

Legislative
Assembly
of Ontario



Assemblée
législative
de l'Ontario

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

No. 11

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

N° 11

1st Session
44th Parliament

Thursday
8 May 2025

1^{re} session
44^e législature

Jeudi
8 mai 2025

Speaker: Honourable Donna Skelly
Clerk: Trevor Day

Présidente : L'honorable Donna Skelly
Greffier : Trevor Day

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House Publications and Language Services
Room 500, West Wing, Legislative Building
111 Wellesley Street West, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Telephone 416-325-7400
Published by the Legislative Assembly of Ontario



Service linguistique et des publications parlementaires
Salle 500, aile ouest, Édifice du Parlement
111, rue Wellesley ouest, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Téléphone, 416-325-7400
Publié par l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

ISSN 1180-2987

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Thursday 8 May 2025

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 8 mai 2025

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Good morning, everyone.

Prayers / Prières.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): You may be seated.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

MORE CONVENIENT CARE ACT, 2025

LOI DE 2025

POUR PLUS DE SOINS COMMUNES

Ms. Jones moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 11, An Act to enact or amend various Acts related to health care / Projet de loi 11, Loi visant à édicter ou à modifier diverses lois en ce qui concerne les soins de santé.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize the minister.

Hon. Sylvia Jones: It's a pleasure for me to be able to rise for the introduction of the More Convenient Care Act. I will be sharing my time with the Honourable Vijay Thanigasalam, our Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions, who has taken on this new role and will be a passionate advocate to support Ontarians seeking mental health support; and our parliamentary assistant MPP Anthony Leardi, the member for Essex, who is a tremendous advocate for his community and for strengthening our health care system.

The proposed legislation builds on the progress of Your Health: A Plan for Connected and Convenient Care, which our government established in 2023, as well as our important work to strengthen public health and the province's Digital First for Health Strategy. Your Health is a comprehensive plan for Ontario's health care system that is connecting people to high-quality care and more effectively meeting the needs of patients and their families across Ontario.

The proposed legislation, if passed, will support our government's ongoing efforts to build a stronger health care system in Ontario, now and for the longer term, by strengthening governance and transparency, improving service delivery and enhancing patient care throughout the health care system.

Before I discuss some of the key components of the More Convenient Care Act and its related initiatives, I would like to take this opportunity to highlight some of the

progress that has occurred in our health care system over the last few years under the leadership of Premier Ford.

Since 2018, our government has made record investments to provide the people of Ontario with more connected and convenient health care services. Connected and convenient care means providing patients and their families with a better health care experience during every stage of life, helping them to stay healthier and have better health outcomes. Our government has made record investments in our publicly funded health care system to connect more people to the care they need when they need it. Since 2018, we have increased the health care budget by over 31%, investing more than \$85 billion into the system alone last year. Our government continues to ensure that the people of Ontario have access to more convenient and connected care.

We are making historic investments to design a health care system that can connect Ontarians to the right care in the right place within their communities, whether it is through primary care, mental health and addictions services, home and community care, Ontario health teams, and virtual care. We are helping people get faster access to timely and more convenient care in hospitals, emergency care, pediatric care, community surgical and diagnostic centres, long-term care and, of course, people's homes.

To meet the needs of our growing communities, our government has added over 3,500 beds to hospitals across Ontario, and we are getting shovels in the ground for over 50 hospital developments, which will add an additional 3,000 more beds.

Here in Ontario, we have achieved some of the best health care metrics in Canada, such as the best rate of access to consistent health care providers, including family doctors and primary health care teams, and the shortest wait times for surgeries.

One of the significant steps we are taking to provide patients with the right care in the right place is by taking action to increase access to primary care. Timely access to primary care helps people stay healthier longer, with faster diagnosis and treatment, as well as more consistent support managing their day-to-day health, while also relieving pressures on emergency departments and hospitals. We lead the country, with nearly 90% of people connected to a primary care provider. And with our recent \$1.8-billion investment in primary care, we will connect two million more people to a family physician or primary care team in the next four years. Ontario's Primary Care Action Team, led by Dr. Jane Philpott, will use this historic investment

to implement its plan to build a primary care system that draws on best-in-class models from across Ontario and connects everyone to a family doctor or primary care team. In every community, Ontarians will have primary care teams as their front door to care, with teams of clinicians providing care they can access in a timely way, close to home.

This April, we launched a call for proposals to create and expand up to 80 new primary care teams across Ontario, supported by a \$213-million investment. This call will target communities that have the highest number of unattached people and will connect 300,000 more people to a family doctor or a primary care team.

Our government is also making historic investments in our health care workforce and expanded medical education and training programs, as well as breaking down barriers so internationally trained health care providers who want to work in our province can do so faster. We continue to increase the number of health care workers in Ontario by recruiting, retaining and optimizing the health workforce to meet the growing demands on our health care system. Since 2018, we have hired and licensed more than 15,000 new physicians, and nearly 100,000 new nurses have registered and are licensed to work in Ontario. Last year alone, we added a record of more than 18,000 new nurses to the workforce, and we are currently having another 30,000 nursing students studying at one of Ontario's colleges or universities. We are adding thousands of new medical school, nurse practitioner, and undergrad nursing education seats across the province.

Our government also continues to expand health care professions' scopes of practice, building on health care professionals' skills and competencies. These changes are an impactful way to make our health system more efficient. They can save time, improve convenience and access to health care services, improve the patient and caregiver experience, get people healthier quicker, and help to ease pressures on hospitals and other practice settings.

The More Convenient Care Act is another way we are building on our progress to create more bold solutions to support delivering on connected care for all Ontarians. This proposed legislation and the related regulatory and policy initiatives are focused on three pillars to address system gaps and build a stronger, more connected health care system.

First, we are strengthening governance and transparency by addressing the use of temporary health workplace agency staffing, strengthening hospital governance and accountability, and strengthening board of health governance, specifically in the city of Hamilton.

0910

Second, we are improving service delivery by making enhancements to the oversight of local public health agencies and improving hospital service continuity.

And finally, third, we are enhancing patient care by expanding the scope of practice for Ontario's nurse practitioners, improving patient access to their health information, supporting improvements in the emergency

health service sector, and consulting on the addictions services counselling workforce.

One of the ways we will improve transparency is by proposing new legislation to create a regulatory framework that would require temporary health staff agencies to report administrative, billing, or pay rate information. This would also allow the government to publish this information to help ensure transparency and cost certainty for hospitals and long-term-care homes.

We are proposing to enhance governance by making amendments to the City of Hamilton Act, to enable the city of Hamilton to appoint its own board of health, and where city council members and community representatives could be board of health representatives. This would ensure a governance structure with more inclusive representation and expertise, which could benefit public health decision-making and help to include diverse perspectives.

The proposed legislation would amend the Connecting Care Act to affirm that Ontario Health atHome is subject to the French Language Services Act. Ontario Health atHome is a provincial crown organization, operating under Ontario Health, that provides and coordinates local in-home and community-based care for more than 400,000 patients across our province. Ontario Health atHome assesses patient care needs and delivers in-home and community-based services to support people's health and well-being. It also provides information and referrals to other community services and manages Ontario's long-term-care-home placement process. This proposal is to affirm Ontario Health atHome's status under the French Language Services Act to stakeholders by enshrining it in legislation.

Another component of the proposed legislation that would improve service delivery is amendments to section 22 of the Health Protection and Promotion Act, which would improve the Chief Medical Officer of Health's oversight functions of class orders issued by a local medical officer of health. This change is expected to support greater alignment, consistency and proportionality in section 22 class orders issued by local medical officers of health in response to a local communicable disease risk, while also providing greater opportunities to identify provincial supports to help mitigate such risks.

The proposed legislation would enhance patient care by amending the Mandatory Blood Testing Act to allow nurse practitioners to complete and sign mandatory blood testing forms. Enabling nurse practitioners to complete and sign mandatory blood testing forms will assist in providing applicants, such as victims of crime, correctional officers or paramedics, with expanded access to this health care service. And while that is a minor part of the proposed legislation, I am particularly proud of it because it is something that I advocated strongly for in opposition. This proposed change is one of several ways we are looking to further expand the scopes of practice regulating health professionals, allowing them to use their training, skills and education more effectively, and maximizing the services they can provide.

Patient care would be further enhanced by changes to digital health initiatives. Proposed amendments to the Personal Health Information Protection Act would help empower Ontarians to have more control over their own health, including by providing them with a general right of access to certain records, including their personal health information in the electronic health record, subject to any exceptions specified by regulation.

Now I'd like to provide further details related to creating a transparency framework for temporary health staffing agencies to report billing, administrative costs, and pay rates to the government. The transparency framework would be designed so that the rates agencies charge hospitals and long-term-care homes are transparent, granting increased cost certainty for employers, and stabilization of agency rates.

Currently, there is a lack of transparency regarding the rates agencies charge health service providers, including the overall fees and agency markups. Rates for agency staff can vary significantly. They may often be higher in rural, remote or northern communities in the province, and employers may also be charged travel and accommodation premiums. Hospitals and long-term-care homes can be limited in their ability to negotiate rates due to this lack of transparency and the agency costs they incur.

Our government has made significant investments to increase the number of workers in the health care system. But with a growing and aging population, and with more hospital bed capacity being added by our province, there remains a demand for staffing in some hospitals and long-term-care homes.

Agencies may also be responding to changing workforce expectations, with some segments of the workforce prioritizing higher compensation, flexibility and autonomy over the total rewards packages associated with full-time employment in hospitals and long-term-care homes.

Should the proposed legislation be passed, we would continue to engage front-line partners on how to bring agency fee stability to hospitals, long-term-care homes and emergency departments while protecting quality of care, prior to drafting any regulations. Key stakeholders to be consulted will include health care employers such as hospital and long-term-care employers and their respective associations, health sector unions and professional associations, and temporary staffing agencies operating in the health care sector, and the Association of Canadian Search, Employment and Staffing Services representing them. This work aims to support stabilization of agency rates, providing increased cost certainty for employers, and leading to better care for patients and long-term-care residents.

Our government understands a modern, connected and efficient health care system is a digital one, and we are working to provide better and more connected digital services for front-line providers and patients. We have made ongoing investments in Health811 to create a modern, digital front door. Every month, Health811 receives over 63,000 requests by phone and digitally to get health advice

from registered nurses and receive support to navigate health services.

People have growing expectations about easier access to their personal health records, and we know that people expect that they can access their information digitally. Through the More Convenient Care Act, we are taking steps to enable people to conveniently access their own personal health information held within the provincial electronic health record and certain other types of records.

The province has made significant investments to create the provincial electronic health record, which is a secure record of a patient's health history that is managed by Ontario Health. This digital record has become a vital tool used by health care providers to understand a person's medical history, make clinical decisions and support integrated care across our health care sector. The personal health information in the electronic health record includes personal health information concerning lab test orders and results from hospitals, community labs and public health labs; publicly funded drugs, dispensed monitored drugs, and pharmacy services; reports and images submitted by hospitals and integrated community health service centres; and clinical information from hospitals and home and community care organizations.

This personal information is currently available for health care provider access through provincial clinical viewers, and some patients can view their lab data via select patient portals. However, direct patient access to personal health information that is held in the electronic health record is not currently available.

0920

If passed, the proposed legislation would enable Ontarians to access their own personal health information conveniently, including through a general right of access to their personal health information in the electronic health record and certain other records, subject to any exceptions specified by regulation.

The proposed legislation would amend the Personal Health Information Protection Act to enable Ontario Health to collect, use and disclose personal health information, to provide a unique and secure means of validating and verifying a person's identity. If the proposed legislative changes and associated regulations are passed, this would allow Ontario Health to issue a unique digital health identifier. If the amendments related to individual access are approved and proclaimed and the necessary supporting regulations are made, with a digital health identifier, eligible Ontarians would be able to confidently and securely access their own health records in the electronic health record, subject to any exceptions specified by regulation.

And we plan to keep adding additional digital health-related services to keep increasing the value and convenience for Ontarians. This approach will allow Ontarians to avoid the inconvenience of accessing numerous, multiple portals while juggling multiple usernames and passwords. We are committed to ensuring people can access a wide range of information in any way Ontarians find convenient.

The proposed legislation builds the framework for digital access to personal health information, and it also supports a general right of access to information in the electronic health record and in repositories through non-digital means.

Consultations with the Minister's Patient and Family Advisory Council, jurisdictional scans from across Canada, and surveys from the pan-Canadian digital health organization, Canada Health Infoway, have indicated that there is a demand for people to access their health information, to support making more informed decisions as part of their individual health care journey.

Surveys indicate that individuals who have access to their health information generally have a positive experience, feel more informed about their health status and treatment, are more able to set and make progress on their health goals, and feel more empowered to manage their health.

Other studies indicate that patient access to health records can empower patients by improving trust and knowledge, and can help facilitate patients to work with their doctors or clinicians. Other impacts may be that patients feel reassured, and patient access to medical records improves communication between clinicians and their patients.

The proposed legislative amendments would help to address these demands, enabling Ontario Health to provide a secure log-on mechanism, which can be used for certain purposes, including to enable eligible Ontarians to access records held in the electronic health record, subject to any exceptions specified by regulation.

The Ministry of Health will continue to work collaboratively with Ontario Health, the Ministry of Public and Business Service Delivery and Procurement, and other stakeholders to ensure that the proposed legislation and any supporting regulations, if approved, would provide the framework for Ontario Health to deliver a digital portal so that Ontarians can view their records in a single place.

Our government will ensure rigorous privacy protections. We will ensure that any digital solution is tested and meets the highest standards.

We took steps to modernize privacy protections by introducing an administrative monetary penalty framework that the Information and Privacy Commissioner can use to levy fines to individuals and organizations that contravene PHIPA or its regulations.

Ontarians can rest assured that we have made significant investments in privacy and cyber protections to ensure personal data remains secure and safe.

This proposed legislation is part of our broader efforts to create a modern and convenient digital system where Ontarians, over time, will be able to easily access a wide range of health information through Ontario Health, subject to any exceptions made in specified regulation. This will empower people to take a more active role in their health.

The proposed legislation would also make amendments to the Health Protection and Promotion Act, to increase oversight by the province's Chief Medical Officer of

Health of class orders issued by local medical officers of health in respect of a communicable disease. A medical officer of health may currently issue an order under section 22 of the Health Protection and Promotion Act directed to a class of persons who reside or are present in the health unit served by the medical officer of health if the medical officer of health is of the opinion, upon reasonable and probable grounds, that in their health unit:

—a communicable disease exists or may exist, or there is an immediate risk of an outbreak of a communicable disease;

—the communicable disease presents a risk to the health of persons; and

—the requirements specified in the order are necessary to decrease or eliminate the risk to health presented by such communicable disease.

The change being proposed would require local medical officers of health to provide notice to and receive written approval from the provincial Chief Medical Officer of Health before issuing a section 22 class order. A key role of the provincial Chief Medical Officer of Health is to monitor the health status of the population and advise the provincial government on public health issues. If passed, this change is intended to support greater alignment, consistency and proportionality in section 22 class orders issued by local medical officers of health in respect to a communicable disease. It will also allow for an assessment of appropriate use of the section 22 class order authority and what provincial supports may be available to help address local communicable disease risks.

Supporting more alignment and consistency in the use of section 22 class orders is another part of the ongoing work to modernize and strengthen public health processes in Ontario. The proposed amendment to the Health Protection and Promotion Act would be implemented by the provincial Chief Medical Officer of Health through the development of operational guidance, which would be developed in collaboration with local medical officers of health. The Ministry of Health will work with local public health agencies to support clear and transparent communication and involvement of stakeholders in the implementation process.

Now it is my honour and pleasure to share my time with our associate minister Vijay Thanigasalam, who will provide more details on how our government is providing patients and families across Ontario with more connected and convenient health care, which is supported by the More Convenient Care Act and related regulatory and policy initiatives.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I recognize the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions.

Hon. Vijay Thanigasalam: Good morning, Speaker. Good morning, honourable members of this Legislature. Let me begin by thanking the Deputy Premier and Minister of Health for her leadership in strengthening our health care system and guiding the development of this important piece of legislation.

This legislation, if passed, will accomplish a number of important goals, such as strengthening governance and transparency, improving service delivery, and enhancing patient care.

I would also like to acknowledge the incredible health care workers in our province and all our health care sector partners for everything they do to provide exceptional care to people and families, and for their tremendous contributions to building a stronger, connected and patient-focused health care system.

I'm honoured to stand here today in my new role as Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions, in which I am laser-focused on building a more connected and comprehensive mental health and addictions system in this province. I have enjoyed meeting and working with stakeholders to better understand the complexities of this portfolio and, of course, working very closely with our Deputy Premier and Minister of Health to strengthen Ontario's mental health and addictions services, advocating for those who need support.

0930

I had the opportunity just last week to meet with a remarkable gentleman from Oakville named Nick Davis, who's just one example of the kinds of people I'm listening to and hearing from when it comes to this portfolio. He suffered from addictions himself, but he's now a successful entrepreneur, author and coach helping people recover from addictions. His story is a testament to the fact that recovery is real.

We understand the pain and suffering that too many people go through because of these addictions. These individuals who are suffering are our brothers, sisters, parents, children, and we will always stand up for them. We'll do that by building a people-first, recovery-oriented model of care for those struggling with addiction.

I want to highlight some of the incredible work our government has done thus far on this file and then speak to the aspects of this bill which I think are significant to mental health and addictions but generally, overall, to the health care system altogether.

Our government has already undertaken major steps to build a comprehensive and connected mental health and addictions care system in Ontario. This legislation, if passed, will help strengthen our mental health and addictions system and support those seeking care.

Since 2019-20, our government has invested more than \$800 million in new base funding that has flowed to key areas of mental health and addictions care. These include community mental health, child and youth mental health, mental health and addictions in the justice sector, and eating disorders services. It includes more than \$152 million for addiction treatment services and supports, plus more than an additional \$9 million for youth wellness hubs that are delivering appropriate care to youth who experience substance use issues.

Our government is adding 10 new youth wellness hubs to the network of 22 hubs already opened since 2020, bringing the total number of youth wellness hubs to 32 across the province.

I had an opportunity to visit the Thorncliffe Park Youth Wellness Hub just last week and to see the incredible work they are doing to support young people in the community, providing mental health and substance use support, primary health care, community and social support, and much more.

In 2022, we established the Addictions Recovery Fund, a \$90-million, three-year investment to boost capacity in addiction services in both day treatment and bed-based systems. In 2024, we continued to invest in this fund, with an additional \$124 million over three years to maintain addictions treatment beds for adults who need intensive support, which is helping to stabilize and provide care for about 7,000 clients each year. This funding is also supporting mobile mental health clinics to provide services to individuals living in remote, rural and underserved communities, and continuing three health-led mobile crisis response teams to support individuals in a mental health or addictions crisis.

This past August, our government announced that we are investing \$550 million to support the creation of 28 homelessness and addiction recovery treatment—we call them HART hubs. These hubs will connect people to a holistic approach to treatment that could include mental health and addictions services and support, as well as provide social services, employment support and supportive housing. These sites are a place for those in need to receive genuine support, addressing complex needs to simple things like a warm meal. My team has heard countless stories of people receiving this kind of care, and it's truly a testament to what a recovery-oriented model of mental health and addictions care can look like in communities across the province.

HART hubs are a critical step to filling gaps in care in vulnerable populations so that they can connect to high-quality care where and when they need it, including supportive housing, which is critical to recovery and a service proven to improve health and social outcomes. And these new hubs are in addition to the \$700 million for supportive housing through the Homelessness Prevention Program and Indigenous Supportive Housing Program each year.

These are just a number of the incredible projects our government has undertaken since 2018, but we are determined to continue moving forward and better understand the mental health and addictions space.

This legislation is yet another step in the right direction as we aim to examine the addictions counselling workforce, which involves establishing a consultation process for Ontario's addictions counselling providers to determine whether any future action may be required to enhance oversight within the field.

I am incredibly grateful for the work that addictions counsellors do, and of course I want to recognize that they are a vital part of the mental health and addictions system, saving lives each and every day.

We are providing more connected addictions and mental health care to people and families in Ontario. Establishing a consultation process with Ontario's addic-

tions counselling providers to determine if oversight within the field should be enhanced is another step to ensure we are providing the best possible service and supports.

I am committed to being a true partner with mental health and addictions service providers across the province, many of whom I have already had an opportunity—either to speak with them, meet with them, and others I am looking forward to seeing soon. We are all so determined to maximize results and improve outcomes for those in need. To do that, we need comprehensive work, where all those service providers come together to work along with our government.

As much as I am focused on mental health and addictions, there are other aspects of this bill which I would like to highlight today, as they have incredible importance for the overall health care system more broadly, especially as it relates to nurses and nurse practitioners.

The More Convenient Care Act includes proposed amendments to the Mandatory Blood Testing Act to expand nurse practitioners' scope of practice to allow them to complete and sign mandatory blood testing forms. Mandatory blood testing forms are required for an applicant to apply to have the blood of another person tested for specific infectious diseases, such as HIV, hepatitis B and hepatitis C, if they have come into contact with another person's bodily fluids. If approved, this change in nurse practitioners' practice could reduce the burden faced by physicians, who are currently the only clinicians able to complete and sign the form, so that they may attend to the care of others. By enabling nurse practitioners to provide a broader scope of services, it may also reduce barriers in Ontario's rural and northern areas, as well as for Ontario's Indigenous peoples.

The ministry will also continue to consult with stakeholders and internal ministry partners and will provide training to local public health agencies' staff to ensure readiness for this July 2025 deadline.

As nurse practitioners already provide primary care in many settings, including community safety and correctional services, they may be called upon to complete and sign these forms, independently or in the absence of a physician. The Nurse Practitioners' Association of Ontario has advocated for scope of practice expansions and is supportive of these specific proposed changes, which will enable nurse practitioners to leverage existing expertise, knowledge, skills and judgment to improve access to services.

Nurse practitioners play an important role in our health care system. We have also continued to make progress in increasing the number of nurse practitioners. The primary health care nurse practitioner education program funds universities to provide advanced education and clinical experience for nurse practitioner students in preparation for the Canadian Nurse Practitioner Examination and registration as a nurse practitioner, primary health care with the College of Nurses of Ontario. The program ensures a continued supply of nurse practitioners, which facilitates faster access to family health care.

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On February 2, 2023, it was announced that our government would be adding an additional 150 training positions for nurse practitioners, bringing the total number of government-funded positions from 200 to up to 350. As of 2024-25, all additional 150 nurse practitioner seats have been operationalized.

Our government is also building on the important care being delivered by Ontario's nurse practitioner-led clinics, which the province supports through \$46 million in funding each year, through our historic investments in interprofessional primary care teams. Through these investments, we are establishing two new nurse practitioner-led clinics and expanding four existing nurse practitioner-led clinics.

Nurse practitioner-led clinics provide comprehensive, accessible and coordinated family health care services. With these investments, we expect that a total number of more than 100,000 Ontarians will be served by these clinics, providing care to many people who had no previous primary care provider or who might otherwise face challenges accessing primary care.

Madam Speaker, we have further expanded the scope of practice for nurse practitioners and registered nurses in other areas, which will provide more choice and convenience for people in how they access care, while enabling registered nurses and nurse practitioners to work to the full extent of their training and expertise to better meet patients' needs. These changes, which will start on July 1, 2025, have been made in consultation with the College of Nurses of Ontario and other health care partners.

These scope-of-practice changes will enable nurse practitioners to order and apply electricity to treat heart conditions using defibrillation, transcutaneous cardiac pacing and cardiac pacemaker therapy—they will also be able to order and apply electricity using electrocoagulation, which can be used to control bleeding and treat skin conditions; and enable nurse practitioners to certify deaths in all circumstances while allowing registered nurses to certify deaths under limited circumstances. These changes will help improve the end-of-life experience for families after the death of a loved one.

These changes will improve access to care for Ontarians, including Indigenous peoples and those in rural, northern and remote areas of the province.

The changes will also ease stressors for other primary care providers and support capacity and efficiency in the health care system.

We are continuing to build Ontario's current and future health care workforce, adding thousands of new nurses across the province and bolstering the nursing workforce. These actions are strengthening health system capacity and ensuring Ontarians continue to have access to timely, high-quality care where and when they need it.

On a personal note, for years, I've seen the incredible work that nurses do in our community. I think of the countless nurses here in the GTA, in Scarborough, where I'm from, who work tirelessly in our local hospitals or in

other settings to deliver the best possible care to our residents. They do this because they care about people and their families. This is true in communities across the province. And this legislation ensures that we not only maximize their skill and expertise, but that we continue to add thousands of new nurses to strengthen our entire health care system.

Our government continues to work on innovative solutions to strengthen our health care system.

I encourage all members to support the More Convenient Care Act and support more connected and convenient care. Let's remain committed to make additional steps not only to improve the mental health and addiction systems in Ontario but improve the system more broadly by taking bold and innovative action with this legislation. We're saving patients time, shortening wait-lists, while protecting our health care system for the future.

I will now pass it to our parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Health, the member from Essex, who will speak to the impacts of this legislation on public health and hospitals.

An emergency alarm sounded.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I recognize that it is distracting right now with the alarms, but I encourage all members to continue. We're fine until it is resolved.

I recognize the member for Essex.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: I thought that was an alarm that was alarming.

I want to start simply by recognizing some of my colleagues for the work that they're doing here at the Ontario Legislature.

First, I'd like to recognize the Minister of Health. Since I have been working with the minister, I have noticed that she has a great dedication to the matter of health care. It means a lot to her. I appreciate everything that she's doing. I certainly respect her talent and her mastery of the subject matter. I wanted to say that.

I also want to thank the associate minister for his comments today. The Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions has an incredible personal story, which he shared with me. It is a story that I think everybody in this Legislature should learn, and I hope that one day he has time to give us a brief, one-hour speech setting out his personal story because I would love to hear it again.

I'd also like to recognize my colleague the other parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Health. That's the member from Lanark-Frontenac-Kingston. He has a very calm demeanour—and I always think of a poem by Rudyard Kipling; it reminds me of the member from Lanark-Frontenac-Kingston. The line from the poem goes like this: "If you can keep your head when all about you are losing theirs ... you'll be a man"—and that's the member from Lanark-Frontenac-Kingston.

Those are just a couple of remarks I wanted to make before I started talking about the substance of this bill.

The substance of the bill before us today makes some regulatory changes—well, the bill doesn't make the regulatory changes, but it announces regulatory changes and

makes some other changes to some basic health care legislation in the province of Ontario. The first is some enhancements to nurse practitioners' scope of practice.

I wanted to say some things about nurse practitioners. Nurse practitioners are something that some people in Ontario might find new. Certainly, the profession is not as old as the profession of doctors, but it is, in my mind at least, a delivery method for health care which is becoming more and more sophisticated.

I will share some statistics with the Legislature from the College of Nurses of Ontario. In the province of Ontario, we have a total number of 5,453 registered nurse practitioners. Of those registered nurse practitioners, 4,332 are registered for primary health care only, 803 are registered for adults only, 286 are registered for pediatrics only, and 32 are registered for multiple specialties.

I wanted to talk about nurse practitioners because this legislation speaks about nurse practitioners and expanding their scope of practice, which is a fancy way of saying that they're authorized to do more and more. Nurse practitioners are a specialty-trained profession in the province of Ontario, and what this legislation does is it expands their scope of practice, authorizing them to do more in the province of Ontario.

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We have something called the Mandatory Blood Testing Act. That act is perhaps as serious as it sounds. It's about mandatory blood testing, which is a very intrusive method of testing blood. You don't want to make too many things in this world mandatory, and certainly blood testing is one of those things that you want to be very careful about if you're going to make it mandatory. There's a certain very, very narrow, narrow, narrow set of circumstances in this country where you can require mandatory blood testing. Typically, you need to fill in a form, and it has to be authorized by a medical professional. Typically, that medical professional is a physician, but under certain narrow circumstances now, this legislation will authorize nurse practitioners to fill in that form and sign it. That's a good thing. The reason why that's a good thing is because we need more and more medical services, and we need more professionals to deliver those services. That's why we want to expand the scope of practice for nurse practitioners so they can do some of these services, which, of course, they have the expertise to do.

One of those services will be to certify death. That is a very useful thing, and it's especially important to have nurse practitioners be able to do services such as that in areas where we don't have a lot of physicians. I'm thinking about areas such as northern Ontario and certain specific rural areas which need more medical services. And of course, these medical services can definitely be delivered by the expert nurse practitioners we have in Ontario, so we're expanding their scope of practice so they can deliver services like that one.

I want to share, again from the College of Nurses of Ontario, their view on the expansion of scope of practice. Here is a quote from Silvie Crawford, a registered nurse and the executive director and CEO of the College of

Nurses of Ontario: “These changes to scope of practice can increase access to quality care. We look forward to supporting these changes by sharing educational resources with Ontario nurses to inform safe practice.”

Some of the changes that are being introduced are outlined in this as well: authorizing nurse practitioners to order and perform more procedures, such as defibrillation and electrocoagulation; removing certain conditions that currently limit nurse practitioners, giving them more authority—as I said, the authority to sign a medical certificate of death; and also authorizing RNs to complete and sign a medical certificate of death in specified circumstances. So that’s a little bit about that, and that’s contained in this proposed legislation.

Nurse practitioners are also playing a very important role in connecting people to primary care. Ontario was one of the very first jurisdictions in the world to launch nurse practitioners in a serious way into the delivery of primary care. This government has undertaken a very large investment to provide more and more nurse practitioners across Ontario to deliver primary care in Ontario.

I can tell you that I receive regular feedback from my constituents in the county of Essex, who tell me—I specifically go out and ask them, “How is your care being delivered? Do you have a nurse practitioner? Do you like your nurse practitioner? Did you used to have a doctor before? What was the difference?” I ask them these questions to get feedback about nurse practitioners. I’m very happy to be able to tell the Legislature that the feedback I get from my constituents is overwhelmingly positive when it comes to the service that they’re receiving from their nurse practitioners. I am routinely informed by my constituents that nurse practitioners give them the time they feel they need when they are expressing their concerns with regard to medical issues; that nurse practitioners seem to have the, let’s say, overall view of the patient in mind, or some people might say patient-centred attitude towards the delivery of health care. In a world where a fee-for-service delivery model might cause some people to be rushed, nurse practitioners—at least, based on the feedback that I get from my constituents—are consistently non-rushed when they’re giving their care to their patients. I think that’s a great thing, and I definitely wanted to mention that during this discussion that we’re having today over this piece of legislation.

This piece of legislation also proposes some changes that will benefit the city of Hamilton. The city of Hamilton currently has no citizen representatives on its board of health, and so this legislation will change that. It will establish a board of representatives which will now allow the city of Hamilton to place citizen representatives on that board. The proposal from the city is that the new board will consist of six council members, six community representatives and one educational representative. That type of representation is more along the lines of what is enjoyed by the city of Toronto and the city of Ottawa. So the city of Hamilton will now have a board that will look similar to that of the city of Toronto and the city of Ottawa. I think that was something that was specifically requested by the

city of Hamilton, and they’ll be able to get that under this legislation.

This legislation also deals with patient information. When I was practising law, from time to time it became necessary for one of my clients to access their medical information, and that was done by a somewhat clunky method, by today’s standards. You would have to go to whatever source you were seeking the medical information from, whether it was a hospital or your family doctor or whatever, and you’d fill in a form—perhaps there would be some information involved—and then they would release the records to you. Typically, the records would be in a big stack of paper, or, as time went on, sometimes you could get those records in a digital format. But it was always a clunky method.

I think sometimes that we need to move things along and adopt better practices. That’s one of the things that this bill is going to do. It’s going to create a method by which you can access medical records through something called the provincial patient viewer. That’s a way that you’ll be able to get records, such as lab records, from the Ontario laboratories information system, or from the digital health drug repository, and that’s regardless of the payer. What that means is, it doesn’t matter whether you had your prescription filled and paid for by an insurance company or whether your prescription was paid for and filled by some other method—it doesn’t matter who paid for it; you’re going to have access to that information. That’s very practical. Primarily, it’s practical for the specific patient, because when you go to get treatment, you’re often asked, of course, what medications you have taken, what medications you are currently taking, and it’s important to have access to that, and, ideally, access as quickly as possible. That’s one of the things that this legislation talks about.

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There’s also another important, I’ll say, oversight function in this legislation. This legislation also makes a slight change to what a medical officer of health can do with regard to a section 22 order.

