but we're focused on helping drivers to save even more. Current regulations require the province to increase driver testing fees every year after 2026, based on the consumer price index. But if the Reducing Gridlock, Saving You Time Act passes, it would enshrine the current fee freeze in legislation, helping ensure that Ontarians' money stays in their pockets, where it belongs. Any future fee increase

would require a legislative amendment. Maintaining the current fee freeze will help save Ontarians \$72 million this decade.

We know that now, more than ever, every dollar counts. Our government is putting money back in Ontarians' pockets, where it belongs—and we're not just putting money back; we're ensuring that it stays there for years to come.

Now is not the time to increase driver testing fees—not when hard-working Ontarians are fighting to make ends meet and feed their families. We know that people across the province are struggling with the cost of living. We recognize this and want to do our very best to help Ontarians. By tabling legislation to freeze the fees, we're standing up for families who have been stretched to the breaking point. People need their vehicles to pick up their children from school, to take their sick ones to hospitals and medical appointments, and of course they need to get to work and back to make a living, or they operate a vehicle as part of their jobs. We're not going to increase fees at a time like this, especially not when driving is vital to so many. They shouldn't have to pay more just to take a knowledge or road test.

If the Reducing Gridlock, Saving You Time Act passes, driver testing fees will remain affordable and predictable, because that's what Ontarians deserve. Freezing driver test fees would build on the success of the Get It Done Act, which froze fees for drivers' licences and Ontario photo cards. We know it's important to keep costs low so Ontarians can get behind the wheel and lead a productive life, contribute to our economy, remain independent and enjoy all that this great province has to offer. With this new legislation, we're fighting harder than ever for drivers across this province. We know that everyone in the province deserves this, Speaker, and that's what this legislation will deliver, if passed.

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Ever since the government was elected, we've made it a priority to fight to make life better for hard-working Ontarians. These are the people who have made our province such a beautiful place to live, work and raise a family. They deserve more, and we want to provide this. That means putting drivers first.

This act demonstrates the intent to keep traffic flowing and build the infrastructure needed to support Ontario's growing population. The Reducing Gridlock, Saving You Time Act would, if passed, provide additional tools and resources to construct vital highways quickly while keeping costs down. It will also allow us to make life more affordable for every driver in this province.

We are looking at every way possible to help Ontarians. The development of a much-needed pothole prevention and repair program declares to smaller municipalities that the government of Ontario has your back, and we're here to help you keep traffic moving and understand your frustrations and concerns.

By taking a safe and responsible approach to raising the speed limits on selected provincial highways, we're

ensuring Ontario's roads remain among the safest in North America.

And while we continue to stand up for drivers, we're also freezing the fees for driver testing. We're allowing it to become easier for Ontarians to get behind the wheel while also making it easier on their pocketbooks. Our government remains steadfast in keeping costs low and predictable for years to come.

This act also includes measures aimed at accelerating the construction of key infrastructure and, as we've heard, measures to ensure that new bike lanes contribute to increased road capacity and do not impact the flow of vehicle traffic. Since the pandemic started, there has been a vast explosion of new bike lanes in larger cities. The lockdown meant there were fewer cars and public transportation on the road. People sought alternatives because they weren't sure how the lockdown would impact traffic and for how long.

But these cars that were parked on driveways or in parking lots before are now back on the roads. Bike lanes that made sense in the time of the pandemic are now slowing down traffic. This is problematic, as congestion is already out of control in Toronto and other cities across the province.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Questions?

Mr. Joel Harden: I listened to the member from Milton closely. I just want his reaction to the notion he expressed in his speech, and other government members have expressed, that we have very safe roads. I just want to reflect on the death of Ignacio Viana, who was a cyclist—81 years old—killed in his community on September 17, 2021; a 57-year-old cyclist killed in his community on November 2, 2020; a six-year-old cyclist killed on Highway 7—not far from Milton—March 2024; and most recently, September 16, 2024, a cyclist taken to hospital in your community with critical injuries.

We know from the Ministry of Transportation Ontario that there's a rate of 134 people taken to hospital with serious personal or lethal injuries because of reckless drivers. I'm wondering if the member can explain to the House if he is happy with that amount of carnage on our streets.

MPP Zee Hamid: The province takes the safety of all road users seriously and will continue to support municipalities in their road safety efforts. This proposal will continue to allow municipalities to construct new protected cycling lanes on municipal roads where a lane of vehicle traffic does not need to be removed. At the same time, they would be required to demonstrate that the proposed bike lanes wouldn't have a negative impact on vehicle traffic.

Municipalities may also apply to the province to construct new cycling lanes and remove existing lanes of traffic. Municipalities would be able to identify any safety concerns or outcomes related to the proposed cycling lanes in the submission. The province would then consider this information prior to making its decision.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Next question?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: We all know that moving goods and services around the province of Ontario is important. It's important to our economy. It's important to the safety of individuals who use our highways. It's important to everybody.

In my own riding, we have goods that leave the area of Leamington, which is just outside my riding. They travel up Highway 3. They go to the international border. They cross over the international border. Then they get dispersed all over the United States, our number one trading partner.

To date, the agribusiness and food industry is exporting \$26 billion worth of food and food products outside of Ontario. It's a fantastic industry, and it is enormously aided by our highways, which have to remain in great condition and keep the goods moving.

I'd like to ask the member from Milton what he sees in this bill that will help his riding and his people in Milton.

MPP Zee Hamid: Thank you for that excellent question, and thank you pointing out the importance of highways. In fact, gridlock costs our economy well over \$11 billion a year. Highway 413 is starting—or ending, depending on which direction you are looking at—in my riding of Milton. It's a highway that municipal councillors in Milton have supported for years, not once but twice through motions asking the province to build. This act would speed up the construction of Highway 413, but not just Highway 413 through Milton to help Miltonians and others, but also the Bradford Bypass and Garden City Skyway, by naming them priority highway projects.