For those of us who aren’t familiar with what a section 22 order is, here’s what a section 22 order is—many of us learned this during the pandemic. A section 22 order, which can be issued by a local medical officer of health—and there are several of those in the province of Ontario. Here is what the content of a section 22 order can contain: It can contain all sorts of mandatory requirements that are imposed upon you as a citizen, which can limit what you can and can’t do. There’s a trigger, and the trigger is in the act itself, and you have to meet these criteria before the local medical officer of health can issue the section 22 order. Here’s the criteria: The medical officer of health has to be of the opinion, on reasonable and probable grounds—all of the lawyers in this Legislature will know what that means—in their jurisdiction that (1) a communicable disease exists or may exist and that there is an immediate risk of an outbreak of a communicable disease; (2) that a communicable disease presents a risk to the health of persons; and (3) that the requirements specified in the

order are necessary to decrease or eliminate the risk to health presented by the communicable disease. If those three criteria exist, the local medical officer of health can issue an order—that's under section 22 of the Health Protection and Promotion Act—and then that order has the force of law, and people have to comply with that order, which means a local medical officer of health can have the same type of power as a judge of the Superior Court of Justice, ordering an order and forcing people to do things or refrain from doing certain things. That's a very serious power.

What this legislation does is it inserts an oversight function and says that before the local medical officer of health can issue that type of order, a very powerful order, the Chief Medical Officer of Health has to authorize it first. So that has to go first to the chief officer, and the chief officer has to sign off on it, and then the local officer can issue that order.

Those are some of the highlights of the legislation that's before us today.

Again, I'd like to thank the minister for her dedication and the associate minister for his dedication.

With that, Madam Speaker, I thank you for the time that I've used today.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Questions?

M^{me} France Gélinas: Thank you to the three parliamentarians for their comments this morning.

My first questions will be about schedule 5. We all know that today is viral hepatitis elimination day, certainly in line with what schedule 5 talks about. I was wondering if Ontario is interested in setting annual viral hepatitis testing and treatment targets to ensure that drug use equipment distribution matches the needs in the different communities. Are they interested in implementing HBV vaccination at birth for all babies and renewal of the HBV screening catch-up vaccinations for adults? Are they interested in developing and implementing broader screening guidelines to capture new cases and link them to care? That's just a little bit about hepatitis day and the intention of the government to help people prevent and care for hepatitis.

Hon. Sylvia Jones: While our government has been investing in public health and vaccines in particular, we have no plans to make those vaccines, in particular, mandatory. We'll continue to ensure that our public health units have sufficient investment and budgets to make sure that they are protecting their local communities, but mandatory vaccines at birth are not what we are planning on at this point.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Question? I recognize the member for Sarnia–Lambton.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's good to see you in the chair.

It's a great bill. I'm very interested in the debate this morning.

Something that's very important to me and, I know, a number of people in this room, in the province, is the health hubs that are going to be instituted or are already

under operation. I have one in Sarnia–Lambton. I'm very thankful for that. I would hope the minister could elaborate a bit about the importance of them and their operations so far.

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Thank you to the member from Sarnia–Lambton for his advocacy.

The treatment hubs really are our newest intervention to make sure that people who are suffering from mental health and addictions issues have those pathways back to community, back to work, back to living and volunteering with their families.

The HART hub model, the treatment model, is really an all-of-government model focusing on the individual, making sure that today, if you need primary care, you'll get it at a treatment centre. You may get supportive housing. You may decide that you would like treatment, support for work. It's all about making sure that whatever that individual needs at that moment in time, they get it through these treatment hubs.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Question?

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: ᓃᓄᓂᕐᓴᓄᓂ. Good morning. Sioux Lookout Regional Physicians' Services Inc., also known as SLRPSI, provides physician services in my riding for hospital services, but they're also in the community to provide physician services. When I left, when I came here to get into politics—I used to be part of that board. At that time, they had 18 FTEs out of the 55 FTEs they were funded for.

Physician services are very hard to recruit—and to retain, as well. Also, at the community level, we don't have any hospitals. We have one hospital in Sioux Lookout, and it's really hard to provide that service, so we have these federal nursing station models. There is a lot of unnecessary suffering and needless deaths that happen because of the use of jurisdiction for providing services.

Fort Severn is the most northerly community in Ontario. How will this bill help the people of Fort Severn so they get proper access where it's more convenient, where they get access to more convenient care? Meegwetich.

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Of course, this piece of proposed legislation, if passed, is one of the many pieces that we are working on.

The member opposite rightly highlights the need to encourage and actually provide opportunities for young people who want to train and practise in the province of Ontario. We've done that through a very clear directive with the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario to say, "Quickly assess, review and ultimately license, when appropriate, internationally trained." We have seen, as my remarks mentioned, a substantial, historic third-year-in-a-row increase in the number of internationally trained who want to practise in the province of Ontario.

Of course, we have also done expansions domestically, internally with our medical schools, and that includes additional seats, almost 50% of which in NOSM are actually for family physicians who are training in the north. We know and we have the data that shows if you train in northern Ontario, you are far more likely to stay

and continue to practise, because it's a beautiful place to be.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Questions?

MPP Tyler Watt: My question is in regard to schedule 3, regarding the staffing agency reporting.

It's great that we'll be more transparent when it comes to our usage of nursing staff agencies. It will go to show actually how much money the province is spending on it. But at the end of the day, this doesn't really do anything to address the nursing shortage that we're seeing across the province.

I know there have been some plans to get more people into the nursing profession. That's great. But what I would like to know from this government is, what are we actually going to do to retain the current staff and nurses who are already working there so we don't have to depend on these expensive nursing agencies?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: As I mentioned in my remarks, we've actually seen, for a third year in a row, a historic high of individual nurses who have requested and are now licensed to practise in the province of Ontario—100,000—and we have 30,000 who are training in our post-secondary institutions.

I'm particularly proud of the work that the Minister of Colleges and Universities and I have been able to do with the Learn and Stay program to make sure that individuals who, perhaps for financial reasons, were not choosing to go into the nursing profession now have an opportunity to get that training and have the provincial government taxpayers cover not only their tuition but also their books.

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These programs are truly making a difference. At the end of the day, as we see the number of nurses, nurse practitioners, RPNs, physicians wanting to be in Ontario, we will close that gap with that last 10% who don't have a primary care physician, and we will get there in the next four years.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Question?

Mrs. Daisy Wai: I thank the Minister of Health for introducing the More Convenient Care Act. It is definitely a great thing for people to be able to access the health care system, making it easier for them to know their records and medical information.

I do have two questions here. With digital access becoming so easy and accessible, how are we going to protect health data from unauthorized access, breaches and cyber threats? And the next question is, how can we encourage some family doctors who used to just write down the information about the patients instead of having digital records?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Those are two really important points raised by the member.

First of all, we have been working very closely with the Information and Privacy Commissioner to ensure that the protection is there. As much as we are keen to push forward on this very quickly, we also need to be very careful to make sure that we have the protections in place,

because I think most of us will agree that our personal health information is probably the thing that is most needed to be secure. So we have been working with the Information and Privacy Commissioner's office all through the preparing of this legislation and, ultimately, regulation.

In terms of ensuring that family physicians embrace the digital space, we're doing that with a model with the Ontario Medical Association, and I'm very excited to see those results come forward.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Seeing the time on the clock, I'm going to make the decision to begin members' statements.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

KEVIN MILLS

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: It is with a heavy heart that I rise today in this House to honour the life of Kevin Mills, a remarkable resident of Newmarket, a former paramedic, and a national symbol of perseverance and strength. Kevin passed away suddenly on April 29, at the age of 44, due to medical complications. But in his time with us, he made an unforgettable impact.

After sustaining a spinal cord injury in 2009, Kevin refused to let his diagnosis define his limits. Instead, he chose to redefine what was possible.

Last year, Kevin hand-cycled over 7,000 kilometres across this great country to raise awareness about accessibility and inclusion. He inspired the nation, and he was celebrated with a key to the town of Newmarket.

He also co-founded the Walk It Off spinal cord wellness centre with his wife, Heather, and created Pedaling Possibilities, a non-profit dedicated to supporting others on their recovery journey.

Kevin brought warmth, courage and conviction to every room he entered. He was a cherished friend, a compassionate advocate and a relentless champion for accessibility.

To his wife, Heather, to his family and to the entire Newmarket community: I share in your grief. Kevin's legacy will continue to inspire generations to come. May he rest in peace.

ELEVATOR MAINTENANCE

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Seniors are contacting my office because they're upset. They have been confined to their apartments for over four months, not because they want to be, but because the only elevator in their building has been down for repairs since January. This is a six-storey seniors' apartment building in London-Fanshawe. Seniors have been trapped in their apartments because they have mobility limitations. They use walkers and scooters and can't climb up and down six flights of stairs. The property management company provides limited services, but tenants must mostly fend for themselves.

This means extra costs for grocery delivery and hoping their family and friends will run their errands for them.

One senior temporarily moved in with a friend because the repairs were taking so long that they could not handle the isolation, and they could no longer be independent.

This is not a minor inconvenience but a matter of dignity, safety and fundamental human rights.

In May 2018, Ontario passed the Access to Consumer Credit Reports and Elevator Availability Act, but regulations were not immediately implemented. The Auditor General reported in 2022 that regulatory changes required elevator owners to report certain outages to the TSSA only after the elevator returned to service. The legislation's intent does not appear to be working when the only elevator in a seniors' building can take over four months to repair.

I urge the government to return to the drawing board and ensure the bill includes measures to take action to prevent another seniors' building from going through what the good people in London–Fanshawe are facing today.

EDUCATION WEEK

M^{me} Lucille Collard: It's Education Week here in Ontario. I'd like to begin by thanking everyone who works in schools: the teachers and EAs, who instruct and help our kids every day; principals and vice-principals, for making sure their school is a great place to learn; office administrators, who not only keep the trains running on time but are also a hub of support for so many students and families; custodial staff, who keep the place clean and safe; school bus drivers, who get students to school safely; parent volunteers and other volunteers, who fundraise and contribute greatly to the school community.

In particular, I want to give a shout-out to my sister Stephanie, who has been working in schools for a decade. It's her second career, and she's an educational assistant. I'm very proud of her work with children with exceptional needs, and the love and care she shows them daily.

There's a lot of work left to be done to make our schools a better place to learn. All our kids deserve the best schools, where they will get an opportunity to thrive and succeed.

BARB COLLINS

MPP Mohamed Firin: It's an honour to stand before you today to share the story of a remarkable institution and an even more remarkable leader, who, together, are transforming the future of health care in my riding of York South–Weston and beyond. At the helm of this transformation is Barb Collins, who has just been recognized by Newsweek as a top CEO for 2024-25, on top of also leading Humber to ranking as one of the world's best hospitals and among Newsweek's world's best hospitals in 2023-24.

The Newsweek CEO Circle brings together top CEOs and executives from across the globe to share insights and drive meaningful change in their industries. Barb's invita-

tion to this group is a reflection not only of her accomplishments, but also of the groundbreaking work happening every day at Humber.

Barb is a champion for equity and inclusion as a co-chair of North Western Toronto Ontario Health Team, where she actively pursues partnerships to advance equitable and inclusive community care.

Under her leadership, Humber has no hallway health care, with a financial surplus.

Barb Collins is not just lighting new ways in health care; she's building the blueprint, and in doing so, she's ensuring that compassionate, innovative and equitable care is not just a promise but a lived reality for the hundreds of thousands who rely on it every day.

Barb is in the gallery today. I would appreciate it if all of the members could rise and just applaud her for the great work she has been doing. Thank you.

Applause.

FOOD INSECURITY

Ms. Jessica Bell: Today, I'm going to read a message written by Kimberly Wu from Harbord Collegiate secondary school. Kimberly wrote a powerful statement about an issue that is important to her for me to read out in the Legislature. It's called "Tackling Youth Food Insecurity."

"I bring attention to an invisible crisis affecting many youth in Ontario—food insecurity.

"In our schools and communities, too many students skip meals, not by choice, but because they cannot afford them.

"Hunger doesn't just hurt the stomach—it steals focus, hinders learning, and dims potential.

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"Programs like student nutrition initiatives and community food banks are vital, but they are band-aid solutions.

"To truly address this issue, we need systemic change.

"Let's increase funding for school meal programs, strengthen partnerships with local farms, and expand affordable grocery options in underserved neighbourhoods.

"Youth are our future, but they cannot thrive on empty stomachs.

"By addressing food insecurity, we nourish not just bodies, but the potential for every young person to succeed.

"It's time to ensure that no child goes hungry in Ontario."

Thank you, Kimberly, for your thoughtful and important message. I am proud to share your voice in the Legislature today.

CAMBRIDGE FOOD BANK

Mr. Brian Riddell: The Cambridge Food Bank is an outstanding organization in my community. They work tirelessly to ensure that those in need have access to food,

and it's no small task. To do this, they rely on donations, which are not always the easiest to get.

That's why I'm so pleased to learn that the Cambridge Food Bank received a \$171,800 grant from the Ontario Trillium Foundation. This funding allowed them to purchase a much-needed, new refrigerated truck. The previous vehicle was nearly 20 years old and had many mechanical issues that made it very difficult to collect donations efficiently. Now, thanks to the new purchase of this truck, they no longer have to load and unload thousands of pounds of food by hand. It's a major improvement, helping them to collect donations more easily and get food on the shelves faster for those who rely on it. In March, I had the pleasure of seeing both the old truck and the new one. The difference is night and day.

To close, I want to extend a heartfelt thanks to the Cambridge Food Bank team. Your dedication means so much to our community.

CONFLICT IN MIDDLE EAST

Ms. Doly Begum: Hind Rajab would have turned seven this week, but her life was taken cruelly: shot at 335 times as she pleaded for help—335 bullets, to murder a six-year-old.

For the past 18 months, we watched in horror the genocide unfolding in Gaza, killing more than 50,000 Palestinians, which include over 20,000 children. Some reports indicate that the actual numbers may be much higher.

The bombardment continues, almost normalized now, as if Palestinian children are less human, as if it's normal to cut off essential services like health care and aid, as if starvation being used as a weapon of war—all of which are war crimes—is normal.

For those 18 months, only a few voices have told us what's happening in Gaza—the stories of fathers collecting their children's body parts; the erasure of entire neighbourhoods; and the complete destruction of health and education systems for millions of people.

And these truths were brought to the world also at an enormous cost. More than 232 Palestinian journalists have been killed over the last year, the deadliest number we have seen in any wars or genocides in history—the targeted killings of journalists to not just silence them, but to suppress the truth.

Speaker, in the short time that I have today, this is all I can say, in hopes that maybe, just maybe, in our hearts, we will find the courage to speak up for the thousands of children. Just maybe, our hearts would tremble seeing the images of children like six-year-old Hind Rajab.

YOUTH AND PUBLIC SERVICE

Mrs. Daisy Wai: Today, I rise to recognize and give thanks to many exceptional youths in my riding of Richmond Hill. They all showed keen interest in Ontario's democratic process.

Olivia Fang requested an interview with me to learn about the role of an MPP. She wants to understand what it is like to be a politician, why and how I get to be an MPP. I was asked to share the achievements and the satisfaction I have being an MPP.

I also spent time with my legislative page from Richmond Hill, Leah Wong. Leah enjoys her time as a page and is interested to find out more and wants to serve the community as a volunteer in my office.

The day before, I welcomed students from Christ the King Catholic Elementary School to Queen's Park. They also showed a keen interest in public service.

Investing in our youth is our responsibility, to ensure that the next generation is given mentorship, education and opportunity. By investing in our youth, we're investing in a strong democracy and future for all of Ontario.

TRENTON GOLDEN HAWKS HOCKEY TEAM

Mr. Tyler Allsopp: A week ago Wednesday night, Tao Artichuk sparked a great celebration in my Bay of Quinte riding as he knocked home an overtime goal in Milton to give the Trenton Golden Hawks their second Buckland Cup title as Ontario Junior Hockey League champions. The win came during the sixth game of their playoff series. The top-seeded Golden Hawks also beat Pickering, Stouffville and Haliburton on this spring's playoff run.

It's impressive to see a group of young people from different backgrounds come together over the course of a season and do something special for themselves and for their community. They sacrificed so much for this game that they love.

Congratulations to them, to coach Derek Smith and staff, owner Shawn Hicks, and the many billets and volunteers working behind the scenes to ensure success on and off the ice.

Named after the historic RCAF Golden Hawks, who were stationed at CFB Trenton, Canada's largest air force base and the pride of our region, these Hawks will keep flying on to Calgary to represent Ontario in the Centennial Cup championship from May 8 to 18. We will also see teams from Kam River, Sudbury and Rockland battle on behalf of other districts across the province.

Please join me in wishing them well as they chase this championship.

APPOINTMENT OF INFORMATION AND PRIVACY COMMISSIONER

Mr. Steve Clark: Speaker, I seek unanimous consent that, in accordance with subsection 4(2) of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, R.S.O. 1990, c. F.31, Patricia Kosseim be reappointed Information and Privacy Commissioner for a term of five years, as set out in subsection 5(1) of the act, commencing on July 1, 2025.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Agreed? Agreed.

HOUSE SITTINGS

Mr. Steve Clark: Speaker, I seek the unanimous consent of the House to move a motion without notice respecting evening sittings.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Agreed? Agreed.

Mr. Steve Clark: I move that, pursuant to standing order 7(c), the House shall continue to meet past the ordinary hour of adjournment until midnight on the following dates: May 12, May 13, May 14, May 15, May 26, May 27, May 28, May 29, June 2, June 3, and June 4, 2025.

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

Motion agreed to.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Hon. Michael Parsa: I'd like to welcome to the House Rob Partipilo, Mark Baldassarra, Luigi Inglese, Daniela Inserra and Daniel Rubino, who helped raise an impressive \$13,500 for My MS Family, supporting individuals living with multiple sclerosis.

Welcome to Queen's Park. I look forward to seeing you after question period.

Mr. John Vanthof: I'd like to congratulate one of our page captains for today, Isabelle Ducharme, and welcome her mom, Melanie—she's in the members' gallery—who is happy to be at Queen's Park today with us, all the way from Timiskaming–Cochrane.

1030

Hon. Nolan Quinn: I am pleased to welcome Johannah Thumb from the Vector Institute, Joyce Ayoson from York University, Joshua Goldman from the University of Toronto, and Dumebi Onyeagwu from Queen's University—three of the 120 students receiving Vector Scholarships in Artificial Intelligence this year. Over 800 students have received this scholarship since 2018, helping bright students make innovative discoveries that build a more dynamic and resilient economy for Ontario. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Ms. Jessica Bell: I'd like to thank Michelle Teixeira from OSSTF, Jennifer Huang from the labour council, and Sandra Huh from the Ontario Autism Coalition for being here today, as well as Kimberly Wu from Harbord Collegiate, who's the winner of our members' statement competition, and her sister Judy Wu.

Mr. Ted Hsu: I'd like to recognize Cole Zelmanovits, who is a page from my riding of Kingston and the Islands. He is serving as the page captain today. I'd also like to welcome his mother, Gemma; his brother Milo; his father, Scott; his grandma Judith and grandpa George, who are in the gallery watching today. I look forward to having lunch with Cole and his family after question period.

Welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. Stan Cho: I want to welcome back to the Legislature, from my riding of Willowdale, Ellen Schoenberger, who worked in the Legislature in the 1980s and 1990s as director of human resources and is the great-aunt of our

page captain Cole Zelmanovits, who has eight other members of his family here, including his mother, Gemma.

Welcome back to Queen's Park, Ellen. And thank you, Cole, for your hard work.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Cole is clearly much loved.

I'd like to recognize the Zelmanovits-DeBoni family who are present from my riding, also to support Cole in his duties as captain. This wonderful family actually has a tradition of participating in the Ontario Legislature as pages—including Jill Zelmanovits, Helen DeBoni, Luke DeBoni, and Ross is also here.

Welcome to the Legislature.

Hon. Nina Tangri: I would like to welcome the staff and students of Rotherglen Meadowvale school here at Queen's Park today.

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: I'm delighted to welcome an innovator and a leader and one of our finest CEOs anywhere in Ontario: our CEO of the Humber hospital, Barb Collins. Welcome to the Ontario Legislature.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Today I'm very pleased to introduce in the chamber some of the recipients of the King Charles III medal in Davenport and their families, who will be joining me this afternoon: Celina de Melo and her daughter Paula; Corporal Frank D'Amico and his wife, Relina, kids Antonio and Caterina, and their friend Vikram; and two of our country's greatest advocates and experts in long-term care, Hugh and Pat Armstrong.

Hon. Victor Fedeli: I want to introduce, from ArcelorMittal Dofasco, their CEO, Ron Bedard.

Mr. Stephen Blais: I'd like to welcome Jason Burggraaf, the executive director of the Greater Ottawa Home Builders' Association; my friend Pierre Dufresne from the home builders. We're going to have a meeting this afternoon, and we look forward to continuing to work to build homes in Ottawa.

QUESTION PERIOD

HOUSING

INFRASTRUCTURE FUNDING

Ms. Marit Stiles: My question is to the Premier.

The Premier recently wrote to the Prime Minister seeking federal support for what the Premier has called "nation-building projects."

A strong nation, ready for whatever is going to hit us, is built on homes—homes for regular people, with state-of-the-art schools and state-of-the-art hospitals. But your list of nation-building projects didn't include those things. Instead, it prioritized your \$100-billion fantasy tunnel under Highway 401.

So does the Premier not think that housing, hospitals and schools are nation-building projects?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize the Minister of Infrastructure.

Hon. Kinga Surma: The Minister of Finance will be presenting the budget in a number of days, in a number of

weeks. But it's no secret that we're spending \$50 billion to expand and rebuild hospitals right across the province of Ontario—CHEO in Ottawa, for example, was a milestone groundbreaking event just recently.

Madam Speaker, as you know, it is the Minister of Housing's intention to present a bill next week that will help us make sure that we keep costs down and we help approve projects as quickly as possible so that future generations have the same opportunity that all of us had—the dream of home ownership.

So I stand behind the minister, and we'll be speaking about housing next week.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Supplementary?

Ms. Marit Stiles: We have put forward, again and again, proposals to get this government actually back in the business of building housing again. But housing starts are down. Housing is not getting built.

The Prime Minister is now talking about this very thing. Direct government investments in housing are a way that we can defend Canada against Trump's tariffs, we can protect construction jobs, we can address the housing crisis.

Speaker, the Premier, and even the members of the third party, for that matter, have opposed this idea every time we bring it forward.

So, back to the Premier: Will the Premier put this fantasy tunnel aside and make a serious investment into home building in the upcoming budget?

Hon. Kinga Surma: I'm so sorry. I didn't realize the Minister of Transportation was here. I'm sure he'll take the next question on transportation.

We know congestion is a huge issue in the province of Ontario—and this government will be helping, easing congestion, because it is something that the public voted for.

Again, the Minister of Housing will be presenting a bill. It is our intention that he will be presenting a bill next week, where we will list out all of the incentives and the new processes so that we can get housing built in the province of Ontario. And then, of course, as the Minister of Infrastructure—we launched \$2-billion worth of infrastructure to help our municipalities build close to 700,000 new homes in the province of Ontario. Both are priorities. We will help stop congestion, and we will do everything we can to make sure our young people can have the dream of home ownership.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Final supplementary?

Ms. Marit Stiles: Speaker, what they're doing is not working. People don't have homes now. They've been in power for seven years, and we still don't have homes that people can afford—regular people.

We've got luxury spas down at Ontario Place being built. We've got this Premier's fantasy tunnel—hundreds of billions of dollars are going to be wasted on that.

Where do homes and hospitals and schools fit into this government's plans for nation building?

Canadian productivity depends on infrastructure 100%. It depends on roads. It depends on bridges. But it also

depends on a high-quality health care system, an education system that's going to meet the needs of students of all abilities, and social supports when people need them. But it seems like health care and education and social supports are not important enough for this Premier.

So, back to the Premier: In the upcoming budget, will the Premier increase funding for important infrastructure like health care, like education, and like the social services Ontarians need?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize the Minister of Health.

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Perhaps the member opposite forgets the \$50 billion that we're investing in 50 capital builds across Ontario. Those are the investments that we started in 2018, and those are the investments that we will continue to do, because we are investing in people. We are investing to ensure that Ontario residents have access to top-of-the-line health care, to schools that are being built across Ontario. We want to make sure that infrastructure is in place. And absolutely, if the federal government wants to come to the table and help, I'm welcoming and all ears. In the meantime, we will get it done, under the leadership of Premier Ford.

Ms. Marit Stiles: People are actually fleeing our province—skilled workers—in record numbers right now. So I think the minister should go back and check what's happening right now.

PUBLIC HEALTH

Ms. Marit Stiles: Speaker, my next question is back to the Premier—because I was so disappointed to hear both the Premier and the Minister of Health yesterday. With over 1,300 confirmed cases of measles in the province, I was absolutely shocked to hear the minister and the Premier defend their absolutely abysmal record on the measles outbreak. They seem to be totally unfazed by the growing number of people who have been infected. They're even making jokes about chasing kids around with needles, when this is serious. It's about fighting misinformation with education, and it is about building trust in our public health care system.

Why have the Premier and the Minister of Health thrown in the towel in the fight against measles?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Back to the Minister of Health.

1040

Hon. Sylvia Jones: There is no doubt that immunization is our best control to ensure that our youngest children are protected, which is why we directed—and the Chief Medical Officer of Health sent out a directive to all of the public health units over a year ago, saying, "Refocus your efforts. You need to refocus your efforts on childhood vaccines." We did that over a year ago. We proactively ordered over a half a million additional—sorry, we've ordered a half a million vaccinations and vaccines specifically related to measles, because we knew that this was going to be something that we wanted to ensure that there was sufficient supply. We have done that.

If anyone—a parent, a caregiver—needs to know where these vaccines are and how to access it, call 811, because we have the capacity, we have ensured our public health units have the information that they need, and we'll continue to provide—

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Supplementary? I recognize the member for Hamilton Centre.

MPP Robin Lennox: I'm shocked that we're continuing to hear about memos sent in 2023.

Instead of coming up with a plan to educate and support people to get vaccinated, our Premier blamed them for their vaccine hesitancy. We need to rebuild trust and meet people where they're at, not just give up.

Hamilton Public Health's vaccine ambassador program recruited members of the community who spoke 17 different languages and came from different cultural groups, and successfully increased vaccine uptake through dedicated outreach. But this Conservative government cut the funding for that program in 2023. And now, here we are, throwing our hands up.

Will this government implement strategies like these, proven to combat misinformation and connect with hard-to-reach communities?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: For context, the member opposite is referencing a COVID-related program that we had in place during the pandemic.

What we have done is we have increased, by almost 20%, the investments and the programs that we have provided for our local public health units.

The Chief Medical Officer of Health has said that we are not seeing a spread in our public schools. Why? Because we have a high vaccine rate.

The member opposite can be part of the solution and actually talk to your constituents about where we can—and the need for vaccines, including measles, which, frankly, has been a vaccine that has been available in Ontario for over 50 years. Help us get that information out. We are doing that with social media campaigns and, yes, directives to the public health units.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Back to the member for Hamilton Centre for supplementary.

MPP Robin Lennox: Just for context, we've had 1,300 cases in six months, and if our minister doesn't know, we usually have 10 cases per year. So if we're still talking about vaccines sitting in fridges, about usual strategies and about memos sent in 2023, then you have completely lost the plot.

Speaker, anyone trained in emergency response could tell you that if you're dealing with a crisis in 2025 and the best you've got are memos sent two years ago, you're not combatting an emergency; you're just counting casualties.

So when will this government move beyond memos and start funding programs, like the ambassador program, which you might not know is now crowd-sourcing external funding because this government won't fund it. Why won't you fund programs that have actually been proven to work?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: I will remind the member opposite that our public health units have actually seen an increase

in their budgets by almost 20%. Innovative programs that they wish to provide in their own communities—they absolutely have the ability to do that.

I want to remind people: This is a vaccine that has been in place in Ontario for over five decades.

We need to ensure that people have all of the information they need to make sure that their children are protected.

The outbreaks, as I hope the member opposite knows, are predominantly within a specific community in southwestern Ontario. We have been working very closely with those impacted public health units. We provide sufficient vaccines—we actually ordered extra.

We'll continue to have public health and children's backs when we're battling the outbreak of measles in Ontario.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Mr. John Fraser: My question is for the Premier.

But first, it's Education Week here in Ontario. I would just like to say, on behalf of my party—and I'm sure everybody here—thank you to all the educators, everybody who is in our schools, helping our kids, keeping them safe, teaching them. We count on you, and, quite frankly, you need to be able to count on us.

When adjusted for inflation, Ontario is spending about \$1,500 less per student than we did in 2018.

So my question to the Premier is, does he really think that spending \$1,500 per student less every year is good for their education?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize the Minister of Education.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I appreciate the question.

Obviously, we don't. That's why we've increased funding each and every year to education well beyond what the previous government was spending on education.

Madam Speaker, I agree with the member opposite on one thing: We have some of the best educators in the world. And we have a system that needs to refocus itself on providing maximum resources for our students in the classroom. It is also a system that needs to refocus itself on restoring the respect that was a hallmark of our education system, basically for generations—respect for teachers by students, respect for parents by the system—and ensuring that our teachers felt supported in the classroom. That is what I am insisting on. That is what our Progressive Conservative government is insisting on. More importantly, I think that's what parents and students and educators are insisting on—a system that focuses on students and maximizes results for them.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Supplementary?

Mr. John Fraser: With all due respect to the minister across, I've heard repeatedly the government—and not the member this time—saying “historic funding” and, “We spend more money this year than we've ever spent before.” Well, that's literally what every government has done on health care and education since I've been alive.

Don't tell me what you're spending. Tell me what you're doing.

The results show just that—crumbling schools, crowded classrooms, exceptional needs not being met, violence in schools.

Back to the Premier: Does he really think that spending \$1,500 a year less per student is actually going to deliver the results that our families need?

Hon. Paul Calandra: The member opposite knows that figure is absolutely incorrect. But it doesn't matter to parents. He can get up here and say, "Oh, we're spending this and that." Do you know what parents care about? It's that when their kids go to school, they're getting the education they deserve; that they're being prepared for the jobs of tomorrow; that we're educating students so they can be prepared to meet all of the challenges of tomorrow. They don't care that you argue with me over \$1,500 here and there. What they want to know is that when they go to school, the teacher will have the resources to properly educate the student and they will feel safe in the classroom.

What parents are telling me is, "Make sure that the boards are maximizing those resources in the classroom." That is what I'm asking the boards to do—work with me, double down on ensuring a line-by-line approach to funding so that we can ensure that maximum resources go to our teachers so that they can maximize the time that they spend with students, and that parents have the confidence that our public education system is giving their kids all of the help they need to succeed in the future.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Supplementary?

Mr. John Fraser: You're giving them less money. That's the point. You're making it harder for them to maximize the dollars, because the dollars are fewer.

I know what's happening in schools because I talk to parents and educators. I've got educators in my family. And the reality is, in particular, year over year, students with exceptional needs are getting less and less and less. We all know that's happening in our boards.

1050

I respect the member, but I don't respect the premise of what his answer is—really, what you're saying is, "I'm asking them to do more with less." And I don't think that's what we've done in education in Ontario to be successful. So I guess the question is, will you restore that \$1,500?

Hon. Paul Calandra: I'll tell you what I will restore, Madam Speaker: I will restore, in the province of Ontario, a school system that respects our teachers, a school system that respects our students, and a school system that gives our teachers the maximum resources they need in order to give our students the tools to succeed in the jobs of tomorrow.

I am singularly unconcerned with what the member opposite talks about, because what we have right now in our school system is a system where parents don't have the confidence that the system is listening to them. I have a board in Durham region that built an elementary school where all the kids use one washroom. I have parents calling me, writing me and saying, "That is not what we

want for our kids. They're afraid to go to the washroom." That is where we lose respect, and that is where people think that the system isn't listening to them.

So that is what I'm going to do. I'm going to double down and make sure that the school system does what it is charged to do: educate our kids—

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Question?

SUBVENTIONS DESTINÉES À L'ÉDUCATION

EDUCATION FUNDING

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Le sous-financement chronique en éducation pousse les conseils scolaires francophones de l'Ontario au bord du gouffre. La taille des classes augmente, le soutien aux élèves ayant des besoins particuliers diminue et les enseignants signalent des milieux de travail dangereux et stressants. Les syndicats comme l'AEFO tirent la sonnette d'alarme concernant la montée de violence et l'épuisement professionnel. Ce ne sont pas des cas isolés mais les symptômes d'un système qui est littéralement à bout de souffle.

Si ce gouvernement valorise réellement l'éducation et la dualité linguistique, comment peut-il justifier des décisions budgétaires qui laissent les écoles de langue française lutter pour servir leurs élèves et protéger leur personnel?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize the Minister of Education.

L'hon. Paul Calandra: Madame la Présidente, comme vous le savez, et comme la députée le sait, nous avons fait beaucoup d'investissements dans le secteur d'éducation. En fait, nous avons fait des investissements historiques dans le système d'éducation.

Mais je suis en accord avec la députée : nous voulons assurer que nos élèves ont les ressources pour « success ». I apologize; I don't want to get the words wrong. We'll want to make sure that our students—francophone, English, Catholic, public and even those who aren't in the system, frankly—have all of the tools that they need to succeed.

What I want to ensure is that our school system respects teachers, respects students and respects parents. It shouldn't matter whether you're in the public system, you're in the Catholic system or if you're a parent who has chosen to not put your kid in one of those systems, you should have all of the tools that you need to succeed. We are a rich province, and we will make sure that that happens, not because we say so, but because that's what our kids and parents need and that's what they demand.

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Le gouvernement aime se vanter des investissements, qu'il qualifie d'historiques, en éducation, mais lorsqu'on tient compte de l'inflation et de la croissance démographique, surtout dans les régions en pleine expansion, les écoles de langue française accusent un retard qui est important et qui est très préoccupant. Sur papier, les chiffres sont beaux, mais sur le terrain—la

réalité—ce sont des portatives surpeuplées et un manque de ressources essentielles.

L'éducation en français, ce n'est pas seulement l'instruction académique, c'est la préservation de la culture et de l'identité d'un peuple.

Quand ce gouvernement va-t-il reconnaître les besoins distincts du système d'éducation de langue française et offrir un financement ciblé et durable qui reflète cette réalité?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Quite frankly, I'm actually very proud of our French-language school boards and the public boards and what they're doing to encourage students to take up the French language.

In York region, our French-language schools are exploding at the seams—and she's absolutely right—because so many parents want to send their kids there. I was just at école Pape-François on Friday. I was touring that school. It is a wonderful French-language school. The French-language board runs it. They are doing incredible work at that school. I'm going to ensure, working, of course, with the Minister of Francophone Affairs and the other members—the Minister of Labour would be very happy to hear that at that school, the work that they're doing on the trades was absolutely groundbreaking. I went and visited the class, and there were young grade 9 women learning how to use the different machines. The coding class was full with both girls and boys. It was an exciting time.

We're going to double down and make sure that our kids in French-language schools or in any school have the resources they need to succeed, full stop.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Final supplementary.

M^{me} Lucille Collard: A key driver of strain is this government's failure to invest sufficiently in the pipeline of French-language educators—not just in our francophone schools, but across the whole system. English boards are turning away thousands of students from French immersion due to a lack of qualified teachers. This shortage pressures the broader French-language sector and weakens Ontario's francophone landscape.

French immersion isn't a luxury. It's a bridge between communities and a tool for building a bilingual workforce.

Will this government address the root causes of this systemic pressure by committing to train more French-language educators and by legislating equitable access to French immersion programs across Ontario?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize the Minister of Francophone Affairs.

L'hon. Caroline Mulroney: Notre gouvernement et, je pense, tous les députés ici sont très fiers du bilan en matière de francophonie et de l'éducation francophone et bilingue ici en Ontario. Notre gouvernement a fait des efforts soutenus pendant les sept dernières années pour assurer que nous adressons le problème de la pénurie des enseignants francophones, qui malheureusement n'est pas simplement un problème ici en Ontario, mais est un problème à travers le pays.

C'est pourquoi, en tant que ministre des Affaires francophones, je représente la francophonie ontarienne directement au gouvernement fédéral, et je parle constamment du besoin d'adresser, en partenariat avec les autres provinces, les territoires et le gouvernement fédéral, cette pénurie des enseignants francophones. Madame la Présidente, c'est pourquoi je travaille avec le ministère des Collèges et Universités, pour augmenter l'offre de programmation en enseignement francophone pour que nous puissions adresser ce problème directement ici en Ontario.

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

MPP Lisa Gretzky: To the Premier: Our auto sector is in crisis, reeling from Trump's tariffs and the Premier's wait-and-see attitude of inaction.

Shifts at Windsor Assembly have been cancelled—4,000 workers are laid off. The promised return of the third shift has been delayed until 2026. One shift lost is one shift too many. These cuts hurt the entire community. Workers in local businesses are already feeling the impact.

Windsor workers deserve real action from this government, such as adopting a policy that if you sell here, you must build here.

Will the Premier stand up for workers in my community by joining us in demanding that these jobs remain in Ontario?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Response? I recognize the Minister of Economic Development.

Hon. Victor Fedeli: I've said it almost every day: We're at war with the United States; we're in an economic war. But under the previous Liberal government, Ontario's auto sector was on the brink of collapse, and good-paying jobs were fleeing to the US. And that was without tariffs. It was a direct result of the Liberal-NDP policies.

Our government worked very hard to revitalize the auto sector. We reshored those jobs lost under the Liberal rule. We've seen auto companies invest \$46 billion over the last four years. Speaker, 100,000 auto jobs were saved, and 10,000 more auto jobs have been created. Companies from around the world chose Ontario because we have everything here they need to succeed.

We're not going to slow down. We're going to do everything in our power to ensure that these companies keep their people here and continue to invest in Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Supplementary.

MPP Lisa Gretzky: The government continues to take credit for the work of the union and workers, who actually saved the auto industry in this province.

Under this government, Windsor already had the highest unemployment rate in Canada, at 10.8%. Now, 4,000 workers at Windsor Assembly and 2,000 more at feeder plants are laid off, with nine spinoff jobs at risk for every auto job lost.

1100

Windsor workers put themselves between company trucks and the border to stop equipment from being shipped to the US because they know, once the equipment

is moved, it's never coming back and their jobs are gone. It's happening while the Premier "waits to see what happens" rather than being proactive.

Will the Premier support workers in my community and across the province by requiring auto companies to build in Ontario if they want to sell in Ontario?

Hon. Victor Fedeli: Again, we are facing a once-in-a-generation threat from south of the border. We are in close contact daily with companies that are navigating through this period of uncertainty.

That's why earlier this week, along with the Premier, we spoke with Stellantis and we visited GM in Oshawa. We spoke directly with the workers there who are proudly building Ontario-made vehicles. We're going to be there to support these businesses and these workers, which is why our government has already announced \$11 billion in immediate relief for Ontario companies.

At the same time, we're taking the necessary action to ensure that Ontario remains competitive. We just announced the expansion of the Ontario Made Manufacturing Investment Tax Credit, which will provide an additional \$1.3 billion over three years.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Well, there are rumours that the Eglinton Crosstown LRT is going to open someday. The people in my riding of Toronto–St. Paul's have been going through construction, financial and economic hell for years with this \$13-billion transit line that is billions of dollars over budget and years and years and years behind schedule.

Madam Speaker, through you to the transportation minister: Can you please tell me how you're going to compensate the hundreds of small businesses that have been closed or bankrupted by this never-ending crazy train of delays and dollars?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Under the leadership of the Premier, we have launched one of the largest public transit expansions in the history of not only Canada, but North America—\$70 billion over the next 10 years.

I know that the Eglinton Crosstown has caused many people frustration and delays, and we are currently working day and night to ensure that the testing continues so we can launch a safe and reliable system.

But we're in this situation today because the previous Liberal government did absolutely nothing to build public transit in this province.

We have gotten shovels in the ground for over five of our priority transit projects, investing \$70 billion over the next 10 years.

We will take no lessons from the members opposite in the Liberal Party on how to build transit and how to get shovels in the ground, because we are preparing for the future of how people get around this city and this province.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Supplementary?

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Well, transportation minister, you certainly have compensated the Metrolinx executives over the years. How many millions of dollars went to Phil

Verster, who didn't get the job done? How many millions of dollars went to consulting companies that never got anything built—and that was seven years, by the way, for Mr. Verster—except for their million-dollar bills; they got those done, the consultants.

It's time that the businesses along Eglinton in Toronto—St. Paul's were given some hope and some financial relief.

Again, Speaker, through you to the transportation minister: Businesspeople along Eglinton West in Toronto—St. Paul's want to know when this compensation will come for them.

And one more thing: When is it going to open, Minister?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: There is no government in the history of this province that has done more for small businesses than that under the leadership of Premier Ford. From fighting the punitive carbon taxes to other policies, and reducing costs for businesses by billions and billions of dollars, which the members opposite have voted against every single time, our government is committed to not only supporting small businesses while we build transit but also building transit and creating thousands and thousands of jobs across the province. Let's take, for example, the Ontario Line, which will move 400,000 people every single day, or the Crosstown project that employed thousands and thousands of people across this province.

We will continue to build in this city, in this province, because we know that's what we need to do.

Unfortunately, for 15 years, nothing was built under the previous Liberal government. We changed that. We got shovels in the ground on the Ontario Line, the Scarborough subway extension, the west extension on Eglinton, and many other LRT projects across the province. And we'll continue to build.

SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: My question is to the Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development.

Workers in Ontario want to know that their jobs are secure in the face of growing economic threats. They want to know that they have the skills to compete in a changing world. Global pressures, including from the US and other nations, are a real concern.

That is why our government is focused on making sure our workers have the skills they need to succeed. With the Skills Development Fund, we're closing the gap between the jobs that are open and the people looking to fill them.

Can the minister explain how this fund is helping to protect Ontario workers and secure their futures in a competitive global economy?

Hon. David Piccini: I appreciate the question from the member opposite. I appreciate his leadership in Brampton. He's always there at every event, advancing the interests of the next generation, giving them opportunity, whether it's from the medical school, right down to the trades and everything in between. It's incredible.

The Skills Development Fund that Premier Ford and I announced at the Skills Ontario Competition—it was remarkable to see thousands of students in Canada's largest skilled trades competition. We announced another billion dollars in the Skills Development Fund.

I want to illustrate a success story that I think we can all get behind. Abdullah from Local 44 was a Hammer Heads youth graduate who won the sprinkler fitter competition—proudly from the GTHA. He was a graduate of Hammer Heads, a program supported by the Skills Development Fund.

We're changing lives. I'm proud of the craftsmanship exhibited by these remarkable youth.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The member from Brampton West.

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: Thank you to the minister for the response.

Ontario's economy is built on the skills and hard work of our people.

It is clear that the Skills Development Fund is not just about numbers; it's about real people and real jobs. From training auto workers in Windsor to supporting bilingual trades in Ottawa, to providing opportunities for communities in the north, this fund is making a difference. It's about helping workers in every corner of our province get the skills they need for good, high-paying jobs.

Can the minister share more about how this approach is helping local workers succeed and support their families while building Ontario's future?

Hon. David Piccini: Again, I appreciate the question from the member opposite.

Let's look at what an impact the Skills Development Fund is having. We've seen both major parties in the last federal election campaign on similar funds, recognizing the impact the SDF is having. It has trained over half a million workers here in Ontario—better training, better jobs with bigger paycheques.

Let's do a little trip around the north—I know the finance minister loves to do that in the budget—2,300 workers. In the north, we're delivering for Indigenous and remote communities with a \$17-million investment benefiting over additional 3,600 workers: Agnico Eagle Mines; Kiwetinohk Red Seal project; Northern Centre for Advanced Technology, or NORCAT; Science North—a new facility, \$3.2 million; the sheet metal workers' union; SMART; Local 397—a new facility. I visited the team up there. It's going to change lives.

The International Association of Bridge Structural, Ornamental and Reinforcing Iron Workers, Local 759, Adam MacGillivray and the team up in Thunder Bay—I saw the new concrete pad. They're going to train a next generation of ironworkers.

Speaker, it's changing lives—

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Question?

SCHOOL BOARDS

Ms. Jessica Bell: My question is to the Minister of Education.

The TDSB is being forced to make major cuts to schools because of chronic underfunding by this government. The board is looking at closing nearly half of its swimming pools, axing music programs, and there are huge funding gaps for special education and mental health.

Can this government address our schools' funding shortfall so we can see improvements in the classroom in the coming school year?

Hon. Paul Calandra: I appreciate the question.

As I've said multiple times, yes, we are sending an investigation team in there to look at how the TDSB spends money, to ensure that maximum resources are being spent in the classrooms. But again, as I said yesterday, I simply will not allow pools to be closed, and I will not allow teachers to be fired.

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The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The member for University–Rosedale.

Ms. Jessica Bell: Back to the education minister: If this government wants to find the true culprit who's harming our kids' education, he doesn't need to do an investigation; he needs to look in the mirror.

Since the Conservatives came to power, our schools have seen funding cut by \$1,500 per student. We have overcrowded classrooms. We have aging schools in urgent need of repair. Schools are losing vice-principals and principals, and kids with special needs are falling behind.

Parents do not want this government to play political blame games with the school board. They want their kids to have a good public school education, and that requires investment.

My question to the minister is, can this government commit to reinvesting the \$1,500 more per student into our education system so our kids can see improvements in the classroom?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Madam Speaker, I don't know why it is that the NDP and the Toronto District School Board are so afraid of an audit happening of where money is being spent in the school board. I don't understand why they're so afraid, because, presumably, their numbers are so firm that the investigation will find that what they've been talking about is accurate. That could be the result of this.

I suspect what will be found is that money is not being put into the classroom for classroom education as it should be; I will ensure, through this process, that it is—because that is the ultimate goal of an education system: to maximize resources that are going for students and maximize the resources that teachers have, to give our students the ultimate opportunity to succeed.

I don't understand why the opposition is so supportive of a school board that has run multi-year deficits. But ultimately, if an investigation finds that the TDSB is correct, then they'll have their answer—if they don't, then I will ensure that the resources being misplaced are being put back into the classroom where they belong.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: Earlier this year, the Premier promised to upload the Ottawa LRT and expand it into Kanata and Barrhaven, fast-growing suburbs where families are spending hours commuting each day.

Reliable public transit isn't a luxury. It's essential for reducing gridlock, supporting working parents and ensuring that people can get to work, school, events, commitments and medical appointments on time.

With the budget just days away, will the Premier keep his promise, deliver for Ottawa and invest in the LRT expansion our city desperately needs?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Response? The Minister of Transportation.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: As the members opposite know, we struck a historic new deal with the city of Ottawa, where Premier Ford announced \$543 million—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The member from Orléans will come to order.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: The member opposite is saying that there was nothing allocated. It shocks me, because it tells me that that member hasn't even taken the time to look at the agreement, where the Kanata LRT expressway was also put into that as part of the negotiations. In fact, Highway 174 was also included in that as an upload, which that member asked to be tolled—which is unbelievable when you look at what is happening in the city of Ottawa—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I apologize to the minister.

Would the member from Orléans please come to order?

The minister may continue.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Madam Speaker, unfortunately, that member was advocating for tolls on Highway 174. But thanks to Premier Ford and thanks to the leadership of this government, we will be uploading that highway and investing significant, historic amounts in the city of Ottawa—whether it be transit or the LRT announcement that we made when we were in that city during the campaign—or have shown our commitment to that city as well.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Back to the member for Kanata–Carleton.

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: People in Kanata and across Ottawa don't want any more empty promises. We've had enough. We need a timeline, not just talking points.

We've seen this government invest billions and move legislative mountains for fantasy projects and luxury spas in Toronto, but Ottawa continues to wait.

When will this government fulfill the promises it has made to Ottawa? It's a simple question.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Just in that historic new deal that I was talking about, we're providing over \$180 million in transportation supports and infrastructure—including, on top of that, the commitment we made to upload the LRT.

This government is committed to building transit all across the province, including roads, bridges and highways.

A part of that infrastructure—not only the LRT—is also Highway 174, as I had mentioned before. We have just completed five new bridge replacements in the city of Ottawa as well. That shows our commitment to the city and continuous work that we have with not only the mayor, but many of the individuals in the city to ensure that we build and invest in those critical investments to keep the people of Ottawa moving.

ONTARIO FILM
AND TELEVISION INDUSTRY

Mr. Brian Riddell: My question is to the Minister of Tourism, Culture and Gaming.

Ontario's film and television industry is a vital part of our economy. It supports tens of thousands of jobs and brings in billions of investment each year.

But threats from outside our borders are real. US President Donald Trump has promised to push for tough trade deals and is threatening our film and television sector. He has said he wants to bring back film jobs to the US and cut back on cross-border productions. That could put Ontario jobs at risk.

Our government believes Ontario should remain a global leader in film and television production. We have the talent, we have the studios, and we have the skilled workers to compete.

Can the minister please explain how our government is standing up for the Ontario film and television industry by protecting these good jobs from outside threats?

Hon. Stan Cho: I know that member is standing up for the industry with his hard work. This government, unlike the NDP, who basically want to rip up the fabric of an industry that is very successful, based on a late-night social media post—this government won't do that. We're going to be measured and reasonable in our approaches, because that member has an amazing list of talent that is actually produced in his own riding that we want to see keep thriving.

I'll just give you a couple of examples. The Handmaid's Tale is filmed in Cambridge, along with The Queen's Gambit, Murdoch Mysteries, Designated Survivor, American Gods. Classic Christmas movies—feel-good ones like A Christmas Duet, The Magical Christmas Shoes, and The Christmas Temp—have all been made in Cambridge, Ontario.

I don't know why President Trump wants to take a little Christmas joy away from us all—but I know the member from Cambridge and every member of this House know that they are working hard to protect those jobs. We will continue to monitor the situation.

And to that member: Know that our government is here to do whatever it takes to support creative industries.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Back to the member from Cambridge.

Mr. Brian Riddell: Thank you to the minister for his continuing leadership and caring.

Right now, we're also shooting a movie about Muhammad Ali, and downtown Cambridge was dressed up like Louisville, Kentucky.

The Ontario film and TV industry isn't just about jobs. It's about telling our stories. It's about showing the world what makes our province special.

Our government has invested in new sound stages, digital tools, and cutting-edge production facilities. We're also making it easier for filmmakers to choose Ontario by reducing red tape and supporting local talent. But as the world changes, we need to stay ahead. We can't let foreign pressure take away or threaten our jobs.

Can the minister explain how our government's investments in film and TV are helping to protect this vital sector of our economy and keep our jobs right here in Ontario?

Hon. Stan Cho: Another great question.

The member is absolutely right; it's not just about "wait and see" on those threats online, but it's also about the investments that we've made, as well as ongoing conversations with the industry.

I want to reassure the House that we are continuing to work with the business community. I've connected with leaders in labour, production and every stage of the film process. I've spoken to FilmOntario, Blue Ant Media, New Metric Media, Cinespace, ACTRA, all in the last 48 hours. Those conversations will continue.

Our government is also expanding accreditation to programs—and to different film and production schools, like Toronto Film School and the College of Makeup Art and Design, along with other programs at colleges to support the next generation of film workers. It's a lot of work that goes on in front of the camera, but also behind the camera, and we understand that this creates a lot of jobs, including in the fine area of Cambridge, which I know the member works very hard for.

We will continue to protect the creative industry and all the economic prosperity that comes along with it.

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ONTARIO FILM AND TELEVISION INDUSTRY

Ms. Catherine Fife: My question is to the Premier.

This week, President Trump announced a 100% tariff on film production from outside the US, and the domestic industry is reeling.

The film, television and digital production industry accounted for \$3.2 billion in revenue to the province in 2022. Speaker, 45,000 workers are at risk. We need to stabilize the sector.

In FilmOntario's 2025 budget submission, they requested a 25% tax credit for their industry, rather than the 21% the Liberals cut it down to in 2015.

To the minister: We learned through COVID that we need to be more self-sufficient and self-reliant. What tangible supports will be in budget 2025 for this sector?

Hon. Stan Cho: Speaker, lots of tangible measures have already been taken to support this industry. That's why we have a system that's working.

I talked about the over \$1 billion in film and television tax credits, which has led to great success in that member's own riding.

Shows like *Degrassi*, *The Handmaid's Tale*; movies like *Star Trek*, *BlackBerry*; shows like *Anne of Green Gables—Detroit Rock City*. These are all big, international hits that created jobs not just in front of the camera, like I said, but behind it—think the tailors, think the hairdressers, think the people who take and make the stage productions, all of the sets, the camera people. This is a lot of work that goes on to put on these productions, which have, again, become world-famous.

The NDP wants us to rip this all up and ruin a system that's already working.

We will take a measured and reasonable approach, unlike the opposition, to make sure that we continue to invest in this industry and respond to these threats as they are put forward in real time.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Supplementary?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Sometimes I feel like I'm living in a handmaid's tale of sorts around here.

Minister, listen, we all agree to keep these jobs here. We need to work together on this. That's what Ontario expects us to do.

The sector is looking for strategic investments to stabilize the creative economy. We've seen record demand for content, and still, this government has failed to provide consistent funding to grow the industry and the sector.

Through you, Madam Chair, to the minister: Now that Trump's protectionism is threatening to cripple the film and television sector—that is what they are telling us, Minister—is there a targeted support plan on the table, or will your government tell writers and producers and directors and crews to hang tight while the rest of the world invests in their creative economies?

Hon. Stan Cho: Speaker, I'll tell you what the writers, directors, crews, union workers, producers are all telling me, because I've spoken to them in the last 48 hours. They're saying, "I appreciate that the government has supported this industry from the beginning." It's not what that member has done.

The member asks for those supports—and I've talked about the film and television tax credits. I've talked about the increased accreditation and all the other measures that we're doing.

Those conversations that we are having with those leaders are in real time, and they are telling us that we are doing the right thing—to act in a measured way and be responsible in our reactions to these online threats. We are not going to rip up the very fabric of an industry that is thriving—thriving thanks to the investments that this government has put forward.

We are a world leader when it comes to the creative industries, and we have some of the best film and television being produced right here in our backyard. I, for

one, am very proud of that. We're going to continue to invest in them.

We are not going to listen to the doom and gloom and the chaos theories of the NDP and the Liberals.

Let's keep investing in Ontario and moving forward in a responsible way.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

MPP Andrea Hazell: Madam Speaker, my question is to the Premier.

Ontarians are suffering due to the ongoing delays in critical transit projects. Over the past seven years, under this government, not one major transit project has been completed. Despite hearing about massive investment dollars flowing into our transit system, the reality is that taxpayers are left with empty promises and no real solutions. These projects are lifelines for Ontarians who depend on public transit to access jobs, education and essential services.

Ontarians deserve transparency and accountability regarding when these critical transit projects will be operational. It's time to restore public confidence and demonstrate that the tax dollars are being put to good use.

My question is very simple: Can the Premier provide a clear timeline for the opening of the Eglinton Crosstown LRT and the Finch West LRT?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Response? The Minister of Transportation.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Here's the reality: The Liberals, for 15 years, built absolutely no public transit projects in this province. In fact, when given the opportunity to support this government's plan to invest in transit—they voted against every single one of those projects.

Let's take a look at their record. That member from Scarborough—how did she vote when it came down to supporting the Scarborough subway extension? She voted against it. When it came down to supporting the Ontario Line, which will move 400,000 people a day, how did the Liberals vote? They voted against it. When it comes to the Finch West LRT, when it comes to many of our other LRT projects, whether that be in Mississauga or Hamilton, how did the Liberals vote? They voted against it. That's a shame. The Liberals don't believe in public transit.

We are getting shovels in the ground, and we're building for the future.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The government side will come to order.

I recognize the member for Scarborough—Guildwood.

MPP Andrea Hazell: How can we trust this government to fix the gridlock crisis when it's costing Ontarians over \$56 billion annually—projected to soar to \$108 billion in the next 20 years?

The time for action is now. No more delays. Come through, come clean and stop the delays.

Our constituents deserve transparency, accountability, honest answers and real solutions.

Through you, Madam Speaker, I once again ask the Premier to provide a clear timeline for the opening of the Eglinton Crosstown LRT and Finch West LRT—a simple question.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: We are making historic investments into public transit, and that's because the Liberals didn't do what they were supposed to. They did absolutely nothing to invest in—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Would the Liberal side please come to order?

I recognize the minister.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Let's recap what the Liberals have voted against every step of the way. Whether it's in Ottawa, whether it's in Toronto, whether it's in Hamilton, Brampton, Mississauga, the Liberals have voted against every single one of those public transit projects. We're talking about taking thousands of vehicles off the road. In fact, in their 15 years, they couldn't get a single shovel in the ground on one of these projects. It was Premier Ford and this government, who they doubted every step of the way when we were committed to building these public transit projects—we've got shovels on the ground on the Scarborough subway extension. We've got shovels in the ground on the Ontario Line. We're making progress on the Yonge-Bloor subway, the Finch West LRT.

We will take no lessons from the Liberals, who did absolutely—

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Question?

MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTION SERVICES

Mr. Aris Babikian: My question is for the associate minister of health.

This week is Mental Health Week in Ontario and across Canada.

Mental health is health, and getting the right support can be life-changing. That is why our government is taking action to help more people get the care they need.

For young people, this means more youth wellness hubs across the province. In 2018, there were just 10 hubs—when fully built, there will be 32, offering mental health, substance use, primary care and social support in one place. These hubs are helping save lives. Nearly 40% of youth who use these services say they wouldn't have gotten help otherwise.

Speaker, can the associate minister please share how these hubs are supporting young people and their families across Ontario?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions.

Hon. Vijay Thanigasalam: I would like to thank the member from Scarborough—Agincourt for that question and for his continued advocacy in the mental health and addictions space. It is important now more than ever to constantly say mental health is health.

That is why our government is taking unprecedented action to deliver better mental health and health outcomes. We are focusing on better services for children and youth—expanding to 32 youth wellness hubs across the province. These hubs offer one-stop-shop offerings for mental health, primary care, addiction services, employment services, and much more.

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I had an opportunity to visit the Thorncliffe Park Youth Wellness Hub last week.

There is no doubt these services are saving the lives of young people across the province. Data backs it up: Nearly 40% of youth report that they would not have gotten help if not for youth wellness hubs.

We understand it is important to make sure—

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Question?

Mr. Aris Babikian: Thank you to the associate minister for his answer.

We know that mental health and addictions are connected, and people need real help to break the cycle. That is why our government is investing \$550 million to create 28 new Homelessness and Addiction Recovery Treatment Hubs—HART for short—across Ontario. These hubs will connect people to care faster, with teams of mental health professionals, paramedics and peer support workers. This is a real step up from the old approach.

While drug injection sites serve just 1,600 people a year, HART hubs are set up to help 65,000 people annually when fully running.

Speaker, can the associate minister share more about how these HART hubs are helping people in crisis and changing lives across Ontario?

Hon. Vijay Thanigasalam: Thank you again to the member for that question.

I know the struggle that too many Ontarians face, which is why we are committed to ending the cycle of addiction by investing \$550 million to create 28 new Homelessness and Addiction Recovery Treatment Hubs, which are bringing net new, safe and comprehensive mental health and addictions services to communities across Ontario. These hubs are designed to connect people in crisis to care faster, providing net new services and multidisciplinary teams working in community settings.

Whereas a drug injection site system only served 1,600 people every year, HART hubs, once fully operational, are estimated to support 65,000 people annually in communities for those in need—that is 40% more people receiving critical mental health and addictions care.

Every investment, every hub and every mobile team is designed with people in mind.

UNIVERSITY AND COLLEGE FUNDING

Ms. Peggy Sattler: My question is to the Premier.

Speaker, decades of chronic underfunding have put Ontario's world-class post-secondary education system on the brink, at the very time when we need it the most.

The Ontario Chamber of Commerce has called for increased base operating grants, fully funded enrolment expansion, enhanced research funding, and strengthened partnerships.

A report from the Canadian Association of Manufacturers and Exporters has called for critical investments in post-secondary institutions to maintain competitiveness.

Speaker, if the Premier won't listen to his own expert panel, will he at least listen to these urgent calls from major business organizations?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize the Minister of Colleges and Universities.

Hon. Nolan Quinn: Our focus has not changed. We are hyper-focused on ensuring that these students are graduating into rewarding careers that address Ontario's current and future labour market needs.

Since the federal government's unilateral decision to reduce the international students, like many other provinces, Ontario's post-secondary sector is experiencing a rebalancing, and institutions are making difficult decisions to ensure their long-term success. But as always, we're working right alongside the sector to ensure that they can keep delivering for Ontario students. In fact, funding has never been higher for colleges and universities in our province's history.

As part of our plan to protect Ontario, we're providing our colleges and universities with \$750 million to support STEM programming that will prepare our students for successful careers in critical sectors that will protect Ontario's economy. Our government's strategic investment will fund 20,500 seats in science, technology, engineering and mathematics every year. That's on top of the 70,000 STEM students who are graduating on an annual basis.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

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

Mr. Steve Clark: Speaker, point of order under standing order 59: I'd like to advise the House of the schedule for next week.

On Monday, May 12, in the morning, we'll have second reading of Bill 13, the Primary Care Act. In the afternoon, we'll have opposition day number 3. Following opposition day number 3, we'll have second reading on Bill 11, the More Convenient Care Act.

On Tuesday, May 13, in the morning, we'll have second reading on Bill 13, the Primary Care Act. During afternoon routine proceedings, a government bill will be introduced, and in the afternoon, there will be second reading on Bill 6, the Safer Municipalities Act.

On Wednesday, May 14, in the morning, we'll have second reading on Bill 9, the Municipal Accountability Act. In the afternoon, we'll have second reading on a government bill to be introduced, followed by second reading on Bill 11, the More Convenient Care Act.

On Thursday, May 15, in the morning, we'll have second reading on Bill 13, the Primary Care Act. Then, during afternoon routine proceedings, a government bill will be introduced, which has already been announced by the finance minister; it will be this year's budget.

That is my report under standing order 59.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize the member for Cambridge.

Mr. Brian Riddell: On a point of order: I'd just like to thank the senior management of the Grand River Conservation Authority for coming here today, and I look forward to the meeting with them this afternoon.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I have already stated introduction of guests are not a point of order. There will be time at 1 o'clock—five minutes—for introduction of guests if you would like to introduce guests.

MEMBER'S BIRTHDAY

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Point of order: I recognize the member for Beaches–East York.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: I would like to wish a colleague a big birthday on Sunday—the member from Haldimand–Norfolk. Happy birthday, coming up.

MOTHER'S DAY

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Point of order.

Mr. John Fraser: To all the moms in the Legislature, happy Mother's Day.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): On that note, this House stands in recess until 1 p.m.

The House recessed from 1137 to 1300.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Joseph Racinsky: It's my pleasure to welcome to the Legislature my grandparents, Bernie and Libby Racinsky. This year, they'll be turning 90, and I'm really thankful they were able to make the trek down to Queen's Park. Welcome.

Mrs. Michelle Cooper: I would like to introduce my family: my husband, Josh Cooper; my mother-in-law, Bonnie Lawrence-Shear; my mother, Marcia Levine; my sister, Risa Lewenberg; and Georgia Bellman, who works with me each and every day here at Queen's Park. I want to welcome them to the Legislature.

INTRODUCTION OF GOVERNMENT BILLS

SUPPORT FOR SENIORS AND CAREGIVERS ACT, 2025 LOI DE 2025 SUR LE SOUTIEN AUX PERSONNES ÂGÉES ET AUX FOURNISSEURS DE SOINS

Mr. Calandra, on behalf of Ms. Kusendova-Bashta, moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 14, An Act to amend the Fixing Long-Term Care Act, 2021 and the Retirement Homes Act, 2010 / *Projet de loi 14, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2021 sur le redressement des soins de longue durée et la Loi de 2010 sur les maisons de retraite.*

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

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Does the minister wish to briefly explain the bill?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Yes, thank you, Madam Speaker, but only very briefly—I'll save most of the remarks for second reading. Just really to give thanks and credit to Minister Kusendova-Bashta, her parliamentary assistants and her team, who are the inspirations and who did all the work with respect to this bill. As you know, she is on a well-deserved maternity leave. I am only introducing it on her behalf, but all the credit goes to she, her team and her parliamentary assistants.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

KIDS' ONLINE SAFETY AND PRIVACY MONTH ACT, 2025 LOI DE 2025 SUR LE MOIS DE LA SÉCURITÉ ET DE LA PROTECTION DE LA VIE PRIVÉE DES ENFANTS EN LIGNE

Madame Collard moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 15, An Act to proclaim the month of October as Kids' Online Safety and Privacy Month / *Projet de loi 15, Loi proclamant le mois d'octobre Mois de la sécurité et de la protection de la vie privée des enfants en ligne.*

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

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Does the member wish to explain the bill?

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Briefly—thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Internet is central to daily life in Ontario, offering many benefits, but also serious risks for children, including cyberbullying, online exploitation and traffick-

ing. Protecting children online requires actions from parents, educators and policy-makers. Education and awareness are key. Parents need support to supervise online activity, and children must learn how to stay safe. Proclaiming October as Kids' Online Safety and Privacy Month would raise awareness, promote education and emphasize the shared responsibility of families and communities to ensure children's online safety.

SACRED SPACES, SAFE PLACES ACT, 2025

LOI DE 2025 POUR DES LIEUX SACRÉS SÉCURITAIRES

Mr. Fraser moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 16, An Act respecting the safe access to religious institutions / Projet de loi 16, Loi concernant l'accès sécuritaire aux établissements religieux.

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

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Does the member wish to briefly explain the bill?

Mr. John Fraser: Yes. This is the second time I've introduced this bill. It's also known as the Sacred Places, Safe Spaces Act. What it does is establish that our churches, our mosques, our temples, our synagogues are places that are free from harassment so people can practise their faith freely.

I look forward to discussing it with the members of the Legislature.

PETITIONS

ONTARIO SCIENCE CENTRE

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: I continue to receive petitions from my constituents regarding the government's plan to undermine the iconic Ontario Science Centre.

They are against the plan to construct a smaller facility at Ontario Place, involving an expenditure of hundreds of millions of dollars of public funds to build a parking lot. They are opposed to the plan because it did not include public consultation, environmental assessment or a sound business rationale, and they believe it will cause irreparable harm to our community.