This act would streamline utility relocations, accelerate access to property and property acquisitions, and introduce new penalties for obstructing access for field investigations or for damaging equipment. The legislation would also allow regulation-making authority for around-the-clock, 24/7 construction on priority highways.

Thank you for the question.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Next question?

Mr. Joel Harden: Back to the member from Milton: I didn't hear in your comments, sir, any reflection or remorse for the family of Ignacio Viana, who was killed on a bike ride on September 17, 2021. I did hear some chatter across the aisle when I mentioned that 49,106 incidents were caused last year, according to the ministry of transport Ontario—serious collisions involving personal harm or death. That's a rate of 134 per day. Mr. Viana is one of those statistics, but Mr. Viana is not a statistic; he was a grandfather, he was a father. He deserved to get home safely.

I'm going to invite the member from Milton again, because I respect the role he plays for his community in this House, to confirm whether or not he believes we need to design roads to make sure everybody, regardless of the transportation choice they use, can get home safely. Yes or no?

MPP Zee Hamid: If the member opposite would recall, last week I talked about a friend of mine who passed away in a driving accident just a month ago—it's a month and a week now. I talked about that during my speech the same day as well. My heart goes out to every single individual—they're not statistics—who was hurt to the point of losing their life, losing their loved ones. It's a tragedy. That is why our government takes the issue of road safety seriously, not just for cyclists but drivers and everyone else as well.

That is precisely why we will continue to allow municipalities to construct new protected cycling lanes on municipal roads where a lane of vehicle traffic does not need to be removed. At the same time, municipalities may also apply to request construction of new cycling lanes that remove an existing lane of traffic. Municipalities will be able to identify safety concerns and outcomes related to the proposed cycling lanes in their submission and the province would then consider the response prior to making its decision.

We take safety very seriously; we always have, and this government always will.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Next question?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: Getting back to the riding of Milton—that's where the member who just spoke is from—I understand that the riding of Milton will benefit enormously from the construction of Highway 413, and I can understand and relate to that because my own personal riding, the riding of Essex, benefits enormously from Highway 3, which, at the present time, a stretch of Highway 3 is four lanes and another stretch is only two lanes. This government is now expanding that two-lane stretch to four lanes from Kingsville to the end of Highway 3, which reaches the city of Windsor.

It makes me think of Highway 413 because, in my own riding, Highway 3 is vital to what we do, so I invite the member to again reflect on Highway 413 and tell the House how it might benefit his riding.

MPP Zee Hamid: Thank you for that excellent question. For those not aware, my riding mostly represents the town of Milton, which has been the fastest-growing municipality in Ontario for over 20 years, since 2000. It continues to grow really rapidly; we've seen the population grow from 30,000 people in the year 2000 to over 160,000 now, and the town of Milton is planning to house 450,000 people by 2051.

Non-partisan traffic studies conducted by the town of Milton show that traffic will come to a standstill unless we invest more in highways.

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That is the reason why different municipal councils with different makeups have passed motions asking the province to build Highway 413. We know that local, hard-working business owners cannot move their goods around if they are stuck on Highway 401.

I've given my personal experience—where I could drive from Queen's Park to home in less than an hour, but now, because of gridlock, it takes me two hours or more.

That is not the kind of economy we want to build, especially in a fast-growing province like Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Next question?

Mr. Joel Harden: I want to thank the member for Milton for his sincere offering of condolences to the Viana family. I think that means a lot.

However, I do want to quote some words from his leader that he said when he had a bike ride with my federal leader here in 2017. The Premier said, in 2017, "You're nervous when there's no bike lanes. At least I was. We have to do everything we can to make sure there's never a death in the city. One death is ... too many when it comes to bicycle riders." So the Premier had one opinion seven years ago, when he went out into traffic with a bike, with my federal leader, Jagmeet Singh, but now he's weaponizing road users against each other, because everybody hates traffic.

And I take the member's point, but the evidence isn't there. I'm wondering if the member could furnish, for once, the evidence that shows us bike lanes cause traffic gridlock. The government hasn't produced it yet. Do you have it in your speech today?

MPP Zee Hamid: Thank you for the question.

Speaker, as I've mentioned, we take the safety of all road users seriously, and we continue to support municipalities in their road safety efforts.

Municipalities, if they wish to construct a new cycling lane that removes the existing lane, will be able to identify and provide evidence showing that doing such a change will not cause a negative effect to vehicle traffic. The province would then consider their information prior to making its decision.

This act would also continue to allow municipalities to construct new, protected cycling lanes that are safe, on municipal roads where a lane of vehicle traffic does not need to be removed. At the same time, they would also be required to provide evidence to demonstrate that a proposed bike lane would not have a negative impact on vehicle traffic.

Report continues in volume B.

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		Premier / Premier ministre
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Gretzky, Lisa (NDP)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	
Grewal, Hardeep Singh (PC)	Brampton East / Brampton-Est	
Hamid, Zee (PC)	Milton	
Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Oxford	
Harden, Joel (NDP)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	
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Leardi, Anthony (PC)	Essex	Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint du gouvernement
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Romano, Ross (PC)	Sault Ste. Marie	
Sabawy, Sheref (PC)	Mississauga—Erin Mills	
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Sattler, Peggy (NDP)	London West / London-Ouest	
Saunderson, Brian (PC)	Simcoe—Grey	
Schreiner, Mike (GRN)	Guelph	
Scott, Laurie (PC)	Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock	
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West, Jamie (NDP)	Sudbury	
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