The petitioners request that the Legislative Assembly reconsider the decision to relocate the science centre, to prioritize renewing the Ontario Science Centre at its current site in Don Mills and ensure thorough public and environmental evaluations of any future proposed changes.

I wholeheartedly endorse this petition, will affix my name to it and ask page Cole to bring it to the Clerk.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

MPP Lise Vaugeois: This is a petition to raise social assistance rates, and it's an issue that's been brought to this Legislature repeatedly over many, many years.

The petition argues that social assistance rates for ODSP and OW need to be doubled. It points to the fact that when CERB was brought in during the pandemic, it was at least \$2,000 a month; that the current rate is well below the deep poverty line; and that even adding for inflation, when you're starting so far below that poverty line, it's just not sufficient.

I endorse this petition, will put my signature on it and will give it to Aashman.

YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH

Ms. Catherine Fife: I'm pleased to introduce this petition for the first time. It's called "Social Media Use Among Young Ontarians." I want to thank Dr. Alison Yeung, who actually inspired the petition and the work.

Essentially, we now know how detrimental excessive screen time is to the mental health of our youth, who are now becoming even more dependent on social media. School boards across Ontario are actually taking up the cause around what content students are seeing on their devices. Australia, as an entire country, recently approved a social media ban for children under the age of 16.

Developing healthy relationships with technology couldn't be more important in today's world in the province of Ontario.

This petition actually calls on the social policy committee to do some work for us and design a plan for the Legislature to navigate some of the dangers around mental health and around safety for young children who are exposed to excessive social media. We want to also see the Ontario public health units implement a health warning on social media platforms about the risk of excessive social media use.

It's my pleasure to affix my signature to this petition, and I hope the entire Legislature will support this work.

HERBICIDES

Mme France Gélinas: I would like to thank Ted Roque, who is a member of Wahnapiatae First Nation in my riding, for this petition. It's called "Stop the Spray."

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Basically, every year in Ontario, the equivalent of a huge land mass is sprayed with herbicides. Everywhere you have big transmission lines, they come and spray. The body of evidence is clear: Those chemicals used during spraying go into the water, go into the plants, go into the animals and are harmful. Other provinces, including Quebec, have banned the use of chemical herbicides, but they are still being used in Ontario. They are being used on many First Nations' communities—this one, Wahnapiatae—in my riding, and they want it to stop.

We all understand that you need to manage the growth of trees and stuff under transmission lines, but you can hire people to do this, to go and cut trees and go and manage. It provides good employment for a lot of young people and First Nations' people during the summer who are interested in those jobs. If you take into account the cost of chemical spraying on the health of people, on the health of our environment and animals, it's actually cheaper, which is why many other provinces, including our neighbours to the east, have stopped chemical spraying and have gone to other techniques.

The people of Wahnapiatae First Nation and all over my riding, in Folyet and Ivanhoe, all want the spraying to end, and so do I. I will add my name to it and ask page Isabelle to bring it to the Clerk.

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

MPP Jamie West: This is the first time I've read this petition, and I want to thank Kerry Odoyannis—I'm mispronouncing her name, I'm sure—in the Sudbury riding for bringing forward this petition. It's entitled "Stop the Cuts to Indigenous Reconciliation."

Basically, what they talk about is that we all recognize how Ontario is on traditional territories of Indigenous peoples, and that in 2015 the TRC commission of Canada released their final report with 94 recommendations that have now been called the Calls to Action, and that we have to recognize how reconciliation should be the centre of all government decision-making.

The ask they have is that in the assembly here we all work together to continue reconciliation work in Ontario, that we implement the TRC Calls to Action, that we reinstate the Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation, that we work with First Nation leaders to sign co-operative government-to-government reports and that we support TRC education and community developments. As well, finally, they're calling on us to support Indigenous communities across the province, like cleaning out Grassy Narrows, addressing the suicide crisis and the housing and health care crises that are happening in Indigenous communities and First Nation communities.

I support this petition. I want to thank Kerry for bringing it to my attention, and I'll give it to Hayden to bring to the table.

VISITOR PARKING FEES

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: I'm presenting to the Legislature of Ontario this petition that is to ban paid visitors' parking at multi-unit residential apartment buildings.

I join, along with Mary Doyan, who has signed this petition, to ask that parking meters that are being installed at multi-unit residential apartment buildings across St. Catharines by corporate landlords not be installed. Visitors to these buildings are actually having to pay hefty parking fees. They've asked me to bring this forward on behalf of

not only the city council of St. Catharines but also the residents of St. Catharines.

City council passed a motion back in November 2023. Residents of residential multi-unit rental buildings reflect all demographics, including newcomers, young, seniors and elderly, and the cost-prohibitive visitors' parking charges further the contributions to affordability challenges.

Madam Speaker, what these residents in St. Catharines are asking is, they want the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to direct the Ministry of Housing to issue an order that states that owners of residential multi-unit apartment complexes and buildings are banned from installing parking meters and charging visitors to park and spend time with residents. It's becoming a health hazard for some of our seniors.

This is a wonderful petition, Madam Speaker, that I fully support, I'm going to be affixing my name to it, and I want to thank Kimberly Scott and Mary Doyon for bringing this forward to me.

HEALTH CARE

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank Michael Harris for these petitions. They are called "Justice after Birth Injury."

As you know, Speaker, the Canadian medical malpractice association is a taxpayer-funded organization that supports physicians when something derails, including cases of devastating birth injuries that have a permanent impact on the child and their family. The CMPA is there to protect physicians, and it often ends up dragging through the courts for years and years, which means that for all those years—you're talking six, seven, eight, 10 years before a settlement is reached. That means for the first 10 years of a child who is severely disabled, everything is in front of the court and the family is not being supported.

There are other jurisdictions that have a kind of a "no fault," where support is given through the parents while the courts take their time to do the work. They are asking for the government of Ontario to look for a program that would help support the parents of children that are badly injured at birth so that the first year of the child, he or she has all the support needed to achieve their full potential.

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

SOINS DE LA VUE

M^{me} France Gélinas: J'aimerais remercier Rick et Pierrette Quenneville d'Azilda dans mon comté pour ces pétitions qui s'appellent « Assurer une vision claire pour tous les aîné(e)s ».

Comme vous savez, madame la Présidente, la vision est fondamentale. C'est une partie de notre vie. Pour notre qualité de vie, une bonne vision est essentielle, et pour que les personnes âgées puissent demeurer indépendantes, en santé et en sécurité. Un nombre élevé de personnes âgées, en particulier celles à faible revenu, ne peuvent se permettre

de payer pour les lunettes qui sont essentielles à leur bien-être. La plupart des personnes de plus de 65 ans nécessitent des lunettes correctrices pour maintenir une bonne qualité de vie, prévenir les blessures et autres complications de santé, et en ce moment, le système de santé de l'Ontario ne fournit pas de soutien financier pour aider les personnes âgées à faible revenu à payer leurs lunettes.

Donc, ils demandent à la province de l'Ontario d'établir un programme de remboursement ou de rabais gouvernemental pour les personnes âgées pour leur permettre d'acheter des lunettes de prescription.

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

GASOLINE PRICES

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank Josh Kelley from Lively in my riding. The petition is called "Gas Prices."

Basically, in northern Ontario, we continue to see wild fluctuations in the price of gasoline. As I mentioned before, most of the mines in Sudbury and Nickel Belt are in my riding. Most of them are a long distance from where people live and there's no public transportation, so everybody has to have a car or a truck, everybody has to buy gas and the gas stations know that those people have good jobs, they are able to pay, and they jack the price. I can tell you that when I go to work, I go through easily seven different gas stations and there could be as much as a 20-cent difference between one gas station and the next.

What northerners are asking is what exists in many other provinces and many states: to regulate the price of gas, put a maximum that gas could be sold at. You can have a different maximum for isolated northern communities, but set a maximum because right now, the petroleum companies, especially after the gas tax was removed—yay, we got a decrease in the price of gas; it lasted about three days and that's it. The price of gas is right back up to where it was. Rather than the government getting the taxes, it's now the petroleum companies that are making more profit, but we are still paying way too much.

So like everybody in northern Ontario, I want the price of gas to get regulated. I will affix my name to it and ask my good page Sarah, who's very patient, to bring it to the Clerk.

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EMERGENCY SERVICES

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank Kim Robinson, who lives in Wahnapiatae—not Wahnapiatae First Nation, but Wahnapiatae; there's a village there about, I don't know, 40 kilometres apart—for these petitions. They're called "911 Everywhere in Ontario."

I will be bringing this petition as often as I can between now and the long weekend, because on the long weekend, we get a ton of tourists who come to northern Ontario.

Welcome to northern Ontario. We like having tourists. We have beautiful, beautiful facilities, but what most

people don't know is that we do not have 911. So as soon as you're out of a municipality—you're out of North Bay, Sudbury or Timmins—there is no 911.

In your time of need, everybody, including the page in here, is told, "If you have an emergency, dial 911." But 911 is not available in northern Ontario. There is a series of 1-800 numbers that you have to memorize that nobody knows. There are seven different ones just in my riding. So I want people to know that if you're going to come to northern Ontario, take the time to go online and find out what the 1-800 number is. I don't wish harm upon anybody, but emergencies do happen.

But what I really want to happen is for Ontario to do what every other province has done: Sign a deal with Bell and get 911 everywhere. It is three cents per month per line. It is a very small amount of money, and I guarantee you, every year, you will save lives—because every year, I have one more story of somebody in my riding, a visitor, who ran into trouble. Last year, it was a young boy who drowned. The family dialled 911, was told, "This number is not available." Everybody panicked, didn't know what to do. It did not end well. Every summer, we have the same thing; 911 should be available everywhere.

I'm happy to sign this petition and ask Sarah to bring it to the Clerk.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

THRONE SPEECH DEBATE

Resuming the debate adjourned on May 5, 2025, on the motion for an address in reply to the speech of Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor at the opening of the session.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize the member for Sudbury.

MPP Jamie West: I had started this debate earlier, and I'm happy to continue on it.

I spoke primarily before about the throne speech and explained to people what the throne speech was, but on the fact that we're having a throne speech a little bit early because we had a winter election, in February, because of the threat of Donald Trump's tariffs, and I just want to share my thoughts on Trump's tariffs.

First of all, we all are very clear that President Trump is playing very dangerous games with people's livelihoods. These are unnecessary tariffs, and even his threat of tariffs has created an economic crisis and a national emergency for workers and families across Canada. Workers and industries across the province are facing uncertainty at a level that I don't think we have experienced, at least in my lifetime.

In my city, for example—in your city, before moving along—Sudbury's mining sector has already experienced too many layoffs simply from the threat of Trump's tariffs and the increasing pressures within an already challenging nickel market.

Right now, in Ontario, things do look grim. Our province has the second-highest unemployment rate in the country. We're just ahead of Newfoundland and Labrador. The Financial Accountability Officer is warning of an impending recession. Nearly one in three Ontario trucking carriers have already laid off employees. Stellantis has announced a temporary layoff of 3,800 in Windsor, potentially to be extended. Alstom announced about 200 layoffs in Thunder Bay. GM has announced 750 layoffs in Oshawa. GM also recently announced a fall layoff of about 500 workers in Ingersoll. I just read that Ivaco Rolling Mills announced about 30 people, maybe a little bit more—layoffs in L'Orignal.

I've always been a glass-half-full person, and so I think the silver lining in this is that we have seen that Canadians don't fold under pressure. Instead, we're already rising to the occasion, and we're already standing together. We see this in our neighbourhoods, in each and every one of our communities, and it's inspiring to see everyday people in our communities respond to the tariffs head-on in any way that they can.

The most prevalent example, I think, is people started boycotting US-made goods in grocery stores. That wasn't because of our leadership; that was people on their own deciding that they're going to fight back. When you hear Canadians say things like "elbows up" or "never 51," I think it's a reminder to all of us that we are part of Team Canada. It's a reminder that they expect us, as elected officials from whatever party we come from, to come together and stand together the way they are in our communities. We need to ensure that we work together. We need to ensure that we listen to each other, that we don't give in to division.

This doesn't mean capitulation. It doesn't mean we're going to agree on everything, but I do think it means that the public no longer has an appetite for political games of old. I don't think they're interested in poison pills that are snuck into bills or deliberate wedge items. I don't think they're going to be interested in bills that are deliberately disguised as tariff response, but are really just partisan politics. The people of Ontario, Speaker, they are thirsty for leadership. They've elected us, all of us, from all different parties, to demonstrate the leadership that they're demonstrating right now.

So what do we do? Well, I think as politicians, the first thing we need to do is follow their lead—follow the lead of the people that we represent, because Ontarians are already making that choice to buy Canadian. We should be helping them do it. We need to urgently develop the buy Canadian strategy that requires made-in-Ontario, made-in-Canada manufacturing. We should also be directing our government-funded agencies to procure locally, in the city—they exist—in our province of Ontario and then in Canada, before going anywhere else. We'll spend locally and we'll grow locally.

We should also be redirecting government investments into Canadian industries so that we're supporting and growing our domestic jobs.

We also need to launch a buy Ontario campaign that helps us to better identify and promote Ontario goods and services in our province and in Canada to the rest of the world; that helps us locally understand what we're buying, but also promotes our products around the world as we make friends, because the Americans—at least, the president—I know the American people want to be our friends, but the president doesn't seem to want to anymore.

As well, we need to accelerate infrastructure projects in Ontario. We need to be rebuilding and building roads and bridges, our highways, especially the four-laning of Highway 69. My colleague, our New Democratic House leader, talked about the importance of four-laning Highway 11/17, the Trans-Canada Highway. We are the only province that has a two-lane road. This is the time to invest, because we know that when people build construction projects, you bring workers to that area, you hire locally in that area, you spend locally in that area, and that drives our economy. So there's the roads, the bridges, the highways. We can invest in transit so that Thunder Bay can get back on their feet and start building subway cars. We can invest in the backlog of school repairs, the hospital expansions and repairs that are needed.

We can start building affordable homes and apartments. I don't say "affordable" to poke people in the eye, but the reality is that we have created a system where the market is really expensive and if we leave it to the market, we're just going to build expensive apartments, condos and homes. We need to start building homes and condos that our kids can afford to get into and the tradespeople who are building them can afford to buy.

When you accelerate infrastructure, that's a strategy that has consistently proven to kickstart our economy, and it keeps people working. It's how we grow internally. As well, with this approach, we will help address the backlog of Ontario's existing infrastructure repairs. We will create infrastructure, and it will help us tackle Ontario's need for housing that people can actually afford to rent or buy.

I'd also urge the Premier to create a Premier's task force on the economy with equal representation from business, industry, labour and government that would give us that in-the-trenches feedback that would allow us to quickly develop best practices and strategies. Let's be honest: Workplaces and workers, they know the industry best. The best way to support them is by listening to them and communicating with them.

Similarly, if companies are considering full or partial closures like we're seeing in a lot of places, this Premier's task force on the economy would allow us to more quickly offer alternatives—that could be direct support, that could be helping to find new markets and supply chains. But the best thing we can do for workers is to keep them working.

We need to develop a workers-first strategy that ensures that Ontario's workers are directly protected and supported, and this includes emergency EI measures.

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We also need to establish financial aid programs so that people who are at risk of losing home ownership or being

evicted are able to stay in their homes and they can cover mortgage and rent payments.

The part that often gets forgotten in government conversations is that we have to ensure that workers' pensions aren't sacrificed during this battle. The most glaring example is with Sears, when the workers and their pensions were the last in line to be rebated. But we need to protect people who have paid into pensions up to this point, so existing workers have that protection, because if we're going to be Team Canada and Team Ontario, we need to prioritize protecting the pensions of today's workers and our retired seniors too.

We have to make sure that displaced workers are able to land on their feet successfully, so we have that monetary support, but also investing in post-secondary and skilled trades and any other opportunities and helping people start small businesses.

Even though President Trump's tariffs are currently creating chaos, I remain optimistic for the future. I think it's because I'm Sudburian, born and raised. "Elbows up" may have become Canada's unofficial motto, but Sudburians have always been especially scrappy. We're not afraid of hard work, we're not embarrassed to get dirty, and we always have each other's backs.

As I've said many times, Speaker, we are a community that cares, and as long as the tariffs remain on the table, I know that Sudbury will remain united. And together, we won't quit defending our democracy, our northern grit and the values we hold so close to our hearts. By working together, Canada will never become the 51st state.

I wanted to share that because we have an opportunity, and there is an expectation of us to rise to that occasion. But there is a tendency to do things the way we always have, because we write bills with poison pills as well, but we have to recognize that people right now—there was a recent poll and about 50% of the people in Canada are worried about losing their jobs. If we think that we can do the same old nonsense that we've done in the past and play political games and earn their respect, we are misguided.

These are difficult times. It's time for us to stand up from whatever party we're from, because the people of those ridings selected each of us because they felt like we would show the best level of leadership. I'm urging all of my colleagues across the aisle, to my left and all around me that we rise to the occasion and do our best.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The member for Essex.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: I was interested that the member from Sudbury was speaking. I was particularly interested in his views regarding the mining industry and critical minerals. I was observing that, of course, Sudbury has a fantastic wealth of minerals in it and around that region.

I was also wondering whether there was anything to be said with regard to that and the association that the President of the United States made with critical minerals in the Ukraine and the ongoing war there. I thought there might be some kind of nexus between those two things. And even if there's not, I find it interesting that there's this remarkably renewed interest in critical minerals around

the world and that this inserted itself into the discussion regarding the war in Ukraine.

I wonder if the member has anything to say about critical minerals and how Sudbury is being affected.

MPP Jamie West: I've had the opportunity through the Legislature to be part of the Council of State Governments, and in the last conference we were in in the States, they talked about nickel, for example—critical minerals. Interestingly, in the States, I don't think they have an active nickel mine; they may have one, but they have very low—their main focus was on recycling. I can see the President believing that the best way to get nickel, or any critical mineral, is to take it, either through agreements with Russia as they move into Ukraine or by attacking our sovereignty locally, either directly or economically.

I think we need to stand together and invest in local projects. I know we just had a bill where about 5% of it was about mining, but we need to focus on investing in local projects short term, during Donald Trump's presidency, and long term to ensure that mining is viable in the long term.

The final thing I will say is that I'm always reminded—Mark Cutifani from Vale, when I was talking about critical minerals, once said, "Tell me which ones are not critical, and I'll stop mining them." There are some that are critically important, but all minerals from mining are very, very valuable.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Question?

M^{me} France Gélinas: In the speech from the throne, there was a part that talked about long-term care. You, in your riding, have this fabulous long-term-care home, Finlandia Village. Finlandia Village is exactly what it is: It has over 112, 118 long-term-care beds; it has supportive housing; it has affordable housing; it has independent—people can age in that village and go from independent living to supportive housing to long-term care. They will be doing the sod-turning ceremony on Saturday morning for the 32 new long-term-care beds that will be constructed on site.

I wanted you to share with our colleagues what you think of Finlandia Village and if it's a model that you support and think should be copied and pasted everywhere in our province.

MPP Jamie West: The short answer is yes. Look, Finlandia is this amazing model, and right now in our riding—sort of on the border of our two ridings—we're having issues with Extencare Countryside, where the Minister of Long-Term Care has ceased admissions to it, and we've been working with the minister on this.

It's frustrating to see a brand new facility not up to snuff in what people expect. People spend a lot of money to have their family members in long-term care, but when you look at Finlandia, they're getting it right and they do it right. I know this first-hand because my wife's grandparents, Rolly and Coloumbe—mémère and pépère—were there in that graduated system where they had the independent living, and as their needs grew, they moved through it. The level of care, and not just while they were there—both of them sadly have passed on now—but it was

that opportunity to meet with people as an MPP afterwards who would come and talk to me about Rolly and Coloumbe and what it meant to them as friends. They have that whole community environment as well as being just world-class and a model for what long-term care should look like across this province.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Questions?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I appreciated the remarks from my colleague. He pointed out the need for investment in post-secondary education. The throne speech included only a single reference to post-secondary education, which I found very concerning.

Since the throne speech, the government has added seats in STEM programs, but our colleges and universities are urgently calling for increased base operating funding so they can stop being forced to close programs, so they can stop being forced to cap enrolment, so that students and communities and employers can continue to rely on a stable, sustainable post-secondary system.

I wondered if the member could elaborate on why that is so critical to Ontario's economy.

MPP Jamie West: The riding of Sudbury actually has three large post-secondary institutions. We have Cambrian College, Collège Boréal and Laurentian University, and hopefully soon Université de Sudbury, a "par, pour et avec" francophone university.

The reality is, in Ontario, we have the lowest provincial funding for post-secondary education, and we have the highest tuition rates. But even at that rate, we are not able to make ends meet. With tuition being frozen for so long and without an investment from the government side, the cost of inflation continues to erode the ability of colleges and universities to make ends meet.

At the federal level, they've cut the number of international students. Quite frankly, because of the low provincial investments, colleges and universities have been using international students' higher fees in order to supplement the funding they have. It's not fair to newcomers to our communities, but it's not fair to our people as well here. We cannot expect our children to be paying higher and higher tuition rates to get the jobs of tomorrow. We need it to be affordable so we can pull people out of poverty into the jobs of tomorrow.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Question?

Mr. John Fraser: I noticed in the throne speech that health care and education came right at the back. Given the fact that 2.5 million Ontarians don't have a family doctor, that too many people—more and more people every day—are having to use their credit card instead of their OHIP card, that wait times are the longest they've ever been and we're still shutting emergency rooms—I'm going to stop here. I could probably go on for the next 15 minutes, but I only have—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Question?

Mr. John Fraser: Can the member comment on why that is so far back in the throne speech?

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The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I recognize the member for Sudbury.

MPP Jamie West: Thank you very much, Speaker, and thank you to my colleague as well on this.

Hallway medicine is one of the things that brought me to the Legislature. I was brought in when the Liberal Party collapsed, and one of the issues in Sudbury was the fact that hallway medicine was at critical levels in Sudbury. We were leading the charge on hallway medicine, which has now become a norm of the Conservative government,

Beyond that, instead of reversing that and making things better, we're at the point now where emergency rooms are closing—Minden hospital was closed completely—and, as my colleague said, 2.5 million people don't have a family doctor, including myself.

This does not make sense, and pretending that just because OHIP is paying, that these private companies are making more and more money from taxpayer dollars is making things better, is absolutely wrong and ignores the fact that people are taking out their credit cards to pay for upselling and other fees like that.

It's the wrong way to go. We're the party of Tommy Douglas; we believe in public health care and we'll continue to fight for that.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Question?

Mr. Deepak Anand: I was listening to the member, and I just want to ask you a question with respect to the throne speech. We heard that the LG was talking about threats from Donald Trump and then the government investing into the Ring of Fire, making sure all these minerals which are required not just for Ontario but the world, where we could be the leader in that.

In your opinion, when you talk to the residents of Sudbury, what is their feedback on what government is doing to make sure that we prosper in our economy, working together with the communities, and bring these minerals into the economy back, and about the mining? What is their feedback?

MPP Jamie West: I know I have a limited time to respond. The short version, basically, is that while they agree that the Ring of Fire is a large deposit and an important deposit, it is a long way away. Even if we had agreement with First Nations communities, which the Premier has not been helpful in happening, that project just to build the road to the Ring of Fire is going to be a long way away.

And the first mine, I believe, is going to be a nickel mine. We have existing nickel mines already in Sudbury. Timmins is developing one as well. We have a lot of nickel. We could be assisting locally in the short-term for those projects to be successful and in the long-term developing other projects as well.

We could be investing locally. I talked about MIRARCO and how we could be getting minerals out of the tailings ponds, reducing our liability, making our communities safer and also increasing the value of minerals that are already on the surface.

I think we need that short-term and long-term strategy, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate?

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: Speaker, it's an honour for me to rise and deliver my inaugural speech to this honourable House.

First and foremost, I offer a heartfelt thank you to the people of Don Valley North. Thank you for trusting me to be your voice at Queen's Park, and thank you for giving me the honour of carrying your hopes, your struggles and your dreams into this chamber. Just as I promised you on election night, I will promise you again today that every day that I serve as your MPP, I will always put you and your family's priorities first.

But in public life, we know gratitude itself is not enough; gratitude must be repaid not with words, but with action and with service. I'm here to serve; I'm here to work—work for the people of Don Valley North.

I also owe a deep debt of gratitude to my campaign team and the countless volunteers who gave not just of their time, not just of their energy, but also of their hearts in a journey that we began together in 2022.

And, of course, to my family: my mom and dad who are in the gallery with us today, and, of course, my brother, whose love and support always allowed me to follow my dreams no matter what.

In particular, I wish to honour my late grandfather David Tsao, a true citizen of the world. He was a man who embraced the best in life because he knew what it meant to suffer and to go without. At age five, he lived through the Japanese occupation of Shanghai during the Second World War. At age 22, he and his family were forced to flee their homeland in mainland China, taking refuge on the island of Taiwan amidst the chaos of a communist revolution. The only possessions they took with them were those which they could carry in their hands or on their backs.

At age 23, he bravely fought for freedom as a captain in the United States Army in Korea. And at age 46, after building a successful career as a respected international businessman in Taiwan, he uprooted his life again, this time moving to Canada. He moved here for a simple reason, a simple yet extraordinary dream: a dream that his three sons could have a future free from the hardships, free from the struggles, free from the suffering that he endured his entire life.

My grandfather was my greatest champion, my best friend. He pushed me to strive for greatness and to enjoy life, of course, along the way. Though he left us almost two years ago this month, I have found his encouragement with me every day of the campaign. Strong, brave, proud, a true gentleman and a scholar: That was my grandfather. So to you, Yaya, you have my enduring love and respect forever.

Speaker, like many who call Don Valley North home, I'm the son of immigrants: people who came to Canada not seeking fame, but seeking freedom; not seeking privilege, but seeking opportunity. On my mother's side,

the first to arrive in Canada was my great-great grandfather, Soo Hoo Ying. He was from Gum You Tong village in Hoiping, Guangdong province, in southern China. He lived at a time when poverty, famine and political instability were the norm, not the exception. And because of this, he knew that the old world could not offer the future he wanted for his family. For Soo Hoo Ying, there was only one clear answer: Gum San—Gold Mountain—Canada.

He crossed the ocean aboard the Empress of China, enduring the seas for over a month and finally arriving at the Port of Vancouver on October 21, 1896, bringing with him nothing more than hopes and dreams for a future in this country. But unfortunately, Speaker, the reality he met here in Canada was much harsher. In Canada, he didn't find a country where the streets were paved in gold. What he found was legalized discrimination in the form of the Chinese Exclusion Act. This act would seek to end the presence of people like him in Canada—to end the influx of so-called cheap Chinese labour. This was the so-called cheap Chinese labour that dug the gold out of our mountains so Canada could be rich. This was the cheap Chinese labour that built the railroad which connected our country from sea to sea. This was the cheap Chinese labour that toiled night and day, scrubbing clothing by hand so Canadians didn't have to.

The Chinese Exclusion Act did not just impose the head tax that Soo Hoo Ying was forced to pay to enter Gum San—Gold Mountain. It also meant exclusion and humiliation. He was barred from voting. He was barred from practising a profession. He was barred from holding public office, the very privilege that I, his great-great grandson, stand here today exercising.

But Speaker, I want to be clear—I want to be absolutely clear with my words: I do not share this story for sympathy, nor do I tell it in anger to shame and scorn the country that I love. I tell it because, despite the walls of legalized discrimination that Soo Hoo Ying and countless others like him faced, he never gave up. He believed in Canada, even when Canada did not believe in him. He and countless others like him built the foundations on which we—on which I—stand today.

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After spending an entire campaign knocking on the doors of my neighbours in Don Valley North, I know that spirit, that belief in Canada, that belief in Ontario, still burns brightly in every corner of our province and our communities today. From Pleasant View to Parkway Forest, from Peanut Plaza to Hillcrest Village, from Henry Farm to Bayview Village, from Don Valley Village to Bridlebrook Park and from Bayview Woods-Steeles to Shawnee Park, we are many histories and many languages, but one community—one shared hope, one dream of a future that belongs to everyone in Don Valley North.

Speaker, our democracy is not a gift; it's a responsibility. It must be earned again and again by every single generation. Mackenzie King once described our democracy not merely as a matter of voting, but rather as a matter of making our will effective and our will intelligent.

Elections matter, but what matters even more is what comes after the votes are cast. Democracy demands that we listen, especially when it's difficult. Democracy demands that we act, even when the cost is high. Democracy demands that we lead, even when it would be easier to follow. That is the standard I will hold myself to as an MPP for Don Valley North. But, of course, I can't do this alone.

In Don Valley North, we are blessed with a community of everyday heroes. Willowdale Community Legal Services fights to ensure that justice is a right for everyone, not a privilege. Oriole Food Space ensures that no family is left hungry. North York Toronto Health Partners and Fairview Community Health make health care accessible for all. The Working Women Community Centre lifts up newcomers and empowers women. The Harriet Tubman Community Organization builds pathways for black youth to lead and to succeed. The Afghan Women's Organization, CICS and the Iranian Women's Organization of Ontario break down barriers for newcomers to thrive in our economy and our society. The Hong Fook Mental Health Association tears down the stigma around mental health, especially in new immigrant communities. New Circles, Friends of Parkway Forest Park, Access Employment, Toronto North Local Immigration Partnership, Community Information Fairview, Wordswell Association, North York General Hospital, 33 Division, Bayview Village Association, Sheppard Leslie Homeowners Association, Brian Village Association, Henry Farm association and so many, many more: These organizations are the true builders of our community. I am truly humbled to stand with them and support their work as their MPP.

Speaker, service to community has always been more than words to me. It's been how I've endeavoured to live my life. I've been proud to serve on the board of directors of the Yee Hong Centre for Geriatric Care. Yee Hong is an organization that sets the gold standard for compassionate, culturally sensitive care in Ontario and is led by an extraordinary community leader and mentor of mine, Dr. Joseph Wong, its founder and chair emeritus. I've worked for Habitat for Humanity Canada, helping to keep the dream of affordable home ownership alive in Ontario because every family deserves the security and dignity of a safe place to call home. Beyond our borders, I've worked with CANADEM monitoring elections from countries from Ukraine to Kazakhstan, helping to ensure that the fundamental rights of democracy, the fundamental rights that we as Canadians enjoy so deeply—free, fair and open elections—are protected everywhere. These experiences have taught me that change is not made by speeches alone; it's made by communities—communities caring and working together. This is the spirit that I bring with me to this chamber.

Speaker, I'd like to believe that Don Valley North stands as a living symbol of what Ontario can be. In our schools, 100 languages are spoken, but a single dream is shared. In our businesses, hard work and dedication meet innovation, energy and prosperity. In our homes, diversity is not a challenge; it's a strength that we share and cele-

brate with our neighbours. Yet at the very same time, too many parents in Don Valley North lie awake at night worrying about how they will feed their children the next day. Too many seniors struggle to access the care they deserve to age in dignity at home, and too many young people wonder whether they can ever afford to buy a house or any home in the community that raised them.

Today in Don Valley North, as across this province, the challenges we face are real, and they are urgent. In Pleasant View, homes are increasingly out of reach for ordinary families. At North York General Hospital, health care professionals are overworked and underpaid while essential resources are few and far between. In classrooms, underfunding, overcrowding and crumbling infrastructure rob our children of the best chance for tomorrow. Sheppard Avenue, as this House heard me speak about just the other day, is choked with congestion while the dream of a fully connected subway from Yonge to Bayview Village to Fairview Mall all the way to Scarborough Town Centre remains only that: a dream.

Safety concerns, affordability concerns, health care concerns: They all loom large.

These problems will not solve themselves. Our constituents expect us to be the problem solvers. They expect us to be builders, and they deserve nothing less.

Some may ask us why. Why as MPPs would we be willing to take on such large and mammoth tasks? Why struggle for goals that are so distant and so complex? Why not simply settle for the low-hanging fruit or bury our head in a tunnel and leave the hard work for another day? I answer simply: because our communities cannot wait, and our constituents will not wait. We choose to confront the housing crisis not because it's easy but because every family deserves a safe and decent place to call home. We choose to strengthen public health care not because it's cheap but because every Ontarian deserves a family doctor and access to world-class health care with their OHIP card, not their credit card. We choose to invest in public education not because it's simple but because every hope for a better tomorrow relies on it. And we choose to protect our environment not because it's popular but because we need the beauty of our ravines to persist for every generation yet to come. We do these things because we believe the good and the great are worth fighting for. We do these things because we know it's what our constituents demand of us.

Speaker, before I begin to close, I wish to pay tribute to a former MPP who once represented part of my riding, Mr. David Caplan. David was not only a devoted—and I stress devoted—public servant; he was also my political mentor and a dear friend. Whenever I needed advice, he was a phone call and a visit to Katz's Deli away—smoked meat on rye, extra fatty, with sauce, of course.

We lost David in 2019, far too young, far too soon. But the lessons he taught us will endure. His unwavering dedication to our community, his belief that public service is never about us, but it's always about the people we serve. His example, his wisdom and his spirit will guide my work as an MPP, and I will do my best to carry forward

the community-first legacy that David Caplan embodied so, so well.

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Speaker, before I close, I want to say this directly to the people of Don Valley North: I know how blessed I am, blessed to have been born and raised in Don Valley North, the greatest community in the greatest province in the greatest country in the world, and now I'm entrusted to stand here as your representative at Queen's Park. I've knocked on your doors. I've listened to your hopes and your worries. I've seen first-hand the strength, the kindness and the resilience that makes us strong. So to you, I promise I will never let you down.

Speaker, in serving our province, I carry with me a simple and enduring truth. We must never grow weary in doing good, because if we persevere, we will reap the harvest of our hopes, a community where everyone has the opportunity to succeed.

In closing, like my grandfather, I'm a student of history. That's what he would say. In 1905, with the westward growth of our great nation, Sir Wilfrid Laurier said, "We do not want nor wish that any individual should forget the land of his origin. Let them look to the past, but let them still more look to the future. Let them look to the land of their ancestors, but let them look also to the land of their children."

It's in that spirit, Speaker, that I stand here today, proud of where I've come from and hopeful for what we can build together. Thank you for your trust, thank you for believing in me, and thank you for giving me the honour to serve the community that I love. Thank you, Don Valley North.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Questions and responses?

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: Thank you to the member from Don Valley North for your passionate story you are sharing with this House. And thank you to your grandpa for going through all these struggles to make you come to this wonderful, wonderful institution.

Madam Speaker, the Don Valley North member's story resonates with me. When I came to this beautiful province and country, I came as a refugee from a war-torn country. We almost lost everything, except hopes and dreams. You shared your grandpa's stories. He came with nothing except hopes and dreams. And here you are, the first elected MPP from your family, from Don Valley North. Thank you for sharing that story.

My question to you: I know you are very passionate. Your dedication—you were elected for a reason; I could tell through your presentation. Could you elaborate? What are the other factors to push you to come to public life, to this wonderful institution? This institution is a symbol of democracy. Please elaborate: What are the other factors to push you to come to this public life?

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: Thank you to the honourable member for his question. Like he noted, and I'll note again, my story is not unique. This is the story of every Canadian—almost every Canadian. Unless you're one of our beautiful Indigenous brothers or sisters, we're all

immigrants here. We were all new here at some point. We have to remember that when we've come to this country, we've been given an opportunity. We need to try to make our society a better place. That's what's driven me: the understanding that I've been given this wonderful opportunity. The struggles of my grandparents, my great-grandparents, my parents—they all made time to come here, and it's my responsibility to make sure that I pay back.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Question?

MPP Lise Vaugeois: I want to thank the member from Don Valley North for your very moving introductory speech. I really appreciate you bringing history here into this House. It's incredibly important, because history repeats itself also, and we see that happening in various parts of the world right now, with the extreme acts of racism and oppression taking place, so I do thank you for that.

But I actually want to turn to something lighter: What do you love? What do you do in Don Valley North that brings you pleasure? Are there parks? Are there orchestras? Is there music?

And are you a singer? Because you have a very resonant voice.

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: In Don Valley North, as I mentioned in my speech, we're blessed with such a diverse community. One of the things I love about my riding is you can spend every single evening, an entire week, experiencing a different country through food. So what is my favourite thing to do in Don Valley North? It's to sample the food of the diverse communities. But on top of that, we're also a riding of beautiful ravines. So once you eat that food, you've got to take a walk in the ravine, burn off those calories, get your steps in. That's what I like to do in Don Valley North. I invite everyone in this House to join me in Don Valley North for a good meal and good walk in a ravine.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Questions?

Mr. Stephen Blais: Thank you for your wonderful inaugural address. Obviously, family and your family history is so vitally important to you. Obviously, as you've mentioned, it shapes who you are as a man today.

I noticed that you have a number of guests with you here today, and I wondered if you wanted to take an opportunity to introduce them to us and maybe share a thought of the people who are joining with you today.

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: I thank my honourable colleague for the opportunity, and yes, of course. As I mentioned earlier, my mother and my father are with us today. We also have my uncle and my aunt Henry Chang and Joy Lin Chang.

I would be remiss if I didn't mention these gentlemen behind as well: Arthur Potts and Michael Coteau, former members and, of course, the former member of Don Valley East, which also encompassed part of Don Valley North.

Thank you for being with us today.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further questions?

Mr. Deepak Anand: I'd like to welcome the member from Don Valley North. It was very touching, your story about your grandfather. Like your grandfather, I'm an immigrant. Many times when we come here, the life is hard, but thank you to Canada and all the Canadians who came before us and the Indigenous community for allowing us to meet.

If you could go back in time, is there anything you think that you would have done in the last five to 10 years that would have been more helpful or could have been challenged differently or something that stuck to your mind, "I wish I would have done that"? What would that be?

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: In politics 101, we're always told never to answer a hypothetical. So what I would like to do, actually, is to look forward. I have an opportunity now to shape the future of my community and to work with you to shape the future of Ontario.

Having a recent immigrant background for both of us, I think we're able to appreciate what it's like for newcomers in this province, the challenges they experience.

So I would take this as an opportunity to reach across the aisle to all parties to work together with me, with each other, to build an Ontario where everyone feels welcome and everyone has a chance to succeed.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Questions?

MPP Catherine McKenney: Thank you to the member from Don Valley North. I'd actually like to take you up on your offer someday. I would love to visit your riding.

Thank you for your speech today. You talked about the reasons why you're here—very compelling—talked about us being problem solvers. It is why we are here.

Maybe I could ask you, at the end of a term, if you could choose one accomplishment that you would leave here with, that you would want to be remembered for, what would that be?

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: Thank you very much to my honourable colleague for the question. This was a subject—when I first was elected, we got to sit with some of my colleagues for a taping of *The Agenda*, and Steve Paikin asked us: What is it that we would smile and remember, looking back to say that I did a good job and that I was happy with. My response to him, and the response is still the same now: that I can look my neighbours, my friends in Don Valley North in the eye and say with a straight face and absolute certainty that they know that every single day I came here, their priorities were my number one.

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We may disagree day to day, even amongst my colleagues, but not for a single moment will I ever turn my back on the people who voted for me. When I leave here one day, I want to be able to know that when I walk down the street, I can smile at my neighbours and know in my heart that I always stood up for them.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further questions?

Mr. John Fraser: That was a great speech. That was a fantastic speech. I just want to say that we both came here as staffers, and you're so much further ahead than I was when I got here. I just want you to know, on behalf of all of us here, we're so happy that you're here.

This is not a trick question, but it's a question that I like to ask—but not usually in public, usually in private. When you won, once they finally told you and said, "You won tonight," what happened? What did you feel?

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): A short response from the member from Don Valley North.

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: Thank you to my honourable colleague for the question. What did I feel when I won? I think it's similar to what most members in this room would say they felt: They went numb, right? You see it on the screen, and you stop and think, "Is this real?" You work so hard towards this goal, the entire election, knocking on doors, talking to every single person who would talk to you. Even days after the election, I would walk into a restaurant, and I had an urge to go and greet everybody. It wasn't my job, but I wanted to say hello to everyone in the grocery store and the restaurant.

But it was, first, that shock, but then simply gratitude—gratitude that my neighbours have entrusted me with this mammoth task and this great responsibility, and I'm so thankful for it every day.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Thank you.

Before we continue with further debate, I'd like to recognize two former members who have joined us here at Queen's Park today and recognize them officially.

From the riding of Don Valley East, in the 40th, 41st, and 42nd Parliaments, Michael Coteau has joined us.

Applause.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Sorry. I perhaps should have combined them, but we'll see who gets more applause.

The other member who has joined us was the MPP for Beaches–East York in the 41st Parliament and a fellow class of 2014, Arthur Potts.

Applause.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate?

Mrs. Michelle Cooper: Madam Speaker, I am honoured and deeply humbled to stand before this esteemed chamber today as part of the 44th session of the Ontario Legislature, delivering my inaugural address as a newly elected member of provincial Parliament. This moment is one of tremendous personal significance, but it is also a reflection of the growing recognition of the value of diverse voices in government.

Before I begin, I want to take a moment to acknowledge the historic significance of having the first female Speaker presiding over the Legislature. This is a milestone for all Ontarians, particularly the women and girls who can now see themselves reflected in one of the highest offices in our province's parliamentary system. It sends a powerful

message: Women belong in every room where decisions are made. I'm incredibly proud to be part of a Legislature that continues to break down barriers and open doors for future generations.

From a young age, I was captivated by the world of politics. It wasn't just about elections or debates; it was about shaping our collective destiny, understanding our past and laying the groundwork for a better future. To me, politics represented hope and possibility.

As a child, I looked up to trailblazing women in business and politics who fearlessly challenged the status quo. Their stories fuelled my passion and helped me envision a place of myself climbing the career ladder. This passion led me to pursue higher education in political science at York University, where I earned both my undergraduate and master's degrees—where I excelled.

I immersed myself in understanding governance, law, public policy and the intricate dynamics that define our democracy. Throughout my studies, one principle became clear: With hard work, determination and clear purpose, anything is possible. That lesson carried me through my academic journey, my professional life and, ultimately, into public service.

After graduating from university, I launched my own online business in the early days of the Internet. As a true entrepreneur, I wore every hat—handling sales, logistics, marketing, finance and every challenge that came my way. It was a demanding journey, but, through hard work and determination, I built the business into a success. That hands-on approach has stayed with me throughout my career; I never hesitate to roll up my sleeves and do what it takes to get the job done. My entrepreneurial spirit shines in everything I do as I approach every role with the same mindset, treating it as my own business and striving for success.

After a successful 10-year run, I sold my business and transitioned into new opportunities. Since then, I've built a diverse career managing teams and leading businesses across various industries, including sales, finance, fundraising, events, marketing and logistics. My adaptability and strategic mindset have allowed me to thrive in every role, driving growth and success wherever I go.

However, the road to this chamber was not paved without its fair share of obstacles. Like many women across Ontario, I wore multiple hats. I was a single mother raising children while balancing the demands of a professional career. There were countless nights when I would finish a long day at work only to come home and prepare dinner, help with homework and tuck my children into bed. There were early mornings, late nights and moments of exhaustion, but there was also joy, laughter and the deep satisfaction of knowing I was doing my best for my family.

To all the single parents out there juggling work and family: I see you. I understand the sacrifices you make and the strength it takes to show up every single day. Your resilience and determination are the backbone of our society, and I promise to bring your voices with me throughout this journey that I'm on—and, yes, you can do

whatever your heart desires too. Some days it may not seem that way, but through positivity and perseverance, you will see that there is a light at the end of the tunnel.

Throughout the years, I've made many sacrifices for my children, using up vacation days for school events, basketball tournaments, dance recitals and holidays. I navigated the complexities of parenting with limited resources and time, but never with limited love. Those experiences made me stronger, more empathetic and more determined. These real-life experiences have equipped me with an unwavering commitment to improving the lives of everyday Ontarians who face similar challenges.

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The journey here has also been filled with moments of uncertainty and risk. When the opportunity to run as a candidate presented itself, I had to make a choice. It would have been easy to stay in my comfort zone, to continue contributing behind the scenes. I've canvassed, door-knocked, put up signs, made calls and fundraised throughout the years. But something inside me said, "If not now, when? And if not me, then who?" And so I took the leap. I embraced the challenge and with the support of my family, friends and community, I ran a campaign rooted in honesty, integrity and hope.

Campaigning was a transformative experience. I went door to door, speaking with residents from all walks of life. I listened to their concerns, their dreams, their frustrations and their ideas. I spoke with seniors worried about health care, young families concerned about housing affordability, students dreaming of opportunity and small business owners fighting to survive. These conversations reminded me of the tremendous responsibility that comes with public office. In every handshake, every conversation and every shared story, I was reminded that public service is not about personal ambition, it's about serving others.

The people of Eglinton–Lawrence put their trust in me, and I will work every day to earn and uphold that trust. I am here because of you and for you.

I want to express my deepest gratitude to my husband, Josh Cooper, who's here today. His unwavering support, encouragement and active participation in my campaign made all the difference. He was by my side at every moment, knocking on doors and cheering me on even when things got tough. Thank you, Josh, for being my rock.

To my children, Ryan, Arielle and Alexis, and my stepchildren, Mikey, Taylor, Lexie and Josh: You are my inspiration. Our blended family, with its unique dynamic and boundless love, reminds me every day why this work matters. I'm here to help create a better Ontario for you and for all children, who deserve to grow up in a province that offers opportunity, security and hope.

To my mother, Marcia, who's here today; my mother-in-law, Bonnie; all my siblings—and my sister, Risa, is here too—your belief in me never wavered.

To my late father-in-law, Mel, who would have been proud of me and loved politics, and to my late father, Billy Levine, whose values and memory continue to guide me, I know you're watching me, proud of this moment. You

shaped the foundation of who I am, and I carry your legacy with me.

A heartfelt thank you to my campaign team, who braved the cold, wind and snow with unyielding enthusiasm and tireless dedication. Your hard work laid the foundation for our success. You reminded me every day of why we do this work. Together, we built something truly special.

To the canvassers who walked miles, the organizers who coordinated logistics, the communicators who crafted our message, you were all instrumental. This victory belongs to all of us.

To every volunteer, every supporter and every voter who believed in me: Thank you. Democracy is only as strong as the people who participate in it, and in Eglinton–Lawrence, everything counted towards my 167-vote victory. You made your voices heard and now I will ensure they echo within these walls.

Let us never forget that our democracy thrives when people are engaged, informed and inspired.

Let us remember this is not just a personal achievement, it is a shared victory. It is a moment for all of us to recommit to the values that have long defined Ontario: fairness, opportunity, compassion and justice. As your representative, I will uphold these values every day. I will be a voice for the voiceless, an advocate for the underserved and a champion for progress.

Eglinton–Lawrence is a unique and vibrant riding—a microcosm of what makes Ontario great. It is home to people of all backgrounds, faiths and cultures. It is a community of immigrants, entrepreneurs, artists, educators, professionals and workers. It is a place of resilience and unity. Our neighbourhoods tell a story of aspiration and achievement—of people coming together to create something greater than the sum of their parts.

I am proud to represent our Filipino, Portuguese, Christian, Italian and Jewish communities, among many others. Each has contributed richly to the fabric of our neighbourhood. I will ensure your contributions are recognized and your concerns are heard.

From traditional local businesses such as United Bakers, a 113-year-old establishment and vibrant hub in the riding known for its delicious pea soup and traditional Jewish favourites, to the many beloved bagel bakeries like Gryfe's, Grazinkys and New York bagel, Eglinton–Lawrence is rich in Jewish culinary heritage.

If you're craving an espresso and a cannoli, stop by Amico Bakery, a buzzing hub within the Italian community.

Explore cultural landmarks such as the Columbus Centre and the over 100-year-old institution of Baycrest.

The riding is also home to numerous faith-based places of worship, including Shaarei Shomayim; the Village Shul; and St. Clement's church, which was established in 1891.

However, we must also confront difficult truths. Anti-Semitism and other forms of hate have no place in our society. Let me be clear: There is zero tolerance for anti-Semitism—not in our schools, not in our streets and not in

our public institutions, nowhere. No one should fear wearing a kippah on the way to synagogue. No one should feel unsafe sending their children to school. This is Canada. This is Ontario. And we protect freedom for all.

I was born and raised here. I raised my children here. I don't recognize the city that I love. The city is filled with so much hate, and I never thought I would see anti-Semitism in schools, in the streets and in our religious institutions and businesses, targeted only because they are Jewish. We must speak out unequivocally against all forms of discrimination and prejudice.

I am committed to helping to build a province where everyone feels valued and respected regardless of their faith, ethnicity or background. But we must also act. Words are not enough. We need robust policies to combat hate, protect communities and educate future generations about tolerance and respect. This is not just about protecting one group, it is about preserving the soul of our democracy. Hate, when left unchecked, threatens us all. We must invest in education, strengthen our legal frameworks and empower our communities to be proactive in addressing these issues.

Looking ahead, I will focus on the priorities that matter most to our constituents. Whether you're a senior in Glen Park, a newcomer in Lawrence Manor, a professional in midtown or a student navigating your future, know that I'm here for you. My office will be a place of openness, support and action.

As member 1,976 of this Legislature since Confederation, I'm acutely aware of the history and responsibility that comes with the role. Fewer than 2,000 people have had the privilege to serve in this chamber. I do not take this lightly. I will work hard, remain accessible and always put the needs of my constituents first.

Public service is a trust, a covenant with the people, and I intend to honour that trust every single day. The campaign may be over, but the real work begins now. From my first question period in the chamber to my first member's statement, I am here to make a difference for my community and my riding.

Walking in the halls of the Legislature brings back memories of my grade 8 class trip here. Standing on the grand front hall steps for a class photo with our local MPP—I still have this photo after so many years. I have thus far had the honour of meeting some local schools who have had similar tours and photos, but now with me. I have to pinch myself some days. I don't believe this is real. It is incredible how everyone knows your name and how special they make you feel as you walk the halls of the Legislature.

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I am determined to quickly learn, navigate and lead so I can make change as I walk these halls and sit in this chamber. I am here to get to it with purpose, with unity and with a shared commitment to building a better Ontario for all. I'm ready to roll up my sleeves, confront the challenges ahead and seize the opportunity before me. As I look ahead, I do so with profound gratitude, humility and unwavering resolve. The journey that brought me here was

shaped by hardship, hope and the strength of the community that surrounds me. I will bring the same strength with me into this chamber every single day.

To the people of Eglinton–Lawrence: Thank you for believing in me. I am here because of you, and I am here for you. Together we will write the next chapter of Ontario's story, one rooted in inclusion, compassion and opportunity for all. Let us move forward with courage, with conviction and with the unshakable belief that when we work together, there's nothing we cannot achieve.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Questions?

MPP Lise Vaugeois: It's always a pleasure to hear these inaugural speeches: It's our chance to actually get to know each other a little bit and hear what each person brings to the Legislature. Thank you for sharing so much with us.

I try to imagine where the ridings are and, as you started to describe it, I thought, "Oh, I've been there to buy bagels," so I do have some sense of where Eglinton–Lawrence is. I'd like you to talk about what you do for fun, where the pleasures are in your riding, because unless we've lived there, most of us don't really know. It's also a chance to get to know more about this province.

Mrs. Michelle Cooper: Eglinton–Lawrence, just to give you a little bit of background, goes from the 401 to the north side of Eglinton, from Yonge Street to Caledonia Road. It is a quite large, diverse riding.

What I do for fun is—there is a place called The Jar and it's for pickleball. It's an indoor pickleball facility, so if you haven't taken up pickleball, it's something really easy and fun that is in the riding. And I like to walk. It's a really beautiful area and walking up and down the streets, you find new areas and all kinds of beautiful sights to see and lots of great shops and restaurants at every part of the riding. Thank you for that question.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further questions?

Ms. Lee Fairclough: Thank you to the member from Eglinton–Lawrence for your comments today. I really appreciated your authenticity. You showed us a real picture of a woman with resilience and strength. Again, it's been nice to get to know you in the same class, but you shared a little more of that today.

You talked at the beginning about some of the strong women who really inspired you in your professional life, in those moments that were a little bit tougher. Is there one that you wanted to comment a little bit more on today?

Mrs. Michelle Cooper: That's a really good question, so thank you for it. There's been a whole variety of women throughout my life that have been inspirational. I always looked up to different business leaders, but I have a tremendous mother and mother-in-law that are here today, and they've always brought me strength. I come up from a family of older sisters, so they have been my second and third mothers as well. They have always given me strength and been my guidance and hope. So family is really important. But I think everything has come from within

for me and just knowing that I wanted to make a difference my whole life.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further questions?

Hon. David Piccini: I just want to echo what others have said. It's so nice to hear a bit, a glimpse inside of everyone's personal life. And congratulations, what a campaign. I had the privilege to join you at the doors and saw your passion. You're an inspiration for many and already having an impact, bringing us all together to see the voices of the Nova victims today. So you are having an impact, and you are an important voice in this place, so thank you.

I have just a nice, light question. With a vowel at the end of my last name, where's a good place to get a cappuccino or an espresso, and can we go there together at some point in the coming weeks?

Mrs. Michelle Cooper: Thank you for that question. I appreciated all your help door-knocking in my riding. He was my Italian sidekick.

Do you know what? There are a lot of great places in Eglinton–Lawrence along Dufferin. There's like the west side, so it's like Dufferin, south of Lawrence. There is Amico Bakery, which is a big hub of the community. I think everyone gathers there in the morning and has a cappuccino or espresso and a cannoli through the day, and they have really delicious pastries. I will tell you that they even bring their flour in from Italy, and everything is homemade. Their pastries are delicious. They make pizzas there as well.

So I'd love the opportunity to go and take you there.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further questions?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I'd like to congratulate the new member for Eglinton–Lawrence on her inaugural debate. It was very enlightening and inspiring to hear what brought her here. But I think that whatever we have done in our pasts, when we come to this place, I don't think anything really prepares us for the new role that we are taking on. I wondered if the member would like to comment on how that transition has been for her. Has there been anything that surprised her in the transition, or anything that has been particularly challenging?

Mrs. Michelle Cooper: So coming here, it's a new environment. Like I said in my speech, I look at everything like a new business. It's starting up your constituent office, staffing it. It's just like starting your own business again. I fuelled up my entrepreneur spirit and just went for it. I opened those doors and got the staff up and trained. I'm very organized, so it was getting these things going so that we're in a groove. I want to make sure that the people of Eglinton–Lawrence have a place to go and have people that are there to answer their questions. So that was the first hurdle. And then this was the second hurdle, the chamber. From my first question to this speech—it's the nerves; that's really it.

So like all of us here, each and every day you come here, and you get up and you're expected to get up and speak, and you want to do the best job you possibly

and service providers who are working with youth and people struggling with their mental health and addictions, but they are not receiving the support they need from this government. Instead, this government, Ontario, is making it an uphill battle.

I say that because in the Sioux Lookout area, the rate of self-harm deaths for children and youth is 88% higher than the general rate for Ontario. For First Nations community members in the Sioux Lookout area, the age group of 15 to 19 years old had the highest rate of hospitalization for mental health and substance abuse from 2011 to 2021, a rate that increased during those years. These are some of the challenges that we see.

Yesterday, I had an opportunity to go see the treaty, the original document—Treaty 9. I physically held these documents in my hand. I saw these signatures of my ancestors and the signature of this province. I read the legally binding promises made between First Nations, Canada and Ontario.

This government's speech from the throne is another unfortunate reminder of how colonial governments of the past and present have failed to keep these treaty promises to us as First Nations, as rights holders. They forcibly come onto our lands without consultation and without consent. They attempt to degrade our rights. They attempt to degrade our sovereignty. And after all this oppression, tell us we should be grateful to them. No, Speaker, we are not grateful.

This colonial approach is not the right way. It's not the way. It's the wrong way. We are moving backwards instead of forwards. Our rights to treaty are inalienable, and when they are threatened, our people will resist, our people will stand up, whether it be in the courts or on the land. In this House, I will always do my part to resist colonial oppression and stand up for the rights holders, and I'm always honoured to speak for First Nations and for the riding of Kiiwetinoong.

At this time, I'm going to pass it over to the member for London West. Meegwetch.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I recognize the member for London West.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: In the short time that I have, I appreciate the opportunity to offer some very brief comments on the throne speech, which was introduced, it feels like, a long time ago now.

Certainly, the purpose of a throne speech is to frame the government's agenda for the next four years, in fact, and I think there were a lot of concerns that people felt after they listened to that throne speech. It really was a missed opportunity, and I want to focus on one of the opportunities that I think is so critical that should have been addressed in the throne speech, and that is reversing the chronic underfunding of our college and university system.

Look, we are in a moment of incredible economic uncertainty in this province—the threat of Trump's tariffs. We heard about it daily on the doorsteps during the election campaign. We know that businesses are worried, workers are worried and communities are worried about what the short-term and long-term impacts are going to be.

They're looking to the government to provide assurance that the government will be there to look after people, to make sure that people's jobs are protected and to make sure that we are hiring the health care workers who we so desperately need in our communities.

People are looking to the government to get Ontario building, to make sure that we have an economy that is resilient, that is strengthened so that we don't have to be vulnerable to what Donald Trump decides to do. We should be embarking on an aggressive program of home building, looking at national infrastructure projects like schools, hospitals and transit. Instead, we see the Premier doubling down on his \$100-billion tunnel.

We need to grow our economy. We need a real plan to buy Ontario, to buy Canadian, not just a single day designated as buy-Ontario day, hoping that consumers will go out and purchase Ontario-made or Canadian-made products. We need a real plan; we need real incentives and supports for consumers who want to do that. We need changes to procurement policies. We didn't see any of that in the throne speech.

In particular, what we did not hear or see was a commitment to address, as I said, that chronic underfunding of our colleges and universities in the province, and that is so important to making us able to get Ontario building. We need those apprenticeships; we need graduates of skilled trades programs and graduates of our college sector who can move into those vital jobs that are necessary to get our economy growing.

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We need a strong university system to attract the best and the brightest from around the world; the knowledge workers who will advance our economy, advance our well-being and advance our communities. Instead, our colleges and universities are literally on the brink. It seems like every day, we read another media story of a college that has had to cut programs, lay off workers, cap enrolment. We are reading almost daily about universities reporting deficits, not just in the next year, but projected deficits for years ahead. We are seeing campuses—whole campuses—closing, and that can be devastating for some of those smaller and rural communities that are host to a satellite campus from a college that employs lots of staff, that are really anchor institutions in those small communities.

The government has known about this crisis in post-secondary education for years. Their own expert panel last year released a report calling for an urgent investment of funding, and the situation has just gotten worse. So the throne speech would have been the opportunity for the government to state clearly that, "We believe in our colleges and universities. We understand the critical importance of colleges and universities, and we are prepared to invest." They did not.

The consequences are real, Speaker, and they are serious and worrying about how that is going to put us more at risk in the face of Trump's tariffs. So my message to the government is: Please make the investment in ongoing, increased operating funds that universities and

colleges need in Ontario to provide stability and sustainability within the system.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Questions?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: I think one of the challenges that we're dealing with in regard to our relationship with the United States—and that was a relationship which the honourable member alluded to—was the idea that the President of the United States wants to shift certain industries from Canada to the United States. A shift of industries—at least I understand that to be one of his strategies. And I understand that in his attempt to shift these industries, one of his methods is going to be to cause great disruption. Whether that disruption is caused through tariffs or through some other means, disruption is one of the tools he's going to use.

My question to the member is this: Does she have any feelings or ideas of how we might counter the disruptive tactics of the President of the United States in order to defend or protect workers and industries here in Ontario?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: What we are seeing in communities like your community, Speaker, of Oshawa; like in Windsor—communities that rely on the auto industry and auto parts sector are feeling very much under attack by the chaotic unpredictability of President Trump. We are seeing workers standing up for their jobs. We are seeing workers try to prevent the movement of equipment across the border because they know that once that equipment is gone, their jobs are at even greater risk. They are quite rightly looking to the government to provide the leadership that those workers deserve, that every worker in Ontario deserves to see from the government.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Question?

MPP Lise Vaugeois: Thank you to the member from London West for your comments. I'm particularly interested and aware that colleges and universities were in a state of desperation long before President Trump took office again, that they have been, I would say, deliberately underfunded to the breaking point for many, many years. We hear these talks, "Oh, let's make them more efficient," but in fact, large numbers of faculty at both institutions are on contract and make very low wages.

When you think about nation-building projects, it seems to me that access to public education at the post-secondary level is critical for preparing people to make Ontario and Canada self-sufficient economically, that we need people to have access to that education. So I wonder if you would care to comment on that?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Thank you very much to my colleague for that question. I agree absolutely that the well-being of our economy, the well-being of our communities, relies on a strong, stable and sustainable post-secondary system. Students have to be able to access education—higher education—at colleges and universities. Workers who may be displaced need to be able to access the retraining, the reskilling and the upskilling that can be delivered at colleges and universities. Our business organizations, the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, the

Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters, are urging this government to make those investments because they are relying on that labour market pipeline that colleges and universities provide.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Questions?

Ms. Lee Fairclough: Thank you to the member from London West for your comments. I was happy to hear mention of health care and, again, the fact that it had so little mention in the throne speech and didn't come up till very late, of course, at about the 40-minute mark. You also mentioned that you were disappointed not to see more discussion of procurement. I wondered if you might just want to expand a little bit on that.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I have heard in my community, in London—some of the most important public sector employers are also the biggest employers in London: the two hospitals, the school boards, Fanshawe College, Western University—they want to be able to procure locally, they want to be able to support local businesses and they are restricted in doing so because of government rules around broader public sector procurement. There is a huge opportunity for this government to lead by example, to free up some of those restrictive procurement guidelines that make it impossible for local public sector organizations to be able to support local economies. That would make a huge difference in my community and, I'm sure, across Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Questions?

Mr. Andrew Dowie: Thank you to the member from London West for her remarks. Actually, I wanted to zero in on your community of London. It was about 10 years ago that the Dr. Oetker plant opened—the first international presence of Dr. Oetker, actually, outside of Europe. Happily, your community was able to attract them, and they've since bought McCain's frozen pizza and so have really consolidated the market here.

Now, with our interprovincial trade barriers that existed, it meant that it was very seldom we could actually ship some of our ingredients across the provincial borders. So it should bring new opportunities to London and beyond for that production, for making better use of our food and exporting our food and growing our market.

I'm wondering if you could elaborate on how London would be affected by the reduction and elimination of interprovincial trade barriers further?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I appreciate your reference to Dr. Oetker. I had the opportunity to tour the plant, to meet with the CEO, and they have really been an anchor in London's food processing sector—a very, very important sector for our local economy. They told us how they do very much focus on making sure that the ingredients that they purchase to produce those pizzas are procured locally whenever possible.

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I believe the issue with international trade barriers—there certainly are opportunities, no question; however, distance tends to be a barrier. It's a lot easier for companies

to purchase across the border two hours away versus British Columbia. But I would like to see this government do whatever they can to enable those interprovincial trading relationships.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Question?

Mr. Deepak Anand: I would like to say thank you to the member from London West for those remarks.

I know the member meets with her residents, so my question is simple: With the uncertainty because of Donald Trump, what is the feedback you are getting from the people of your riding on the economic uncertainty in the job market? Are they concerned, and if they are concerned, what are their concerns?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Definitely, the people of London are concerned. I think everybody in this province, everybody in this country, is concerned.

Getting back to the throne speech, however, we came through an election where clearly the message was that we have to work together, we have to be part of a Team Canada, Team Ontario approach to deal with Trump's tariffs.

The throne speech would have been the opportunity to move in that direction. It was unfortunate that the Premier decided immediately that he did not want to have an all-party committee to look at a tariff response. I'm proud of the efforts of our party to create a leader's advisory committee on Ontario's tariff response.

But people want to see the government focused on the real issues that are confronting us: health care, housing, education, post-secondary education. Unfortunately, that is not what they're seeing right now from this government.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate?

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: It's an honour to be here in this chamber today in front of my fellow members, colleagues, family, friends, supporters and those watching at home and maybe a little bit later at home as well.

Even if you've worked in politics, nothing quite prepares you to enter this House for the first time, to be able to serve people and to be their voice here. It's an immense privilege that hit me the day after the election when I learned that there had been less than 2,000 people who've sat here, a number that I admit I didn't know before—for me, I'm number 1,992, to be exact. I wish I had timed this a little bit better, because it would have been pretty cool to be 1,988, the year of my birth, but I guess I'm now 1,992. I guess I can fudge my birth certificate a little bit later. I'm just joking.

I've been following politics and elections for quite some time. When I was a kid in 1997—so if you're doing math, I was nine years old—and I saw the results of the federal election then coming in, I kind of thought of it like a horse race: Who's going to come in first?

You see, I made that connection because some of my childhood memories involve hanging out with my father at the track. He liked the horse races and going, and I went with him. We made a lot of bets, and it was a lot of fun going with him there, so that's where I made that

connection. I think I always cheered for the underdog. I'm not too sure how I did in those bets; I was kind of randomly selecting some of the numbers or I liked this name on the program.

But lo and behold, in this election, I was the underdog, putting together a campaign over the course of less than five weeks from start to finish. It's kind of remarkable for me to think about that still—all of my experience—in the bitter cold and snow, building a team, putting in more steps that I can really remember doing in a long time and campaigning on the issues that mattered to the people of Ajax, and they sent me here to work on their behalf. I thank them and I'm forever grateful for the trust that they've placed in me to represent them here in this chamber.

I'm also thankful for my partner, Gunjan, who every morning made sure I had my coffee during that election campaign—which are really two long espresso shots with some heavy cream—and who's been there for me every step of this new journey. So I'm very grateful, and thank you, honey.

Thank you to my campaign team of Mat, Adam and Sara, and countless volunteers and supporters who helped get me here today over the finish line—just 331 votes. I know we have another member that was a little bit less vote total, so we'll call the member from Mushkegowuk—James Bay a landslide instead of me. But those folks really helped me get over that finish line, and they believed in my abilities and vision.

After the campaign, Chris, one of our campaign volunteers from Ajax, shared a touching note with me and the team, talking about his experience. He recently retired just a few years ago and he said he was a first-time volunteer on a political campaign. He shared with us that he was hopeful and inspired by everyone involved, from the youngest volunteers, who are my niece and nephew, to some of the older volunteers as well. He was inspired by everyone involved, not just for Ajax, but also for our province and country of people coming together.

I'd like to thank my predecessor, Patrice Barnes, for her service to Ajax. As a member of provincial Parliament and a school trustee, her and I have had many great conversations over the years, and I wish her well.

I'd also like to recognize and thank the now former member of Parliament for Ajax, Mark Holland, who's up here in the gallery today. I'd like to thank him for his support and encouragement. Ajax was served so well by Mark, and his example in the community is something that I strive to be. Although we didn't get to serve together for very long, I've learned something new from him every day, and I know I'll continue to do that. Thank you, Mark.

The land on which Ajax is situated is within the traditional and treaty territories of the Mississaugas, and specifically the Mississaugas of Scugog Island First Nation, the signatories of the Gunshot Treaty of 1788 and the Williams Treaties of 1923. As a new member in here and as someone who lives on this land, I believe we all have a responsibility to Indigenous peoples to respect their traditions and as rights holders, including our duty to consult.

Ajax was founded during the Second World War, laying down roots that would grow into a strong and resilient community. It was the site of the largest munitions plant in the British Commonwealth, producing over 40 million shells and employing over 9,000 people, primarily women, who were known as the Bomb Girls. The town bears the name of HMS Ajax, a Royal Navy cruiser that played a decisive role in the Battle of the River Plate. The spirit of that ship to face challenges head-on with courage still lives in the town that grew from its name.

Ours is a community that has always met adversity not with despair but determination and victory. I find it's fitting that today is Victory in Europe Day, and I'd like to just thank the brave men and women who have served our country with valour and honour in the Armed Forces, and those who have supported them at home.

In the wake of war, as Canada confronted a severe housing crisis, Ajax became a model of intergovernmental co-operation. With a strong direction from government who coordinated between provincial, federal and local authorities, Ajax turned temporary wartime infrastructure into permanent homes. This rapid expansion of housing gave stability and opportunity to workers, veterans and refugees alike. That legacy of responsive, inclusive growth remains a point of pride and one of Ajax's greatest strengths today. It reminds us that with coordination and local focus, we can address shortages and build communities that work for the people who live in them. It's a lesson that I think all members should take note of and repeat again as we confront another housing crisis here today.

Ajax has long stood as a beacon of diversity. In the post-war years, our community opened its arms to European refugees and new Canadians from all around the world, building not just a workforce but a shared sense of belonging that still defines the town to this day. We have the fastest-growing diverse population in the country. You can see this in the amazing restaurants and shops all throughout the community and, dare I say, with respect to my colleagues in the House, home to some of the best food in the province.

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Ajax is a community of different faiths and places of worship, all with these community institutions playing an active and engaged role within the community. For our economy, we've always looked to high-demand areas to grow. We're built on high-skilled manufacturing in the legacy of the Second World War and on the legacy of Defence Industries Limited. And today, Ajax continues to host a dynamic mix of innovators in sectors including health care, manufacturing, housing and technology. It's a town that knows the value of hard work and the power of working together. We have a skilled workforce, easy access to roads, highways and rails to move goods and people, and with the right strategy—and hopefully I'll be able to help make that happen—the potential to supercharge Ontario's economy and the economy within Durham region.

But Ajax is more than its economy. It's a place where families thrive, home to dozens of community organiza-

tions, clubs and teams. There's an extensive network of community centres and great schools. We take pride in our publicly accessible waterfront along Lake Ontario, one of the few of its kind in the region. We're defenders of our environment and precious wetlands, such as Duffins Creek, and are deeply connected to the green spaces that enhance the quality of life and protect our environment for generations to come.

Growing up, my mom was a single mom. She's here today. I'd like to do that now.

And life wasn't always easy. We grew up in an apartment building, but we had enough, and every day she supported and encouraged me. And do you know what? Every day she was patient with me, sometimes maybe days she shouldn't have been, but every day she gave me the opportunity to follow my passion and wear my heart on my sleeve, as I think you're seeing right now. So, Mom, thank you, and I love you.

It's my upbringing that led me to a passion for public service, to help people, and I chose to seek provincial office because I believe that every child in our province should have the opportunity to succeed. I was lucky. I grew up in a great neighbourhood, went to great public schools, had teachers that challenged me and inspired me to do better. I had the opportunity to go to post-secondary and earn a BA in political science at York University—a degree which, I might add, is very different than actual politics—and later on an MBA from the Schulich School of Business. I had economic opportunities coming out of school, but not every child has those same opportunities. So that's why I believe, as a society and as a government, that we need to ensure that every kid in this province, whether you're from a big city like Toronto, or what was a small town in a farming community like Bradford, where my mum and aunt grew up—that everyone has an opportunity to succeed no matter where you are. That means investing in people, helping those who need a hand up, providing early interventions and preventative measures in areas like child development and health care—not because it's the right thing to do but because it's the smart thing to do. That's how we build a stronger economy and a society where no one is left behind. In the long run, this approach saves government money and gives people the opportunity to make their own decisions and choices for their futures.

I believe in responsible government, one that respects the hard-earned tax dollars that it collects, one that provides value and a return on investment in the services that we provide to every resident of Ajax and all across Ontario. In my view, it's this level of government right here that we all have the privilege of being a part of in this Legislature that has the biggest impact on our day-to-day lives, and it's why I'm so honoured to be able to sit and stand here in this House today.

When I think about my family and where we come from on both sides, I sometimes find it remarkable to be here because we carry within ourselves their stories and experiences that form part of our identity of who we are. So I'd like to pay tribute to my grandmother, Cristina Cerjanec, who's passed away now, who I know would be

so happy and proud to see me here today. I miss her every day. She was nine years old when World War II ended, and suddenly was a refugee within Europe and lived in a displaced persons camp until she came to Canada. It's something that I'm still taking time to process and understand, that experience, because growing up you don't always hear that experience. So thinking about her—and I learned about some of this a little bit later on and had the opportunity to visit the area in which that was. It was just kind of remarkable to be there on the land and see the water that she had looked out on there, a river—a place in Austria.

In writing my remarks, though, I remembered that she and I would drive by this building, where we're here today, as I took her to medical appointments just down the street. Those were full-day adventures but also cherished moments as I took her on that long return trip and, with traffic, even longer. But thinking of her kindness and humour always made me smile and still does today.

I think of my grandfather, George Cerjanec, who came here as a farm labourer and settled in Bradford, which is the carrot capital of Ontario. I don't know if the member representing Bradford is here right now, but I'm sure they'll agree with me. He was the toughest person I knew and proud of the work that he did. He said that he earned more per hour than anyone else working on the field because he did the work of two men. Now I'm going to just have to take his word on that one, but I think that's where I get my work ethic and determination from. I'll never forget the values that he had and how he spoke about Canada. He called Canada the greatest country in the world because it gave him an opportunity, and it's something that, as a member here, I'll work towards every day: to try and make our province and country even better.

He met my grandmother there and, together, they built a family and a life that I'm immensely proud of. They had one son, Steve, my uncle, and their two daughters, who are here today—my mom, Mary, and my aunt Anne, who's also here with her husband, Iain Burnett. We had a lot of great conversations around the dinner table during Easter, Christmas, Thanksgiving and other important occasions, along with my cousins Stacy and Michael.

My grandfather brought his winemaking traditions from Croatia—but in the basement, and bottled in those, I think it was, glass Evian bottles that they used to have. I always wondered why he cut it with some ginger ale, but now we get to laugh about it and keep their spirit alive.

My dad, Ed Cachia, came here from Malta when he was four, and he built a career selling to power utilities across Ontario for over 50 years, retiring when he was 74 as the company's Canadian sales manager. In the course of his work, he co-invented an overhead power in-line disconnect switch that, since 1991, has had sales of over 3,500 switches per year to Hydro One and utilities across our province. Although he doesn't earn a single cent from his invention, I know that my father played a role in contributing to a safe and reliable electricity system in our province. After a brief retirement, he's still working in sales, but now at a hardware store at the young age of 81,

because he enjoys helping people. It's a great way for him to get out of the house and get some steps in as well, and he really enjoys that. It's so great to see him do that still.

Through him, I have two half-brothers, Tim and Joe, a large extended family, a strong passion for the Toronto Maple Leafs—go, Leafs, go! We're up 2-0 in the series—and a rich connection to the island of Malta that I cherish. I should note that I believe that I'm the first member of provincial Parliament of Maltese descent to sit in this House.

I appreciate the friendship of so many that have entered my life over the years. Some of them are here today, like Cameron, Craig, Ferd, Erika and Umaid—and many others who couldn't be, like my friend Baz who's a public school teacher in Peel region.

I'd like to acknowledge a few other people who are here today in the gallery, and one who isn't, that I've had the privilege of sharing my political journey with.

Arthur Potts: I'd like to recognize Arthur, who's here today, a former member of Parliament for Beaches–East York, a strong advocate for consumer protection here in the House. I also hear, from our conversation earlier, that he might be starting a petition to rename the inaugural speech to be a rookie speech. You can look up in Hansard his inaugural speech for a little bit more reasons why.

Michael Coteau, former member of provincial Parliament for Don Valley East and now member of Parliament for Scarborough–Woburn: I've known Michael for more than 15 years, before he sat in this House, actually. It's through him that I expanded my involvement within the Ontario Liberal Party. Michael always believed in standing up for people, and I bring with me his same belief of opportunity for all and speaking up for those who don't have the same privilege and honour of being here in this House. So, thank you, Michael.

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Someone else who's not here today but would have tried to: Ana Bailão, probably my closest mentor, former deputy mayor of Toronto and who I worked with for four years at Toronto city hall, working on housing issues with her and big challenges that we were facing in the province—we were ahead of the curve in advocating for solutions, many times against the grain, on the housing file, to make changes to policy that we knew would have impacts and benefits to everyone within Toronto, the GTA and the province, and some of which still do need to take place today. Now I have the opportunity in this House to help contribute to advocating, to doing more on housing and hopefully solving that big challenge.

I also learned from Ana how to be effective. I always have her in the back of my head, saying, "Rob, we've got to do this. We have to do that." Now, I am taking a little bit, like her—but I also learned from her how to work for the community, to serve the community and to never forget where you come from. So, thank you, Ana, for that.

I've learned from so many more over my years.

For the people at home: You may only see the press conferences on TV or the noise and theatrics of question period. I must admit, while it can be a little fun, I'm not

sure sometimes that it is the most productive use of our time.

Interjection.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Little groans, right?

In my short time here, I think I've found so far the most meaningful interactions are the ones that you don't see: talking with a member of a different party in the hallway or at an event, where more of our true selves come out. From those conversations, I believe there's more that unites us than divides us. I hope that we all will, in this new session, try to work better together, to reach across the aisle and truly make all of our communities and province a better place.

Entering this chamber for the first time, wandering the halls, looking at the paintings and reading the names inscribed in stone, it's a surreal experience for me, one that I continue to feel and I hope, for however long I get to be here, to feel the weight of that responsibility that has been entrusted in me by the people of Ajax. The decisions we make here will have an impact on people's lives, hopes, dreams and futures.

So, Speaker, as we confront the challenges of our time, those in Ajax draw inspiration from the past. Just as we met the demands of the 20th century with unity and resolve, I hope that we'll meet the challenges of the 21st century with that same spirit and even more.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Questions?

Mr. Andrew Dowie: I want to thank the member from Ajax for his incredible maiden speech. Welcome to Queen's Park. We're glad to have you here.

I wanted to pry a little bit into the last couple of years of your emerging political career. As you've certainly spent time with youth and with the school board, I'm hoping you could share with the House what your perspective is on how youth of today may have grown up differently than, say, when those who are children of the 1980s went through their formative years, and what recommendations you would have for youth who are coming up, following in your footsteps.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: I feel like I'm in an interesting kind of generation. I'm a millennial, one of the younger members of this house—not the youngest—so I'm kind of in between the technology piece and the paper piece. But, as it pertains to young people and what they aspire to, I think that, for me, it came down to a teacher, Mr. Hoyt. He was my grade 11 history teacher, and he inspired me, and he challenged me to do more. I hope for young people of today—and I know that there are so many great educators working in our schools. I know that they'll be challenged by those great educators and be inspired to do more and follow their passions and their dreams.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Question?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Congratulations to the member from Ajax for doing his first big speech here in the House. You can tell from your comments that you understand the weight and the gravity of the work that we do here. Going forward, what are your hopes for the legislative work,

given the political context, and what informs those values for you from your constituency?

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: I hope, through the debates that now I guess I'll get to participate in in this Legislature, to not only add to the public record but provide alternative ideas or thoughts to legislation that is being proposed by the government, or even private members' bills in here. So I hope through that I'll be able to—and through the asking of questions. But I think, as I referenced in my remarks, for me there's a great opportunity to do that once we leave this chamber and have those conversations. I've had so many wonderful conversations so far with members of all parties about things that we need to work on in this province and based—just so many different issues. We all come to this from different angles, so that's really where I hope that we'll be able to do that.

I didn't run to say, "Look at me. I'm important." It's kind of cool that I guess my name gets to be on the wall, but it is what it is. Whether it's on or not, that doesn't matter to me. It's about making a difference for people. When I'm listening to my constituents—I had a woman come into my constituency office not too long ago talking about the challenges that she was having with a family member accessing health care. I think about my own family and I think about her experience, and that drives me to say, "How do we get better at this? How do we make those improvements?" Sometimes they're gradual improvements, sure; I understand that. But how do we do that? I take for me, and hearing from people.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Question?

Mr. John Fraser: I want to congratulate the member from Ajax on a great inaugural speech. We're really happy and proud that you're here.

You talked a lot about family in your speech, which is great. I think we're all like one big family here and you're going to find that out.

I was talking to the House leader, though, and she wanted me to point out a couple of things. You left three seconds on the clock, okay? You're going to have to learn about that. And she noted your willingness to participate in debate and is making adjustments to your House duty schedule as we speak.

I'm going to ask the same question I asked this morning: When you won, what's the first thing that—what happened to you, when somebody said, "You won"? Because it was a tough election.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: I think I've already signed up for a debate on the bill in the future, knowing that I'm doing the inaugural speech today, so I'm on it, House leader.

But when I found out I won, it was actually in the election night party with the team and the volunteers that helped. It was a really, really tight race: 331 votes. Watching the results come in on my phone—at one point I was up by three and down by seven or vice-versa. It was a real nail-biter. Going into that election night party, actually, we didn't know if I would win or lose. It looked good; it looked like, as long as that last poll was there, that my lead would hold. I actually found out in the middle of

giving my speech, where it came up on the TV and it had the check mark that said “elected.” So I literally found out in the room with the team there, and there’s a photo of it. I think it was one of the most remarkable experiences, and probably one of the things I’ll remember most for the rest of my life.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Questions?

Mr. Deepak Anand: Welcome, to the member for Ajax.

It’s not really a question, more of a comment. From a Schulich graduate myself to a Schulich graduate, welcome to your House. Knowing that Schulich is not an easy task, I want to commend your mother on her efforts, and happy Mother’s Day to your mother and all the mothers as well. So maybe we can go for a reunion at Schulich too, by the way.

My question is, knowing that you’re here, when did you decide to run for this office, and what was the reason behind it, so that you can share with all of us?

1540

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: I think we’ve just found the two co-chairs of the Schulich School of Business caucus. We’ll do a canvas for any of the other members who have attended, and maybe we’ll be able to get together and talk about our experiences there. I think that would be wonderful.

For a long time, I had wanted to run for public life, based on my values, based on my upbringing, based on my belief of ensuring every kid has an opportunity to succeed. In this particular case, to be very honest with the member opposite, it was because of the snap election. I decided to put my name forward. It wasn’t a typical one where you’re out for a year before and knocking on doors. It was literally five weeks, I think, from when I put my papers in with the party to election day, so it was just that sprint and having to get out there and hustle and work hard and knock on doors. That was the decision around here, to be very honest.

But it was something that I had been very interested in for a very long time, and I’m very privileged to be able to be here today.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Question?

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I’d like to thank the new MPP from Ajax for his excellent inaugural speech. It’s often been said that how a man treats his mother is a very big indicator of the type of person that he is as an individual.

I wanted to ask, how would you like to be remembered, both as an MPP and from your work here? What would you like to most be remembered for doing?

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: I think, as someone that wasn’t afraid to buck the trend sometimes, to be honest—maybe my colleagues are hearing that for the first time. There’s a drive in my beliefs, and I feel very strongly in them sometimes, so I’m going to be always working hard to kind of push, “What else can we do?” So, I think that.

A little bit of humour, hopefully—I like to think I’m funny; maybe I’m not.

But I’m enjoying it so far as someone who took this responsibility with a heavy weight on my shoulders, for certain, but someone who always worked and stood up for, frankly, folks who don’t have that voice.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate?

MPP Mohamed Firin: Madam Speaker, I rise today humbled to stand in this historic chamber of Queen’s Park, surrounded by the marble walls and carved oak that embody Ontario’s long-standing democratic legacy. Each day I walk through these hallowed halls, past statues and carvings that whisper stories of service, I feel the weight of this place’s history and the privilege of being part of it. For example, I have learned of the owl and the eagle carved into the ceiling above us—reminders to be both vigilant and wise in our duties. In this magnificent space, where generations of Ontarians have debated and decided our future, I’m filled both with awe and gratitude to begin my journey as a member of provincial Parliament for York South–Weston.

Madam Speaker, I offer my sincere congratulations to you on your election as Speaker. Your leadership and fairness set the tone for our deliberations, and I look forward to your wise guidance.

I also want to express my deepest thanks to the people of York South–Weston for entrusting me with the honour of representing them. I’m grateful to the thousands of constituents who have supported me and put their faith in me, and I pledge to uphold their trust and act as the voice for every neighbourhood in our riding.

I must also thank my family, especially my parents: my mother, whose prayers and sacrifices allow me to be here today; my father, who migrated from Somalia right before a civil war—and once he got to Canada, his credentials were not recognized. For his sacrifices and for the work that he put in over all those years, I want to thank him today.

To the volunteers and campaign team, who worked tirelessly behind the scenes, knocking door to door across thousands of houses in York South–Weston, your dedication helped turn our vision and my dream into reality, and for that, I sincerely thank you from the bottom of my heart.

To Premier Doug Ford: Thank you for your support and confidence. I’m grateful to serve in Premier Ford’s government and to carry forward our shared commitments to York South–Weston and all of Ontario. I would also like to acknowledge my predecessor Mr. Michael Ford and to commend him for his service to our community. He represented our community with great commitment and compassion, and I assure our constituents that I’ll build on the foundation he helped lay, continuing the projects and initiatives he championed and always putting the people’s interests first.

York South–Weston is a vibrant and diverse community. With a population of roughly 116,755 people—I said roughly, but that’s more precise—our riding is a tapestry of cultures, faiths and languages reflecting both hard-working families and the challenges many face. We celebrate strong Portuguese, Italian, Filipino, Jamaican

communities and growing Latin and South Asian and Somali communities, amongst others. In Weston, Mount Dennis, Keeleisdale and other neighbourhoods, people of all backgrounds live side by side, contributing to our shared success. We're also a riding of young families and seniors, parents who came here with hope, like my father, and children born here today who carry our future. These facts and our rich, multicultural mosaic shape who we are and guide the work that I will do.

Turning to the province, Madam Speaker, we heard Ontario's speech from the throne for the 44th Parliament session. As we defend our economy against US-imposed tariffs in these uncertain times, the throne speech rightly emphasized that Ontario must become more resilient and independent. In the words of the throne speech, "We can no longer assume the benefits of our economic partnership with the United States," and our government must "build an economy that is more competitive, more resilient and more self-reliant." I wholeheartedly agree with this direction. Protecting Ontario's industries—from agriculture and manufacturing to green energy—is essential to securing job opportunities for our families. York South–Weston has a strong manufacturing service sector, and I'll work to ensure these businesses can thrive, even in uncertain times. Expanding trade within Canada, upgrading our infrastructure and investing in local entrepreneurs are all part of this plan to keep our economy strong.

In short, I'll support policies that shield Ontarians from unfair external pressures and create new homegrown opportunities. I'm honoured to be part of a larger movement that touches the lives of millions across Ontario, rooted in service, change and impact. I came into this role as an MPP to make a real difference, and I'm proud to contribute to an institution dedicated to enriching lives, expanding opportunity and building a better future for all Ontarians.

Although we may sit on different sides of this chamber, we still jointly represent Ontario and share the same desire to see our communities thrive. I look forward to working with all members, regardless of party, to drive meaningful change for the people of Ontario. I carry with me a fresh perspective and the voices of a newer generation—one that is eager for change, progress and a more inclusive future. I'll work every day to not only meet these demands but to also see they see Queen's Park as a pillar of support that is constantly listening, leading and growing.

Let me now share some context as to why these priorities matter deeply to me. I grew up in this area, having walked the streets for decades and built lifelong friendships here. As a young person, I've experienced first-hand some of the same challenges members of our communities face on a reoccurring basis. Those experiences have shaped who I am as a person and have motivated me to get involved in community work, where I can be put in a position that can effect change.

My path to this Legislature has been guided by community service and public advocacy. In my decades of community work, I have worked tirelessly with various grassroots like youth for youth, the Dixie youth project,

the centre for resilience—organizations to connect Ontarians in York South–Weston and across the province with access to good jobs, higher education and critical services.

1550

In the past, I served as a special adviser to the Premier, and I was Ontario's advocate for community opportunities for two years. Also, I served as the chair of the Premier's Council on Equality of Opportunity for the last four years. In those roles, I travelled our province, listening to youth, parents, faith leaders and community organizations.

Madam Speaker, representing York South–Weston is more than a role; it's a responsibility rooted deeply in lived experience. As someone who has lived and worked in northwest Toronto for many years, I've witnessed first-hand the resilience of our communities and the challenges they continue to face.

Through my leadership on the Premier's Council on Equality of Opportunity, I had the honour of working with over 20 diverse council members and engaging with hundreds of stakeholders across the province. I've always believed that when a government listens to people's stories, we can build better, more effective policies. For example, our council convened broad engagements for the Ontario Black Youth Action Plan, meeting with over 200 community stakeholders. These consultations led the government to double the funding, investing an additional \$60 million to expand opportunities for Black youth.

We also facilitated discussions on how to help young people access education and jobs, and we advised the Ministry of Education on Ontario's Learning Recovery Action Plan in 2022 to address the pandemic's impact on our students.

In the winter of 2023, I worked with Ontario's Anti-Racism Directorate to host consultations—bringing together about 30 community and corporate stakeholders—to support the legislated review of Ontario's Anti-Racism Strategic Plan. The insights and recommendations from those sessions were shared with the Anti-Racism Directorate to strengthen its strategy.

One area where I've been privileged to contribute is in advancing access to fertility supports across Ontario. In consultations with families and health partners, it became clear that too many Ontarians were struggling with the emotional and financial barriers to starting a family. Fertility support is an issue close to my heart not only as a legislator but as a proud father of two young daughters.

Over the past two years, I have supported efforts to expand fertility coverage in Ontario, connecting with organizations like Conceivable Dreams as well as the Ministries of Health and Finance to help raise awareness, and this led to \$150 million in funding for the fertility supports. This will triple the number of families able to gain access to treatment through our Ontario Fertility Program.

Madam Speaker, I'm proud to have played a part in making that dream possible for many would-be parents. I know people personally who have struggled to start families and have undergone multiple rounds of fertility

treatments, which is why I understand just how life-changing these supports can be.

Our economy thrives when every worker is treated with fairness and dignity. Through my work, I've had the opportunity to support efforts addressing issues such as wage theft, unfair deductions and barriers to employment for internationally trained professionals. I've also stood up for Ontario workers and their rights.

Now, as a parliamentary assistant to the Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development, I will continue to fight wage theft in all forms, whether employers illegally withhold tips or deny fair pay to young workers.

I've also been a steadfast advocate for recognizing international work experience, an issue that remains a persistent barrier for thousands of workers, like my father. Too many skilled immigrants arrive in Ontario with years of experience and knowledge only to find their background—sometimes decades of extensive experience and expertise—ignored simply because it wasn't acquired in Canada. I'll continue to advocate for the faster recognition of foreign credentials so that skilled newcomers can put their training to use and start good careers as soon as they arrive because when we empower newcomers to fully participate in our economy, we all benefit.

Madam Speaker, in each of these roles, my approach has been shaped by both principle and pragmatism: listening closely, working collaboratively and advancing solutions that respond to real needs. Whether through social policy, labour reforms or youth empowerment, the goal has always been to ensure that Ontario remains a place of opportunity—for every resident in every region. These commitments will continue to guide me as I serve the people of York South–Weston in this House.

Looking ahead, I will bring the same energy and determination to address the everyday challenges for York–South Weston. My priority will be delivering real results on the key issues that matter to our families.

My focus in this Legislature is to work constructively and collaboratively towards delivering tangible results for the people of York South–Weston. Guided by the needs of our constituents, I'll prioritize five key areas: housing, jobs, youth opportunities, support for seniors and community safety.

On housing: Many families in our communities continue to face growing challenges around affordability and availability. I'm committed to supporting policies that encourage development of new housing options, protecting tenants and assisting first-time home buyers. By working with all levels of government, streamlining approval processes and encouraging smart development, we can make meaningful progress towards accessible and stable housing for all.

On jobs and economic development: York South–Weston has significant potential. Supporting small businesses, enhancing workforce training and promoting entrepreneurship are essential steps towards building a resilient local economy. I'll advocate for initiatives that ensure workers, including newcomers and young profes-

sionals, are equipped with the tools they need to succeed in a changing job market.

On youth opportunity: I firmly believe that when young people are given the right support, they rise to meet it. Programs that promote mentorships, skills development and pathways to employment are crucial. I will work to ensure our youth have access to those opportunities that they need to grow, lead and contribute meaningfully to our society.

On seniors: We must continue to build a system that enables older Ontarians to age with dignity, independence and connection to their communities. This includes strengthening home care, improving community programming and ensuring that social supports reflect the diverse needs of our seniors across the province.

And on community safety: All Ontarians deserve to feel secure in their homes and their neighbourhoods. I'll collaborate with community leaders, local law enforcement—like 12 Division—and service organizations to promote evidence-based strategies that address the root causes of crime, while building stronger and more inclusive communities.

These priorities are grounded in the conversations that I've had with the residents across my riding. They reflect not only the hopes of our community but also the shared desire for balanced and thoughtful and achievable progress. I look forward to working with my colleagues on all sides of this House to advance these goals in the months and years ahead.

This chamber is not just a place for policy, it is a place for progress. Let's work together to ensure that York South–Weston and communities like it are not only represented but empowered.

I stand here today on the shoulders of those who came before me: my parents and my family, who instilled in me values of hard work, education and giving back to the community; the many supporters, first and foremost my wife, who have stood by me in this journey; the many mentors and teachers, from community organizers, aunts, uncles and many cousins; and the local leaders who believed in me and pushed me to dream big.

Most of all, I'm inspired by the people of York South–Weston: the neighbours who volunteer at food banks, the seniors who mentor youth, the newcomers who start small businesses and the kids who study hard in school in hopes of a better life. Hearing their stories and witnessing their commitment every day reminds me why I'm here and what I set out to accomplish.

I want to say that our work starts with hope and unity. In a riding as diverse as ours, we know that our strength lies in solidarity. Whether you came here recently or have lived here for generations, whether you speak English, Portuguese, Spanish, Italian, Somali or dozens of other languages, your future matters to me. I promise to listen to all voices in York South–Weston to implement policies that will help us all thrive. Let us embrace the promise of this new session of Parliament and let us build a more prosperous future.

Madam Speaker, I want to thank you, and I want to thank everyone who has given me this opportunity. Together, we will turn our shared dreams into a reality for York South–Weston and for our province.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Questions?

Ms. Jessica Bell: Thank you to the member for York South–Weston for your presentation. I really enjoyed listening to it.

I liked to hear about the priorities that you've already set for yourself around housing, community safety, jobs, youth opportunity and seniors. I'm curious if you could spend a little bit more time talking about how you decided those priorities. Why are these important to you personally?

1600

MPP Mohamed Firin: I'd like to thank the member opposite for your question.

As I said in my speech, I worked the last few years with the government in advising the Premier and other ministries on broad issues. The reason why a lot of these issues matter to me personally is seeing first-hand, on the ground, and hearing from communities.

For example, housing—I'm someone that grew up in this province, and I don't own a home. I'm a renter myself. So I'm passionate about—maybe I might not own a home, or I might own a home, but at least I want to see how we can shape policies so the next generation, like my two daughters, has the ability to be able to afford a home.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Question?

Ms. Lee Fairclough: Congratulations to the member from York South–Weston on your inaugural speech. I really enjoyed hearing you speak, and I hadn't appreciated you'd been very involved as the chair of the equality of opportunity, so congratulations.

It sounds like you got involved in community advocacy even for youth, and maybe in your youth, and I wondered if you could talk a little bit about that. What was some success that you saw very early in your advocacy work that kept you energized to continue?

MPP Mohamed Firin: I thank you for your question.

I grew up in north Toronto. A lot of the young people that I grew up with faced many challenges. A lot of the friends that I grew up with were impacted by violence. A lot of them had a lot of issues locally on the ground.

I decided to get involved early in my community, so I've worked with a lot of various grassroots from a young age. I think that's what has shaped me over these years, and that's what has helped me in my roles in government.

I think, a lot of times, when you're in government or when you're in a position of elected office, you might not have the time to go on the ground to see some of those local issues. I've been fortunate enough to actually see some of the local issues on the ground, and that's what has helped me bring some of those voices to Queen's Park in my previous role, and that's what I intend to continue over the coming years.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Question?

Hon. David Piccini: Thank you to the member for that speech. It's an honour working with you. I was inspired to see folks from every walk of life, in particular men and women in the skilled trades, backing you big time—union members from all over Ontario supporting you in the campaign.

You touched on an important piece: what's inspired you. I know, from late-night conversations, I usually hear children in the background. Tell me why this is important for your two daughters and, if you could share a bit, what family means to you.

MPP Mohamed Firin: I want to thank the Minister of Labour for that question—and thank you. I look forward to continuing working with you. I've enjoyed it so far.

As a father of two daughters, it's, again, seeing the sacrifices that my father made. Hearing Robert's story and hearing some of the other folks today as well—and Michelle. You don't really understand the sacrifices that parents make until you become a parent—even seeing Charmaine, with her five children and the sacrifices that she makes on a daily basis. That's what drives me.

My daughters—it's what I'm passionate about, and what drives me more than anything else is to create a better Ontario for the next generation, like them. Especially, explaining to you earlier, with my father coming to Canada, his credentials were not recognized. He was a single father at that time; my mother never came to Canada. Those experiences are what I carry with me, and that's why I'm more involved in my daughters' lives. Except for when I was elected, I've been taking my daughter to school almost every day for the last seven years. That's what drives me and that's what I'm more passionate about.

Thank you for the question.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Question?

MPP Robin Lennox: I really appreciated your talk. I was just wondering, if I were to go to your riding and want to explore nature, get outside, where would the best place be to do that?

MPP Mohamed Firin: Thank you for the question. There are a lot of parks in the riding, and I would definitely love to invite you for a walk. I personally enjoy going on a lot of walks. There are many, many parks in our riding which I would love for you to come and join us in.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Question?

Mr. Adil Shamji: I'd like to thank you for your thoughtful remarks and congratulate you on being here. I'd also like to congratulate you on the work that you described, seeking out equality of opportunity, especially for those people who may not necessarily have that. You now have an opportunity as an elected official to return and continue that work with more power, as a member of provincial Parliament. How do you foresee yourself continuing and expanding the advocacy that you've been doing using the voice that you have here in this chamber?

MPP Mohamed Firin: I'd like to thank the member for the question. Continuing the work that I've been doing as chair of the PCEO and the ACO, one of the things that I look forward to is the workers for workers bill that I'll be working on with the Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development.

One of the things that I've realized is there are a lot of obstacles and barriers that we might not see every day. Working with the Ministry of Labour, one of the things that I saw in one of the workers for workers bills was that employers are able to take tips away from regular restaurant workers. If you eat in a restaurant and you run away, that employee might be responsible for paying for that meal.

Because of working with the Ministry of Labour and tackling some of these issues, we've been able to address some of those issues. So I look forward to making those types of impacts. It might look small, but to someone that's making \$2,000 a month, paying an \$80 tab or a \$200 tab because someone ran away—it means the world to them.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Questions?

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: Thank you to the member, and congratulations. I'm happy to have you here in this House. I learned a lot about you just now. I did not know, and I have to say I'm sorry, that you were part of that great consultation that went on for the past few years.

I'm wondering if you could tell us, maybe, something that you learned over those years that you could share with us, specifically about how to make a more inclusive Ontario with all those consultations, over 200. Is there anything that really stands out in your mind that you would be able to share with us?

MPP Mohamed Firin: I'd like to thank the member for the question. One of the reasons why, again, not a lot of people were aware of the work we're doing is because I typically enjoy engaging people at the grassroots level, and I think one of the things that we learned, and the Minister of Labour can attest to this, through the workers for workers—when you talk to average-day people, and you go to them for ideas, and you go to them for solutions, they're able to provide some of those solutions. Like in the workers for workers bill that I described, the Ministry of Labour, through us and other forms of consultations, we went to everyday people, and we've asked them for ideas on what the barriers are. For example, companies charge—for example, No Frills or Walmart, they charge employees for the shirts that they wear, a shirt that they'll never wear anywhere else besides where they work. Now is it fair that that employee has to pay \$100 for that shirt? No, it isn't. So that's why this minister took action in making sure that we remove some of those barriers.

So when you go out there and you talk to average-day people, you get to learn more about the issues that they face and then in return we're able to solve some of those issues here.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Thank you very much.

I don't think we have enough time for one more question, so we'll move on to further debate. Further debate?

MPP Billy Denault: First, I do want to offer, because it's the first opportunity I have to do so, my sincere congratulations to Madam Speaker Donna Skelly on her election to the office of Speaker. It is a historic and meaningful moment for this Legislature, and I'm proud to sit in a chamber under her leadership, having witnessed the sitting of the first woman Speaker in Ontario's history. I look forward to a respectful, productive and collaborative working Parliament under her tenure.

1610

I want to thank my colleagues for the opportunity to share a bit about my story and how I came to sit in this chamber today. I rise as the newly elected member of provincial Parliament for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, and I do so with a deep sense of gratitude, humility and responsibility.

I want to take the opportunity to thank the people of Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke for placing their trust in me. To the friends, families and team who made this possible—Bill, Brandon, Tiffany, Kim, Eric, Cassandra and the many volunteers and supporters from across the riding—because your work and dedication made this day possible, and I am forever grateful.

It is a profound honour to represent the riding that I have called home my entire life. Though some might say that that hasn't been that long, it still is my home, and it always has been.

I want to take a moment to acknowledge my predecessor MPP John Yakabuski, who served the people of our riding for 22 years. He served 22 of my 25 years on this earth. His example has left a lasting impression on me, and his continued support throughout this journey has been greatly appreciated.

Now, many in this House as well as back home have remarked that I have big shoes to fill. I do want to provide a moment of clarification and assurance to those here and back at home that John's shoe size is only size 12. Mine is size 10 and a half, so with a little bit of extra packing I should fit right in.

Nestled west of Ottawa, the riding of Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke is grand in size, larger, in fact, than the province of Prince Edward Island. It is a riding rich in economic diversity, from manufacturing and forestry to agriculture and tourism. Its natural beauty stretches from the rolling hills and dense forests of Algonquin Park to the mighty Ottawa River and the picturesque communities that dot our landscape.

To those who haven't visited yet, I extend an open invitation. Come see the valley and experience the world-class hospitality that we are known for.

Our riding includes 21 communities when you include municipal, county and Indigenous communities, all with unique traditions and strong, resilient people. Our history is rich and textured, from the First Peoples—the Algonquin peoples, who continue to call the valley home—to the early explorers like Samuel de Champlain, to the Irish,

English, German and Scottish immigrants, and later, Polish families, like my own, who settled in Barry's Bay and Wilno. That cultural blend gave rise to a distinct local accent, one that any valley resident will recognize with pride.

My story begins with my family, whose humble roots taught me the values that have shaped me into who I am today. On my mother's side, the Glofcheskis came from Poland just before the First World War. My grandfather grew up speaking only Polish until grade 1 and worked on the family farm before his mother insisted he get an education. He later worked in forestry in Barry's Bay until his brother, a Catholic priest, heard some of the rough words he picked up working in the bush in the back of Barry's Bay and guided him towards new opportunities, where he moved to Arnprior and met my grandmother.

My maternal grandmother, Gladys McGrath, is a woman of immense strength and resilience. She has Indigenous roots from Kebaowek First Nation, across the Ottawa River from Kipawa. Some may be aware that growing up with Indigenous descent wasn't always easy for many in the early times. She faced discrimination throughout her life, including being denied her Indigenous status until she was 85 years old. I had the privilege of bringing her to her first powwow at 87, in my own riding, at the Algonquins of Pikwakanagan, and it's a moment I'll never forget.

She excelled in school but left early to help support her family, later working in banking and as a PSW, all while being an active member of her church and community. She and my grandfather have been married for over 65 years, and these two are my strongest supporters that I've got in my back pocket.

On my father's side, my grandmother, Stella Denault, was left to raise my father when her husband passed away. For much of her life, she didn't even have a driver's licence, and yet she worked in the next town over in Arnprior. She eventually earned that licence, worked as a PSW and kept her family afloat with determination and grit.

My parents, Pauline and Brian, inherited that same work ethic. My mother, my biggest supporter and advocate, worked in health care administration, with her now working at the Ottawa Hospital. My father, after a long career in manufacturing, including Alcatel, Pfizer and Boeing—but when manufacturing began to take a decline in my community, he went back to school in his fifties to get his trucking licence. That decision, made in the face of adversity, continues to inspire me.

My stepmother has also been a steady, kind presence and someone I have immense respect for.

Then there's my sister, a nurse, a fighter and someone I deeply admire. She's the type of person who can talk to anyone, and I often wonder why she didn't become the politician. Her resilience reflects the same strength passed down through our family.

As for me, I grew up in Arnprior. I went to St. Joseph's Catholic elementary school, and like everyone in my family, I went to Arnprior District High School. I played

football and swam competitively. My first job was at McDonald's, and I still run into former co-workers who remember those shifts. My dad likes to remind me of that time by occasionally texting me a photo of my "employee of the month" badge. I went on to lifeguard for the town of Arnprior where I discovered my love for public service. I would be valedictorian of my graduating class when my cohort put me forward, and recipient of the 2018 Arnprior Youth of the Year award, with over 300 volunteer hours in my community. That award was presented by Mayor David Reid and much of the same council I would eventually join and serve with in 2022.

I studied a bachelor of commerce at Carleton University and majored in accounting. During COVID, not knowing if I had employment, I started a property maintenance business with just a mower, a whipper snipper, and my 2010 Honda Civic—no trailer, so I'm lucky to be here, really. I eventually worked in accounting, both at a Big Four firm and later, at a small local firm.

Just before graduating in 2022, I faced a decision: Do I run now or wait to run for Arnprior town council? It might surprise some of you in the House, at first I thought I was too young to do that, but I also figured, what do I have to lose? So I ran for Arnprior town council and after university classes in the day, I knocked on every door I could in the evening. My first words at the door were always, "Hi, I'm Billy Denault and I'm running for council. What issues are important to you this election?" I was elected fifth out of five councillors at-large, with 1,621 votes.

For the next two and a half years, I threw myself into the work. I went to every event and attended every meeting I could, even paid my own way to municipal conferences when our budget wouldn't allow it. My colleagues around the table respected that I came to every meeting prepared, ready to make decisions for the betterment of our community.

After those two and a half years at the next PC AGM, I managed to reconnect with MPP Yakabuski. At that point, he had announced his retirement, and he had asked if I considered putting my name forward for the nomination, and later as a candidate. He asked, "Do you feel ready?" I replied, "John, your cousin Sean Conway was 24 when he was elected, and in March, I'll be 25." He then replied, "Well, you'll be an old man by then." Maybe not old, but I am here today.

The rest is history. We ran a positive campaign that brought us to every corner of the riding. At the start, a woman from Killaloe noticed that my name on Elections Ontario was actually William Denault, not Billy Denault. I corrected her, I said, "Well, actually, I go by Billy." She said, "Billy: I like the sound of that. It sounds like Billy the Kid is in town." And yes, I am Billy the Kid, and I am Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke's representative at Queen's Park.

This is my story. This is who I am, and this is where I come from and this is why I'm here today. People supported me along this journey because they knew where I came from. They knew I was honest, hard-working and

rooted in my community. I am a son of the valley, and its values have always guided me every step of the way.

When people ask why I got involved in politics, I point to this one statistic that just has always been stuck in my head: From 2001 to 2016, Arnprior was the biggest loser of high-paying jobs in Renfrew county. It amounted to a 34% decline in salaries of over \$67,000 a year, mostly due to a loss of 670 manufacturing jobs, which, when it's your neighbours, your friends and your families that are the ones who are affected by that statistic, it feels more real. You don't sit on the sidelines; you step forward.

When your province is threatened in the same way, of doing what was done to your community, to your fellow Ontarians, you protect them. I believe that this government and all of us in this chamber will.

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I know the meaning of the words “to be a public servant,” to take on the weight of your people and serve them with that maxim, that we do so not for greater glory, not for personal fortune, but to give back to a community that has given so much to us. I know that mine has given a lot to me.

It is the honour of my life to represent the people of Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke. I will serve with integrity, humility and relentless dedication to the people of the Ottawa Valley. I look forward to the road ahead and working with all my colleagues in this House for the betterment of our constituents and the community we are so privileged to serve.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Questions?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Congratulations to the new member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke. He certainly has big shoes to fill, but from that inaugural speech, it seems like it's not going to be a problem.

I was interested to hear about that decision process he went through, when he was trying to decide fresh out of university, I think, whether he should run now or run later.

I just wanted to ask him, how old were you when you first saw yourself serving in elected office, and what was it that made you feel that this was a calling that was meant for you?

MPP Billy Denault: Well, I was 22 at the time when I was elected to municipal council. A lot of people have asked, “What made you get involved in politics?” I usually respond, “I have no idea.” But I think it's about the community and really wanting to be involved in your community and take an active role in leadership in your community.

Sometimes when I knocked on doors, the comment of age may have come up, and I would respond with, “I'm not here for the next four years; I'm here for about the next 40.”

How we can make a positive impact on the longer term through our residents and our communities—to be able to be here today and continue that is an honour, and one that I'm just eternally grateful to do.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Questions?

Ms. Lee Fairclough: Thank you to the member from Nipissing–Pembroke—and I'm missing one—

MPP Billy Denault: Renfrew.

Ms. Lee Fairclough: Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke—I can't read my own writing.

I really appreciate your remarks. You call yourself “Billy the Kid,” but you're obviously wise and capable beyond your years. I think having you in our chamber is going to be really important given, again, the generation that you represent and the perspectives you bring.

What advice do you have for us on, maybe, some of the things that we consider a little bit differently to be sure that our decisions reflect your generation?

MPP Billy Denault: That's an interesting question. I would think just having an open mind towards differences of opinion. I remember when I was on council, I would always be sometimes providing a difference of opinion or a difference of consideration to my colleagues, and my colleagues around the table respected that.

So I think just having an open mind and being open to different points of view is really beneficial and one that we can all take, whether it be generationally or those with different lived experiences.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Question?

Mr. Joseph Racinsky: Thank you to the member for his speech. I appreciate having another member from Gen Z. It has been helpful already.

I actually met the member for the first time at the 2023 AMO conference. We were able to connect there as first-term young councillors back then, even. For me, personally having mentorship and mentors, both on council and here now, has been extremely helpful.

I just wanted to ask him about his experience with mentors and mentorship as he steps into this role.

MPP Billy Denault: One of the mentors I think a lot about from my municipal experience was actually a former mayor, the mayor that presented me with the Youth of the Year Award, Mayor Reid, who was a really intelligent, compassionate and forward-thinking mayor prior to me even being on council, but still continued even after I had gone on because he was, at that time, no longer the mayor of Arnprior, but he was a really big mentor and provided me that guidance after. I would go and chat with him about issues that were going on in our community.

I just have been really beneficial to continue to go forward and have big people in my life, my family especially, who have been really my guiding North Star in terms of getting here and guiding me on decisions going forward. That's my experience with mentorship.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Question?

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I'd like to thank the new member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke. You have some big shoes to fill, both figuratively and literally, with the departing member.

I just wanted to know, what first drew you to politics, or when did you make the decision that you wanted to run as an MPP?

MPP Billy Denault: I think I said this when I was asked that same question during the campaign, and I responded—and it's matter of fact—that the thing that drew me to public service was actually volunteering at my town of Arnprior's recreation department, Camp Wanna-Go, because, after that point, I just got more and more involved in my community. It sort of almost spiralled out of control because then when I ran for council, I was able to connect with a lot of the same people that I had met along that path, whether it be through being involved at Camp Wanna-Go or working at the town of Arnprior's recreation department.

In terms of what's drawn me, it's just always been about representing my community and representing the people of the Ottawa Valley who have done a lot for me and whom I want to give back to and do a lot for in return.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further questions?

Mr. Adil Shamji: Congratulations, and welcome to the chamber. I quite liked your predecessor. There are many things that I liked about him. One of my favourites is that he was quite animated during question period, and I really respected him for that. The other thing that I really admired about him is how much of a champion and how proud he was of your riding. What are you most proud of?

MPP Billy Denault: In terms of John, is that what you're referring to?

Mr. Adil Shamji: In terms of your riding.

MPP Billy Denault: In terms of my riding. I really have a deep pride in the people of Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke—of the Ottawa Valley as a whole. It's a unique place and a unique dynamism in terms of the people of the riding. It's close-knit; it's kind of the most amazing part of rural Ontario.

You mentioned MPP Yakabuski's championship of the riding, and I got to witness that pretty well the entirety of my life as him as my MPP. In terms of pride, if I can provide that exact same championship for the riding, I think that's what I want to accomplish in terms of being here and being present in the chamber.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Question?

Hon. Charmaine A. Williams: It's so great getting to know the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke. It's been a short time. When I close my eyes—and a number of us, when we close our eyes and listen to you speak, you sound way wiser beyond your years. But I know you're a young guy, and politics, if we're not careful, it does age all of us.

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Mr. Steve Clark: Now, now, now.

Hon. Charmaine A. Williams: It does. We've all gotten grey hair—I did since—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Come to order.

Hon. Charmaine A. Williams: But we own it, we love it and we accept it.

But what do you do to keep yourself youthful, connected and to have fun and to let your hair down?

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Response—and we're all listening carefully.

MPP Billy Denault: I will respond to that by saying some people, during the election, would say, "You look so young. How can you run for this position?" I said, "Well, if I'm successfully elected, wait two years. I won't look that young anymore."

But in terms of how I maintain that, I guess, youthful vigour, I do have a lot of, obviously, friends my age who I still connect with and continue to keep in contact with. I don't know how I have the time, but somehow I still manage to go out with them and participate in any activities that I can, and they keep me in that same mindset as a young member of provincial Parliament here. They keep me grounded.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate? Further debate? I recognize the member from Perth–Wellington.

Mr. Matthew Rae: You didn't want to recognize me there, Speaker. I know, I'm tucked in a corner. They're punishing me.

It's an honour to rise today to provide some brief remarks on the throne speech. I know it's great to hear some of the maiden speeches, or inaugural speeches, from some of our colleagues in this place who are new here, sharing their backgrounds as well. I remember mine like it was yesterday. Some days being here, it seems like a lifetime ago, versus it only being not even three years yet for myself.

But, Speaker, I know the throne speech and that opportunity is a unique opportunity. Not many people have that opportunity to even witness it in the public galleries. I know federally the King has said he's coming for theirs, which will be obviously interesting to see even on television. But the throne speech itself I think really spoke to the moment we are in as a province and a country, and the challenges we are facing as a people, whether it's the threat from Trump's tariffs or any other incendiary comments he may make during the day, ensuring that we're there to protect Ontario, continuing to build our province. The throne speech really outlined—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I am sorry to interrupt the member, but pursuant to standing order 44(a), there have been 12 hours of debate on the motion for an address in reply to the speech from the throne. I am now required to put the question.

On April 16, 2025, Mr. Clark moved, seconded by Mr. Leardi, that an humble address be presented to Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor as follows:

"To the Honourable Edith Dumont, Lieutenant Governor of Ontario:

"We, His Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Legislative Assembly of the province of Ontario, now assembled, beg leave to thank Your Honour for the gracious speech Your Honour has been pleased to address to us at the opening of the present session."

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 ayes have it.

A recorded vote being required, it will be deferred until the next instance of deferred votes.

Vote deferred.

PROTECT ONTARIO THROUGH SAFER
STREETS AND STRONGER
COMMUNITIES ACT, 2025

LOI DE 2025 POUR PROTÉGER L'ONTARIO
EN RENDANT LES RUES PLUS SÛRES
ET LES COLLECTIVITÉS PLUS FORTES

Resuming the debate adjourned on May 7, 2025, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 10, An Act to enact the Measures Respecting Premises with Illegal Drug Activity Act, 2025 and to amend various Acts with respect to public safety and the justice system / Projet de loi 10, Loi édictant la Loi de 2025 sur les mesures visant les lieux où se déroulent des activités illégales liées à la drogue et modifiant diverses lois en ce qui concerne la sécurité publique et le système judiciaire.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate?

Hon. Zee Hamid: I'm pleased to be here today for the second reading of Bill 10, the government's proposed Protect Ontario Through Safer Streets and Stronger Communities Act.

Protecting Ontario means protecting our communities and our families from the threat of crime. With these proposed changes, we're building on our all-of-government approach that supports community safety and enhances the justice system and keeps our communities safe.

If passed, this legislation would help increase tools to address intimate partner violence, fight crime and strengthen our justice system. We're moving forward with targeted measures to support victims of human trafficking, further combat auto theft and monitor repeat offenders. This proposed legislation builds on our government's collective efforts to tackle crime and find real, meaningful solutions, including through the Safer Streets, Stronger Communities Act, 2024. Sadly, we're seeing more brazen acts—violent home invasions and carjackings—and we must do everything we can to put an end to these and keep our streets safe. We will do what it takes to continue to bring about much-needed change to address the public safety issues we know are top of mind in our communities and across our province. We want to give our police services the tools they need to do their jobs.

As the Associate Solicitor General for Auto Theft and Bail Reform, I would like to highlight the important initiatives that are part of this proposed legislation that will help us continue to reduce auto theft and keep dangerous criminals off our streets. Auto theft is more than the loss

of one's vehicle; it can leave victims feeling violated and vulnerable. Imagine waking up to realize that someone has stolen your car while you slept just a few feet away in your home, realizing the car you rely on for work, appointments and groceries is no longer there.

Auto theft takes an emotional and financial toll. Thousands of Ontarians have had their cars stolen, some more than once, and those who haven't wonder when or if they will be next. Last year, our Safer Streets, Stronger Communities Act made it an additional offence to knowingly provide a false VIN while applying for a vehicle permit. This offence carries stiff penalties and is a strong deterrent, but with this proposed legislation we're going further. We have seen a marked increase in the use of keyless entry systems to steal cars. Car theft has become more sophisticated, and these tools have been exploited so vehicles can be stolen without the need for a physical key fob.

We're addressing this issue by proposing to impose and implement measures to stop this from happening. Last week, I joined the Minister of Transportation to announce work our government is doing to help combat auto theft, including proposed legislative amendments to the Highway Traffic Act as part of the Protect Ontario Through Safer Streets and Stronger Communities Act. As part of Bill 10, our government is proposing, through the Ministry of Transportation and supported by the Ministry of the Solicitor General, to make it unlawful to possess certain electronic devices for the purpose of committing auto theft and providing police with the authority to take these devices away. These devices can include key fob programming devices, fob scanners and even some smartphone applications. But the prohibition doesn't apply to auto dealers, repair services and roadside assistance personnel, who lawfully rely on these tools to provide service.

Our government takes public safety seriously, and we're working every day to help law enforcement combat crime and protect Ontario. We rely on the brave men and women in the police service who work day in and day out to keep communities safe. Their skills, dedication, hard work and courage hold criminals in check and put them where they belong: behind bars. Our government is always here to support them in this battle. We're supporting our brave men and women in uniform with initiatives such as the Preventing Auto Thefts Grant; the creation of the Provincial Auto Theft and Towing Team, led by the OPP; and the Major Auto Theft Prosecution Response Team. Our government is permanently establishing this last team to focus on key hot spots across the province like Ottawa, Toronto, Newmarket, Durham, London and Windsor. The team provides legal advice and prosecution support to police services and is helping to dismantle organized crime networks, while holding offenders accountable.

The team is also cracking down on serious crimes involving carjackings and home invasions. Since April 2024, the Major Auto Theft Prosecution Response Team has taken on over 80 prosecutions and provided legal advice on over 20 major investigations across Ontario. These matters relate to over 1,700 stolen or targeted

vehicles. The work we're doing is sending a strong message to car thieves: Your time is up.

Speaker, I've detailed this bit of work already, but this is just part of the overall work our government is doing to stop car thieves and protect Ontario. We're investing in the GTA-greater Golden Horseshoe investigative fund to stop the illegal export of stolen vehicles and target violent crime linked to criminal organizations. This will provide police with the resources they need, including cutting-edge technology.

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We're investing \$134 million to establish our joint air support unit. This includes funding for the OPP to purchase and operate two police helicopters to provide air support to Ottawa and Toronto police services, as well as funding for police services in Durham, Peel and my region of Halton to acquire and operate one new police helicopter each. Equipped with the latest technology, the helicopters will keep highways and roadways safe from violent carjackings, auto theft, street racing and impaired driving. With eyes in the sky, car thieves will have nowhere to hide.

Combining the efforts of law enforcement with the support of our government will keep our communities safe and the people of Ontario safe. Getting these criminals off our streets is one step. Keeping violent and repeat offenders behind bars is another. Criminal acts that are committed by individuals while out on bail are one of the most frustrating issues facing the justice system today. It is frustrating because it is recurring, with repeat violators of bail conditions getting bail again and again and again. Most of all, it is frustrating because reforming Canada's broken bail system is out of our hands. As you know, Speaker, it is a federal jurisdiction. Our government has been a national leader in making a case for reform to protect the public, and we will continue to do so. I can assure you, criminals in this province will not see us on the sidelines.

Speaker, we're also proposing changes to strengthen the bail system and keep our communities safe by getting these offenders off our streets and by keeping them off our streets. Our proposed steps include:

- strengthening the collection process for forfeited bail money, requiring sureties to provide up-to-date information in accordance with future regulations;

- introducing permanent intensive serious violent crime bail teams—these teams will be made up of dedicated prosecutors who work with provincial and local police services to present the most persuasive case possible at a bail hearing in case of serious and violent crimes, placing a priority on repeat and prolific accused, including those charged with firearm offences;

- supporting a comprehensive review of the bail system—this review would be conducted to make the system more consequential and effective and would include a review of how to support better tracking of repeat offenders and improve administration;

- moving towards establishment of user fees for people convicted or accused of a crime who use provincially

administered ankle monitors, potentially using those fees to offset the cost of the program or to support victim services. The proposed changes would also help police access GPS information for the purpose of monitoring those accused or convicted of a crime.

These immediate changes will strengthen the bail system, hold offenders accountable and protect communities across the province. They also build on the important work we're doing to protect Ontario. This past fall, we launched a Provincial Bail Compliance Dashboard, a new tool that provides police with near real-time data to help verify that chronic, violent individuals on bail for firearm-related offences are complying with the conditions of their bails. This is a crucial part of our government's \$112-million investment to strengthen the provincial bail system and justice sector by ensuring that serious, violent, and repeat offenders comply with their bail conditions.

This investment includes the Bail Compliance and Warrant Apprehension Grant, which is helping police services establish dedicated teams to monitor high-risk individuals out on bail. We continue to hear from police that these investments are making a real difference on the front line every single day.

Our government is doing everything it can to keep our streets safe, but we can only do so much. We need strong, meaningful actions from the federal government, as it is the federal government that has jurisdiction over the criminal code. Speaker, we continue to call on the federal government to do its part. We need to amend the Criminal Code and implement concrete changes to tighten bail legislation to protect our communities and to keep violent offenders off our streets and in custody where they belong.

As Premier Ford recently wrote to Prime Minister Carney, the federal government must put in place mandatory minimum sentences for serious crimes, stricter bail and sentencing laws, and a mandatory three-strike rule requiring pretrial detention for repeat offenders. We need to see these changes so that everyone in Ontario can live in a community that's free from violence and criminality.

By strengthening enforcement, improving tracking and introducing specialized teams, our government is ensuring violent repeat offenders face tougher consequences. These changes will also empower law enforcement and protect Ontario communities, reflecting our government's unwavering commitment to keep criminals behind bars.

Speaker, the proposed legislation, if passed, will build on our government's effort to keep our communities safe and to hold offenders accountable. We're working hard to protect Ontario and to ensure that our province continues to be the best and the safest place to live.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Deepak Anand): It's time for oral questions. The member from London—

Ms. Catherine Fife: Waterloo.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Deepak Anand): Go ahead.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you very much, Speaker—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Deepak Anand): Oh, the member from Waterloo. Go ahead.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Yes, I know where I'm from. It's very helpful.

Thanks to the member for chatting and sharing your support for Bill 10, the Protect Ontario Through Safer Streets and Stronger Communities Act.

I think that we can all acknowledge in this House that the court system is under duress and is not meeting its potential. However, Bill 10 does not address one of the key issues, which is the court backlogs. One of the key issues that is an indicator of how the government needs to do more, particularly in the courts system, is the fact that in 2023, 1,171 sexual assault cases were dismissed. In 2024, 1,526 cases were dismissed. It's not going in the right direction.

Why not address these court backlogs in Bill 10, as it is such an urgent issue?

Hon. Zee Hamid: There is a need to address judicial vacancies on an expedited basis in order to address court backlog. As a result of changes we made in 2021, the Attorney General now receives a minimum of six candidates to be considered for appointments, and the JAAC is required to recommend candidates who were previously recommended for a similar vacancy within the past 12 months, rather than having to run a full application process. These changes have helped to modernize the process, but further changes need to be made to ensure that qualified candidates can be appointed quickly and efficiently. For example, in May 2024, the government announced a \$29-million investment to appoint at least 25 judges. The recruitment of these 25 judges is still in progress.

The JAAC was consulted on this pool-based process and expressed general support for these proposed changes. The ministry will now continue to look for ways to expedite the recruitment and appointment process.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Question?

Ms. Lee Fairclough: Thank you for your remarks this afternoon, from the member opposite. I think you've highlighted a few positive things that this bill could help to enable this afternoon, particularly related to some of the protections for victims. I think we've heard about this in other debates on this bill: There are some definite concerns around the judicial independence risk and appointments process, as well as the flexibility for people, once appointed, to be able to move to other courts etc. So I just wondered if you could address that issue further in a way that would provide some reassurances.

Hon. Zee Hamid: These changes, if passed, would continue to maintain the integrity of the process while shifting to a pool-based approach in order to further speed up and streamline appointments of the OJC. The AG can only recommend candidates classified by the independent JAAC as "recommended" or "highly recommended" for appointment. This would not change under the new pool-based system we're proposing.

For example, Speaker, the federal government uses the pool-based system to select candidates for judicial appointments. Candidate classifications are also retained for three years. Our government's proposed changes mirror the federal judicial appointment process.

Our government will also continue to ensure transparency in the recommendation process. Any criteria established by the AG for the review and selection of candidates would be published on the JAAC's website and publicly available with the rest of the criteria.

Thank you for the question.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Question?

Mr. Matthew Rae: Thank you to the Associate Minister of Auto Theft and Bail Reform for his remarks on Bill 10 this afternoon. I know, like many of us in this place, he works very hard in his riding to hear from his constituents around the challenges that we have with auto theft but also crime. This bill is addressing some of those challenges by putting more resources—and he has alluded to that in his remarks—in the court system.

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Can the member elaborate a little bit more on some of the things he's hearing at the doors in Milton, in his riding, on how our government can do more and, through this legislation, do more to ensure that the criminals who are committing the crime are doing the time?

Hon. Zee Hamid: I'd like to thank the member for that excellent question.

During this election, one of the top three issues that came up was community safety. Auto theft is a major concern not just in my community but also in Peel, Mississauga and Brampton. We have made tremendous, tremendous improvement. Because of our efforts, auto theft rates were down 14% and 17% last year. The Peel police announced that they're seeing a 45% decline in Q1 of this year.

However, more needs to be done. Despite that 45% decline this year, Mississauga and Brampton continue to see an average of 10 car thefts a day. That's why we're strengthening the system and we're making sure that we use every tool available to end this issue once and for all.

I'd like to thank him for the question.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Questions?

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I'd like to thank the associate minister responsible for auto theft and bail reform for his presentation.

While Bill 10 does not explicitly deal with the election of judges, it certainly does tilt more towards an ideological selection of judges.

But my question would be: With courts that don't have the necessary staff in order to see the carriage of justice and all of the different administrative functions, will there be any more focus from this government to hire those people to make sure the courts can function?

Hon. Zee Hamid: I'd like to thank the member for that question. I actually miss serving with the member in committee. We should get together, anyway. Just to clarify—

Interjection: Bald guys with beards.

Hon. Zee Hamid: We have the same barber.

As I mentioned earlier, Speaker, the AG can only recommend candidates classified by the independent

JAAC as “recommended” or “highly recommended” for appointment, and that is not changing under the current rule.

This process continues to stay independent. In fact, our process after this will simply mirror the federal process because the federal government also uses a pool-based process to select candidates for judicial appointments. Candidate selections are also retained for three years. Every single thing we do, including anything the AG does for review or selection of candidates, would be published on JAAC’s website and publicly available with the rest of JAAC’s criteria for full and complete transparency.

Thank you for the question.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Question?

Ms. Lee Fairclough: Thanks for the opportunity to ask another question.

In my riding of Etobicoke-Lakeshore, auto theft is a big issue—in fact, I’ve had my own car stolen out of my own driveway—and it’s a very frequent thing, so I am glad to see that we’re going to do more to reduce auto theft.

But I’ve got a bigger concern, which I spoke to a little bit when I spoke to another bill this week. It’s great to be tough on crime, but we have overflowing correctional facilities. South Detention is in my riding. It’s sleeping three to a cell today that was designed for two. The backlogs in the courts have been very real.

I just want to understand how we can be tougher on crime but actually, really have no way to jail people appropriately and how this would help that problem.

Hon. Zee Hamid: Thank you for the excellent question. I won’t actually give specific numbers because I don’t have my—I was planning to flip through to find specific numbers. But I will tell you this and it’s the same thing the Solicitor General has mentioned multiple times: We will not turn criminals away. We have not done so.

The issue right now is a revolving door of justice that needs to be resolved. I’ve talked to police officers myself, and they’ve arrested people who’ve already been out on bail three, four, five times. We know for a fact they’re going to get out on bail again the next time around. We absolutely need that system to end for violent and repeat offenders.

As far as the backlog is concerned, crown offices across the province continue to actively review cases, and cases that have been in the system longer than 18 to 30 months are assessed individually. So, we’re moving things along. We’re moving pretty fast. We’re working with all our legal partners to explore ways to address court delays. But at the same time the other side has to be solved as well when it comes to violent and repeat offenders, and it’s not just for auto theft. It’s also for intimate partner violence and other firearm-related or violent offences.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I appreciate the opportunity, and I’ll be sharing my time with the member from University-Rosedale. There’s a lot in here, Speaker, and I’m not going to be commenting on every aspect of the bill, but there are

a few elements that stood out and I think deserve some note.

Schedule 1, the Bail Act, allows the Attorney General to make regulations requiring sureties to provide information within a prescribed time period. According to the government’s press release, this will “improve and increase the collection of forfeited bail monies.” For those who are not familiar with the concept, who don’t regularly deal with bail, a surety is a person who assumes responsibility for supervising an accused person while they’re out on bail. A surety promises an amount of money to the court if the accused person fails to comply with bail conditions or fails to show up to court.

Now, while a surety can be ordered to forfeit financial assets pledged to the court, it is not a common occurrence. During the Standing Committee on Justice Policy’s study on bail, the head of the Ontario Provincial Police Association stated that he had “in 27 years ... never seen a surety held accountable for whatever they’ve put up.”

Speaker, that may mean that the bail system is not as effective as those who are invested in it would like. And yet we have a reality that there are a variety of programs that could be put in place that could be more effective. One of those areas is community-based bail programs. Rather than increasing requirements for sureties, the government could invest in community-based compliance programs. Bail supervision and verification programs are cost-effective and are proven alternatives to pre-trial detention.

I should note that, right now, bail in Ontario is more difficult to obtain than ever, with around 80% of the people in Ontario prisons having been denied bail and awaiting trial, which is extraordinary to me—80% of the people in Ontario prisons have not been found guilty of anything. They’ve been charged, they’re being held, but they have not been found guilty. That’s pretty extraordinary. No wonder when I talk to people who are familiar with the prison system, they say the jails are packed. Yes, if you were just putting in them people who have been found guilty, you would probably have far fewer people and more manageable jail populations. That isn’t the situation we have.

In any event, as I was saying, bail supervision and verification programs are cost-effective and proven alternatives to pre-trial detention. Caseworkers monitor compliance with bail conditions and connect people with services such as housing, mental health counselling, substance use treatment and employment resources.

Bail bed programs exist in some areas of Ontario, including Ottawa and Thunder Bay. They provide shelter and supervision for individuals without a fixed address. The enhanced supervision reduces the risk of offending and promotes public safety. Further, they operate at a fraction of the cost of correctional beds.

Just a note here: An awful lot of the people who currently put out surety, put out money, to get someone bailed out tend to be family members—grandparents, parents, other relatives—who aren’t necessarily skilled at helping people get back on their feet and not necessarily skilled at keeping people’s activities under control. It strikes me that

the government would do far better with this legislation if they're actually going to put in place these community-based bail programs, so that people who were accused of a crime and who are on bail would have some supervision, would have access to services, in particular drug abuse and addiction services, so that we don't have a situation where people are being supervised by those who, for the most part, don't have the skills to supervise.

1700

To their minimal credit—I'm being really minimal—the government did provide funding to the John Howard Society program in 2024. But frankly, this bill, this change to bail, isn't going to make that much of a difference. I mean, they could say 100% of people couldn't get bail and then they would have standing room only in the jails. But if they actually wanted to seriously deal with those people who have been charged with a crime, not yet found guilty, who could use and benefit from supervision, then they could have taken a very different course. So that's one thing I wanted to speak to.

The other thing I wanted to speak to was restraining orders. This bill changes the criteria for restraining orders so more people can get them or apply for them than have applied for them in the past.

And I'll just explain: A restraining order is a family court order that limits what a person can do in any way that the court thinks is inappropriate. The order might limit where a person can go or who they can contact, who they can communicate with. Restraining orders are not effectively enforced. Rates of non-compliance are extremely high.

In a recent news story, a Toronto woman had to repeatedly report breaches of a restraining order before police made an arrest. So saying that more people can apply to have them put in place is not going to change anything for those who are threatened or have fear of physical violence or intimidation. If, in fact, you're concerned about people who are victims of intimate partner violence, you should be looking at other things that have been recommended in the past.

Now, the Renfrew county inquest into intimate partner violence did not list restraining orders as one of the areas where action was required. How you bring forward legislation to address this substantial problem and focus on something that was not even talked about by that inquest is beyond me.

The government could do an awful lot more for victims of intimate partner violence, including increasing the amount of affordable and transitional housing for victims fleeing domestic violence.

I have to tell you, my constituency office—and my guess is constituency offices across Ontario—people come in who are desperate for housing. So my sense is—I'll use a fairly common case: A woman with one or two children comes into your office and says, "I have to move to be safe." All you can say to them is, "You're out of luck. Your name is on the waiting list. You're going to be on the waiting list for a long time."

If you actually wanted to deal with the problem, simply increasing the number of people who can apply for a restraining order does not actually solve this problem.

The government could create an emergency fund to support women living with intimate partner violence who are taking steps to seek safety. So they've left the house, they have kids, they have some luggage, the minimum necessary clothing to get through the day—where do they get the emergency support to actually re-establish themselves?

What we have is a change to restraining orders, which is really cheap, particularly because they don't get enforced, so it's more of a "wave your hand in the air and say something nice" effort, rather than putting the resources in to make sure that these people—overwhelmingly women—are safe.

They could enhance court supports for intimate partner violence survivors and develop an intimate-partner-violence-focused model for criminal court similar to the Family Court Support Worker Program. Again, investing money so that, in fact, people get the services they need to be safe—that isn't what we're seeing.

Creating the role of a survivor advocate to advocate on behalf of survivors regarding their experience in the justice system—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Sorry to interrupt the member.

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

I recognize the member for Essex.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: Please continue the debate.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Thank you.

I return to the member for Toronto–Danforth.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Thank you, Speaker. I appreciate that.

I have to say that those people who are in these situations are pretty narrowly focused: "How do I get a roof over my head?" "How do I get my kids looked after?" "How do I get food?" They are not in a position to do far-reaching advocacy for themselves or anyone else, and actually having a person in place whose job, whose direction is to advocate for these people would be of consequence, would be useful.

Again, the restraining order—not necessarily negative, but for the most part, not particularly useful—is just simply a placebo, a sugar pill, when what's needed is actual medication.

The last thing I'd say is, ensuring that survivors and those assisting survivors have direct and timely communication with probation officers to assist in safety planning—well, that's pretty low cost. It makes a lot of sense and should have been in this bill. It should have been in this bill but isn't.

Speaker, I'm going to turn this over to my colleague. I understand the pressures to take action on these matters because they're substantial. But when you bring forward a bill that's pretty light in terms of actually solving the problems before us, it does victims of crime an injustice.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I recognize the member for University–Rosedale.

Ms. Jessica Bell: I'm proud to be here today speaking about Bill 10, the Protect Ontario Through Safer Streets and Stronger Communities Act. We've got another justice bill ahead of us, and like the others before from this government, it is an opportunity to demonstrate their understanding of the issues and willingness to fix the crisis in Ontario's justice system.

I'm going to review the schedules, but overall, my assessment is that this bill does not tackle the core issues that we see facing our justice system and our criminal justice system.

My hope—I think every Ontarian wants this—is that we have a government that respects the independence of the judiciary, values access to justice and is willing to invest in infrastructure that underpins our legal system; that includes the courts.

I also think that the crisis in Ontario's justice system is not inevitable: It is the result of choices made here in this Legislature, and it can be solved by us making better choices.

Now, this bill is certainly supportable. We have heard from stakeholders and public witnesses, and we hope to introduce additional amendments in the standing committee to address some of the key issues we're hearing stakeholders raise with us. But we also want to be very clear that this bill falls very short of fixing the crises we plainly see in the justice system.

I want to summarize some of the schedules, so people are aware of what this bill entails.

Schedule 1 is the sureties and bail supervision matter. This amends the regulations around having someone who is charged getting a surety so that they can be released into the community.

Schedule 2—and schedule 6, I believe—focuses on expanding who can apply to the court for a restraining order against a person where there are reasonable grounds to fear for his or her safety or for the safety of any child in their lawful custody. Once again, this is not a particularly controversial schedule.

Schedule 3 changes Christopher's Law, and it amends the sex registry act to include voyeurism as a sex offence, despite current Criminal Code statute.

Schedule 4 is the Community Safety and Policing Act, which amends the act to allow chiefs of police to request assistance from an entity from another Canadian jurisdiction, as well as from one that employs First Nations officers. It's not clear what this problem is meant to solve, but certainly there's nothing egregious or controversial from our initial assessment of schedule 4.

1710

When we get to schedule 5, that's when it gets a little bit interesting. Schedule 5 is a move by the Attorney

General, once again, to influence how judges are appointed in Ontario. Essentially, this bill aims to give the Attorney General more say over how candidates are evaluated at the Judicial Appointments Advisory Committee. That is the committee that selects judges, essentially. And it also wants to change the composition of the Judicial Appointments Advisory Committee. So not only does it choose its criteria, but it chooses the people who choose the judges.

In summary, the Attorney General wants to have more control over who gets to be a judge in Ontario. Understandably, the legal community has reached out to us, and I'm sure they've reached out to the government side, to express some of their concerns about changing the judicial process. I want to read some of those concerns out today.

This is a letter that came from three Ontario justices: Chief Justice of Ontario Michael H. Tulloch, Court of Appeal for Ontario; Chief Justice Geoffrey Morawetz, Superior Court of Justice; and Chief Justice Sharon Nicklas, Ontario Court of Justice. I want to read out their statement now:

“We are very proud of the work of the judicial officials who preside in the Ontario courts. Judicial independence is a cornerstone of our constitutional democracy. An independent judiciary protects the public, not just judicial officials. It means a society governed by the rule of law. In Canada, this means, as is set out in section 52 of the Constitution Act, 1982, that the Constitution is the supreme law of the country. Our constitutional democracy is comprised of three branches of government—the executive, the legislative and the judicial—and all three branches of government must exercise their power ... in accordance with the Constitution. While it is the Legislature that enacts legislation, it is the role of a judicial official to interpret and apply the law. To fulfill this role, the judiciary must be distinct from, and operate independently of, all other justice system participants, including the other two branches of government....

“Every Canadian has the constitutional right to have their legal issues decided by a fair and impartial judiciary. Our justice system is founded on public confidence that decisions, whether popular or not, are fully heard and fairly made. It is crucial that the judiciary is both actually independent and appears to be independent so the public can be confident that judicial decisions are made without bias.”

As my colleague from Toronto Centre said, it is interesting that in Ontario today we have judges writing a letter to the Ontario government schooling them on basic grade-9 civics issues. There is a government and there is the legal system, and they need to be independent. When we have the Attorney General once again introducing legislation that allows Conservative members to meddle in the judicial appointment process, it threatens the integrity of our legal system and it can impact the public's faith in the legitimacy of the legal system as well. So people have very valid concerns and we are hearing those concerns, and I can imagine that you are hearing those concerns as well.

The other issue that I would like to address in my remaining time is the issue of court backlogs. When I speak to stakeholders, one of the biggest issues I hear about is that the courts do not have enough funding in place to provide people with access to justice. What we are seeing in these situations is that victims of crimes—survivors of crime—are hoping, when they come forward to the police and their assailant is charged, that they're going to have their day in court and justice is going to be served. And what we are finding is that there has been an increase—and there continues to be an increase—in the number of cases that are disposed, delayed and dismissed, and it means people don't get their day in court.

To take a really egregious example, I want to read out the number of sexual assault cases which are being disposed before their trial date. In 2022, 1,326 cases were disposed. In 2023, 1,171 cases were disposed. And in 2024, 1,527 cases were disposed. That number is going up, and that number is going up at a time when the Conservatives have been in power. This is on this government.

When this government is saying, "We want to take a tough-on-crime approach. We want Ontario to be a law-and-order society"—that does not correlate to the everyday reality of victims and survivors who want the courts to be a place where they can get justice, because many people are not getting justice today, and I think that's a real concern.

While this bill has some measures in it that are certainly supportable, there are some very valid concerns that we are hearing. One is around threats to the appointment process for judges and the need to keep government and the courts separate. The second issue is that it doesn't address the very real reality that many people are not getting their day in court and justice is being denied. Hopefully in the budget we'll see improvements on that matter.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Questions?

Mr. Matthew Rae: Thank you to both my colleagues on the other side of the aisle for their remarks this afternoon on a very important piece of legislation. My question is to either one; I'll let them decide who wants to answer.

I know the member from University–Rosedale mentioned at the conclusion of her remarks the upcoming budget—and I know, last year, there was a \$29-million investment in our court system to do that exact same thing: invest in our court system; hire more judges; hire that team, as I have said throughout the debate on this piece of legislation, around those judges to support them in the important work that they do.

The member from University–Rosedale—so maybe she can answer—mentioned that she hopes to see that in the budget. My question to the member opposite: Will she then vote for that budget if there is that investment within it, unlike the last provincial budget?

Ms. Jessica Bell: Thank you to the member opposite for that question. We'll reserve judgment on the budget.

Once we see it, then we're going to look at it carefully and decide.

It is important to note, though, that in the previous fall economic statement, there was a reduction in the amount of money available to the legal system, and it is contributing to the increased delay in court cases. We're very concerned about that, and so are victims and survivors of crime.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Question?

Ms. Catherine Fife: I'll continue on the funding, because you can have press releases and you can have speaking points, but if the money and the resources aren't there to support the system that you hope to build, then that system will fail.

I will look to the resource shortages and systemic failures in MCCSS—and this is from a report from the Financial Accountability Officer. I know the government doesn't put a lot of stock in this independent officer, but removing the partisanship as you evaluate where the money is going is actually very important, and it's something that we fought for in 2014. In Ontario, from June 2024, he estimated that the provincial government had underfunded the ministry by \$3.7 billion. The shortfall obviously means that existing programs and announced commitments, including supports to child abuse survivors, are not getting where they need to go. Bill 10 absolutely and utterly fails on this point.

This government is well aware of these funding shortages. To my colleague and friend from University–Rosedale, what would you like to see dedicated in this upcoming budget to ensure that children who have survived sexual assault actually receive the counselling and resources that they deserve?

Ms. Jessica Bell: Thank you to the member for Waterloo, and thank you for drawing attention to the serious backlog of cases that we're seeing in the Ontario court system. I'm just having a look here; it seems that in 2025, the first quarter of 2025, there are 45,000 cases that are waiting for their day in court. So when the member opposite talks about an investment of \$20 million, it's safe to say that that is not enough. It's just not enough.

My hope is that in the budget, there is funding available to address the court backlog that we are seeing—the growing court backlog—as well as sufficient funding for victims and survivors of crime, from intimate partner violence to children that are victims as well.

1720

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Question?

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: Reviewing this bill, several things really stick out with great concern. We're looking at overreach, issues with due process and issues around judicial independence, and those are just to name a few.

I would ask my honourable colleague, would you like to expand further around concerns that your party has around judicial independence and what you think the consequences are in Ontario if we allow that to proceed?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: My thanks to the member for the question; it's an important one.

First, I should say that it is really critical in the democracy to have an independent judiciary that is not politically beholden to a party in power. We can see what's been happening in the United States with the reshaping of the judiciary and the undermining of the credibility of the justice system, so ensuring we have an independent judiciary has got to be an extraordinarily high priority for any society.

What we've seen from the Premier's comments is that there's a tremendous interest in making sure that judges kiss the political ring rather than show that they have the knowledge of the law and the history of the law to actually act within the spirit of the law, as opposed to carrying out a political task.

From our perspective, find the best legal minds that you can, the people with the greatest intelligence that you can, with the integrity to actually apply the law as written.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Thank you—

Mr. Peter Tabuns: If the law changes, then they apply the new law. But don't have someone put in place who's simply going to be following instructions from the Premier's office to persecute this or that person—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Peter, thank you.

Further questions?

Mr. John Jordan: I want to go back to section 6 and the member for Toronto–Danforth's comment about restraining orders being not particularly useful. I would agree that as far as ensuring compliance to a restraining order, it's fairly limited in what we can do. But I would say that restraining orders are very effective when we look at their ability to allow the police to act. When someone has a fear for their own safety or a fear for their child's safety and there's an avenue for even a temporary restraining order, that is very useful, because when they have that fear, when they think something is going on, they can contact the police, and with that restraining order, they can act.

Would you agree that there's value for a restraining order in section 6 in this bill?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I appreciate the question. I don't think there's any doubt that having an effective restraining order system could be to the benefit of the victims, but as I understand it, they have to go to court to get a restraining order, so they have to navigate the court system. It isn't as though they go to the police and the police put in place a restraining order. They have to have the wherewithal to negotiate the courts. So it isn't as straightforward as you may have thought it was, member. Certainly, I don't have much experience with them, but the apparent reality is that, notwithstanding the fact that it gives the police greater latitude to act, it doesn't happen very often.

A situation in which restraining orders are far more effectively enforced might make a difference, but that isn't what you're doing in this legislation. You're making it

easier for someone to get a restraining order; you're not setting up the mechanism to enforce it. That's a problem.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Question?

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I'd like to thank the member from Toronto–Danforth for an excellent presentation, as well as the member from University–Rosedale.

I would like to hear some thoughts about the very curious disconnect between the fact that we have a government that says violent offenders are out on the streets as a result of bail, and yet, at the same time, because of the cuts and the underfunding of the justice system, thousands of cases are not being heard, as it pertains to sexual assault. What would the member like to say about that? And please feel free to involve the recommendations from the Renfrew county inquest.

Ms. Jessica Bell: Thank you very much for that question.

There is a real disconnect between what the government says in its press announcements and what the reality is on the ground. We have had many survivors of sexual assault approach us in committee. The committee heard many concerns, and overwhelmingly the message was to implement the recommendations from the Renfrew inquest.

I want to give you one right here: "One thing this government can do to support survivors trapped in the court backlogs is to have the Attorney General prioritize intimate partner violence and sexual assault cases and mandate trauma-informed training. This government can do so much more to protect and support survivors and victims."

That is a very practical measure that this government can take, and my hope is that in future bills, or even if there are amendments that are going to be introduced in committee, you can support them so we can enact this proposal and make it law.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate? Yes?

Mr. Deepak Anand: Yes.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Move the furniture on your own time.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): The member for Mississauga–Malton has the floor.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Oh, my goodness. Thank you, Madam Speaker, and the member from Waterloo. I still remember my commitment and I'll be there.

I usually say I'm honoured to rise today and speak, but today, the bill is about serious things. I'm thankful to the god for giving me an opportunity to speak—that's what I think I would do today—for the Protect Ontario Through Safer Streets and Stronger Communities Act, 2025.

I'd like to extend my gratitude to the whole caucus, who believe in safer and stronger communities; to our champion Attorney General for his dedicated leadership; and I'm thankful for the leadership of Premier Ford for always standing up for the people of Ontario, for his ongoing commitment to enhancing access to justice across Ontario. I was actually at one of the announcements when the media asked questions to the Premier and the Premier

opened up and spoke from the heart. You can see genuinely he believes in supporting those who have elected him, the people of Ontario. So I want to say thank you to the people of Ontario for putting trust in this government and all our caucus.

Madam Speaker, Ontarians are increasingly concerned about the rise in crime across the province. They deserve to feel secure in their homes, on their streets and in the places that they work and raise their families. That is why our government made a firm commitment in the last election to take decisive action on crime, protect families and restore safety in the communities across Ontario. And when you do things genuinely, you get results genuinely back. That is the reason people went to the polling stations and they chose this government to lead them.

We are continuing to deliver on that promise by strengthening our court system, implementing tougher bail measures and working alongside police to confront serious criminal activities. This legislation introduces new and enhanced tools to address violent and repeat offenders while advancing real solutions that improve public safety across the province.

Madam Speaker, I am a practising Sanatani. This is the religion that I am from. In Sanatana Dharma, we talk about “Ram Rajya,” which technically speaking is a world where we don’t have to fear. We can leave our home unlocked; we can be safe; we can go anywhere, any time. I wish the world was “Ram Rajya,” but we need to understand the bitter truth.

Those who move away from the civic duty of being civilized are also human beings. I personally think it is, as a community, a responsibility right from childhood. We should provide them with education. We should give them support. There is a point of time when they move away, and it leads to the situation where they have to go for the rest of their lives. They themselves don’t live well, and many times that results in other people not living well.

1730

So, Madam Speaker, we believe the proposed reforms will make a real difference in the lives of Ontarians and help foster safer and more resilient communities. This is about providing police, prosecutors and the justice system with the resources they need to prevent violence, protect the people and restore confidence in law and order.

I want to take this opportunity to highlight the critical measures in this bill and explain why they matter to my constituents in the riding of Mississauga–Malton. For an example, Shahid Mughal—during 2023, he lost his car. Somebody came and stole it from his driveway. In 2025, the same thing happened a couple of weeks back, Madam Speaker. And I do remember, rather than making a phone call, he posted on social media asking, whose responsibility is it to protect us? Is it federal? Is it provincial? Is it municipal? Or is it community? Madam Speaker, it is all of our responsibility. We all have to do our part.

Through the Protect Ontario Through Safer Streets and Stronger Communities Act, 2025, we are addressing rising crime, supporting victims and ensuring community safety across the province. Madam Speaker, if you heard what I

just said, this legislation is another clear step forward in our government’s plan to restore public safety, deliver justice more effectively and ensure victims, not criminals—the people of Ontario, the hard-working, tax-paying people of Ontario—remain at the centre of our justice system.

And these people are concerned. They are seeing the real impact of rising crime in their neighbourhoods, and they are demanding action, not more excuses. There are many people like Shahid Mughal just asking simply for a justice system that moves quickly, holds offenders accountable and gives victims the protection they deserve. This legislation delivers on that.

We heard it multiple times: Somebody committed a crime, went on bail, committed the crime again—this vicious cycle. Put it this way: I don’t know if I can go to that person and fix that person and tell them the impact or what the shortcut is. But I can tell you one thing, Madam Speaker. If we take these measures, if we make sure they stay where they are supposed to stay, in the jail, maybe we don’t have to go through these repeat offences. Maybe people like Shahid Mughal don’t have to go through this again and again.

Through this bill, Madam Speaker, we are taking direct action to strengthen our courts by making it faster to appoint judges to the Ontario Court of Justice. We made an historic investment of \$29 million to add 25 new judges, plus 17 more this year. It means more capacity, less backlog and faster justice for victims. Ontario deserves a system that works, and that starts with ensuring that our courts are properly resourced.

We’re also tackling long-standing issues in our bail system. Too many high-risk offenders are being released with little accountability. Through this legislation, we are putting community safety first and building a stronger, more responsible bail system. This builds on the measures we announced in 2023 with our \$112-million investment over the next three years to strengthen bail enforcement.

We are also standing firm against the threat of organized crime and illegal drug trafficking. This legislation gives us the tools to explore stronger enforcement options and sends a clear message to the criminals: Ontario will not tolerate the criminal networks that profit from addiction and violence. We’re expanding our guns and gangs strategy, enhancing police units in high-risk areas and continuing to work to stop illegal firearms at our borders.

Madam Speaker, we all know about auto theft. We want to make sure we heard the people of Ontario, so we put measures in place. This bill makes our dedicated major auto theft prosecution team a permanent part of the fight against sophisticated, organized crime. This bill strengthens our commitment to survivors of intimate partner violence by making it easier to obtain restraining orders—removing barriers that have left too many without protection.

I want to give a shout-out to MPP Jess Dixon, the member from Kitchener South–Hespeler, for all her hard work through the committee meetings, where we heard from the victims of intimate partner violence, and this

government is taking action. The people of Ontario elected us to keep them safe, and that's exactly what this legislation is doing. It's about safer streets, stronger communities and a justice system that works for the people. I urge all members of this House to support this bill.

Talking about victim supports: In addition to fighting crime on the streets, this legislation goes further to include increased supports for victims within the justice system. We're proposing stronger measures to protect families, especially children and youth, by strengthening Christopher's Law, amending the Family Law Act and the Children's Law Reform Act and supporting victims of human trafficking.

To support the legislative bundle, the government is making regulatory changes to protect children against sex trafficking by strengthening Christopher's Law to include child sex traffickers on the Ontario Sex Offender Registry. Often we hear the data, and sometimes I really get concerned about the data when we say 1% or 2%. That 1% or 2% could be, maybe, 2% out of 100, and if it's 1,000, it's 20. But for those families, that 1% is 100%. It's not just a number; it is that family, it is that individual, it is everybody around them who gets affected.

So this proposed legislation would increase tools to address intimate partner violence by amending the Family Law Act and Children's Law Reform Act to make restraining orders against abusers more accessible. This means additional persons would be able to apply for family restraining orders on behalf of the individuals in need of protection, including designated representatives or other persons with the permission of the court.

Madam Speaker, the measures we're introducing build on our four-year action plan to end gender-based violence and our anti-human trafficking strategy.

To help combat human trafficking in hotels and short-term rentals, Ontario will bring into force the Accommodation Sector Registration of Guests Act, 2021, on January 1, 2026—another way to stop the crime, to help and support our province. This will provide police with the tools needed to help investigate human trafficking, as they could easily obtain related information from hotels and other prescribed businesses.

In addition, the province will also be proceeding with consultations to support the implementation of Bill 41, the Protection from Coerced Debts Incurred in relation to Human Trafficking Act, 2023. This act, when implemented, would reduce the financial hardship survivors face because of human trafficking, helping them to make progress on the path to recovery. Alongside this legislation, Ontario is renewing its anti-human trafficking strategy from 2025 to 2030 with an additional investment of \$345 million over the same period.

This legislation is just part of our continued efforts to support the well-being of victims and their families. Since being elected in 2018, we have taken crucial steps to prevent and address gender-based violence, to deliver support to survivors and hold offenders accountable.

We're investing \$310 million over the next three years to community organizations that support survivors of

gender-based violence, human trafficking and other vulnerable groups. This includes \$5.5 million in funding to support gender-based violence initiatives for women.

1740

Madam Speaker, talking about women, our MPP from Brampton Centre has been doing incredible work and making sure those victims—they need help and support. Thank you to the minister for supporting them and giving them the training and the financial tools so that they can carry on with their families, so a big round of applause for you.

We have implemented the Sexual Violence Advisory Group, assisting trial crowns on the specific needs in sexual assault cases and providing advice, education and training for crowns, police, and community and victim services workers. Our government is committed to working with all legal partners to explore ways to address delays in the justice system and ensure that sexual assault cases proceed through the system as efficiently and effectively as possible.

This bill has been responding to the evolving needs of the justice system to tackle crime on all fronts. This includes looking at solutions beyond the courts. For an example, justice centres empower communities by moving justice out of the traditional courtroom into a community setting. By doing so, they bring justice, health and social services to target the root cause of crime and break the cycle of offending and reoffending. Justice centres hold offenders accountable for their offences while at the same time connecting them to the services that can help them so that they have the support they need to reduce their risk of reoffending. I call it a positive vicious cycle.

Simply put, as an example, if you're not feeling well, you stop eating. When you stop eating, you become more ill. When you become more ill, you throw up and you can't recover. The best way forward is to make sure we reverse that cycle. When you're not feeling well, rather than eating, you can take soup or something which you like. That will give you some energy. When you have energy, you will fight. Your body will fight against your illness and you can recover better and faster. The same way, our justice centres, Madam Speaker, as I said, hold offenders accountable for their offences while at the same time connecting them to the services so that it can help them to come back, come out of this and be part of the society so that they have the support they need to reduce the risk of reoffending. By doing so, we're making our community better.

Justice centres also support communities and victims harmed by crime by stopping the revolving door of repeat offenders through a system of policing, justice, health and correction. Don't forget, Madam Speaker, the people who get involved in these offences are also kids of some parents. I always feel, many times, that when these kids were born—as much as my parents were happy when I was born, or I was happy when my kids were born—how and when and where we got to a situation when they got diverted and went into a situation where we have them doing the offences. So justice centres are the places where we can, if I can, go back in the time machine and stop at

the point. And if you can't, if we go to a place, we can help to bring them back to the community.

Madam Speaker, we've seen these justice centres have been shown to reduce crime rates, support front-line officers and contribute to healthier and safer communities. And now, thanks to the collaboration with community leaders, Indigenous leaders, municipalities and partners like police and the Ontario Court of Justice, we are expanding our justice centres across the province. I am excited to share that the expansion will include:

- a new dedicated facility for Toronto Downtown East Justice Centre, a first-of-its-kind hybrid health and justice centre that will provide wraparound recovery for those facing homelessness, mental health and addictions challenges;

- a new justice centre and a community campus model in Barrie, designed to reflect the complex needs of the community;

- a new justice centre in Timmins, the first in north-eastern Ontario, following calls from the community and the Indigenous leadership; and

- a new dedicated facility to house the London justice centre that will include a new young adult integrated intimate partner violence model.

These are another way of supporting our communities. Another example would be a new youth justice centre model in Toronto to process all youth cases across Toronto police divisions through satellites in high-needs communities.

These things are what we're doing through this bill—and as I'm looking at the clock, there are too many more things needing to be done and that we are doing through this bill. I can continue, but considering we don't have much time left, I'm going to go straight to the conclusion.

As I come to a close, I want to reiterate that the Protect Ontario Through Safer Streets and Stronger Communities Act is a critical step we are taking to deliver what our communities need. We are taking bold action to improve the efficiency of our courts to ensure our law enforcement and prosecutors have the tools they need and to expand critical services that are working, like our justice centres.

Our government is listening to the people of Ontario, who elected us to protect Ontario. We are quickly acting to modernize the system to have supports in place for victims, survivors and for anyone navigating the system. We do not want Shahid Mughal to leave Mississauga–Malton. We want to have stronger, safer communities. We want to build a better, stronger Ontario. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Questions?

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: I want to thank the member opposite for his presentation.

Conservatives like to call themselves heavy-handed on crime. Certainly, in the last seven years, when it comes to auto theft, we have seen numbers increase by about 300%. In response, they have come up with some very creative ideas, like taking away the licences of car thieves so that it would force them to perhaps take buses or a rideshare to go commit theft.

Now, in this bill, something even more draconian: They are going to take away the electronic devices that might be used—not punish them; just confiscate them—forcing them to go back on Amazon and to continue to purchase those devices to commit crime.

My question is, who comes up with this stuff?

Mr. Deepak Anand: I want to touch base on what the member opposite just talked about, the devices. I'll talk to you about what we are doing, and it's about the GPS monitoring system.

A typical question is how long the ministry has been using the GPS monitoring system. As a part of the modernization effort and prior to COVID-19, the ministry has been exploring the use of GPS monitoring systems as an alternative to some types of custody.

Following extensive review and evaluation of the POC and the GPS for bail initiative that began July 2020, the ministry made the decision to implement GPS monitoring with a vendor that specializes in providing GPS services. So as of 2020, the ministry is implementing GPS monitoring for individuals released on bail. We are making these devices illegal that are used for stealing.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further questions?

Ms. Natalie Pierre: Thank you very much to my colleague from Mississauga–Malton for his remarks.

I heard you talk about one of your constituents who had their vehicle stolen, and I would add that that is something that is important in my community as well. Community safety and auto theft were issues that I heard about a lot during the recent campaign.

This bill, Bill 10, if passed, proposes new tools that police can use. In Halton region, where Burlington is located, we have seen a reduction of 40% in auto-theft rates, so thank you to my colleague the Associate Minister for Auto Theft and Bail Reform, who's also a Halton representative, for the good work that you're doing in our community.

I'm just wondering if my colleague from Mississauga–Malton can talk about maybe some of these additional auto theft measures that are proposed under this legislation, how we can see those rates of auto theft drop even more and what that might mean to the constituents in your riding of Mississauga–Malton.

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Mr. Deepak Anand: First of all, to the member from Burlington, that's a great question and something that affects all of our ridings.

Madam Speaker, loud and clear, we heard from our residents who are concerned about safety and security. They came to Canada, like I came to Canada on January 15, 2000, because Canada is a place that gives you—if you can dream it, with hard work, you can achieve it. It's a safer community. It was a great community, something which we have seen now, in the last few years—public safety is becoming an issue.

But for this government, public safety is and always will be a top priority. That's why we're making our Major Auto Theft Prosecution Response Team permanent. The

team will provide dedicated legal and prosecutorial support to police services, help dismantle organized crime networks to hold offenders accountable and crack down on carjacking and home invasions. This builds on the investment in policing by the Ministry of the Solicitor General and is crucial in prosecuting those involved in auto theft.

Madam Speaker, we are working hard to make sure that the people of Ontario feel safe and secure.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further questions?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I listened to the remarks from the member for Mississauga–Malton, and one of the things he didn't spend a lot of time on is schedule 5, the changes to the Judicial Appointments Advisory Committee that are included in that bill.

Certainly, the changes themselves are not the biggest concern. It's more the context in which this legislation is being brought forward and these changes are being made because the Premier has made some pretty inflammatory remarks about how we need to forget about the independence of the judicial system; we need to get rid of those judges who have rose-colored glasses; we need to appoint more like-minded judges.

My question to the member is, why does the Attorney General need the new powers that are provided in this bill to introduce new criteria for the appointment of justices?

Mr. Deepak Anand: I want to start by thanking the member from London West for the question.

I'm sure she was watching when the Premier was talking; I was actually standing right behind him, and I got a lot of texts and calls. People applauded and people said, "Wow, it came straight from the heart." I'm sure, Madam Speaker, the whole of Ontario heard the Premier say, "There are good judges." He applauded and he supported the judges.

Talking about this bill: These changes, if passed, would continue to maintain the integrity of the process while shifting to a pool-based approach in order to further speed up and streamline appointment of the judges.

The AG can only recommend candidates classified by the independent JAAC as "recommended" or "highly recommended" for appointment. This would not change under the new pool-based system we are proposing. The federal government uses a pool-based process to select candidates for judicial appointments. Candidates classified are also retained for three years. Our government's proposed changes mirror exactly what has been done by the federal judicial appointment process.

Our government will continue to ensure transparency in the recommending process. That's what we are doing: We

want to make sure that we have judges, and we can have a better, stronger Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Questions?

Mr. Andrew Dowie: I want to thank the member from Mississauga–Malton for his question.

I was intrigued by his comments regarding the Accommodation Sector Registration of Guests Act. My own riding is growing up. We have the Diane Motel. There's a new TownePlace Suites by Marriott. We're getting our second hotel in my riding. The prospect is very close to us now of seeing that human trafficking.

Look, these are great developments, but it wasn't long ago I was at a conference and I was with a police officer. He was saying the hotel I was at was the centre of human trafficking in his community. So this could happen anywhere in any of our hometowns.

I'm asking the member how the Accommodation Sector Registration of Guests Act, 2021, impacts on the accommodations industry.

Mr. Deepak Anand: As I was talking in my remarks, I did touch—what members asked for this. At the end of the day, as I said, when we talk about the number—1%, 2%, whatever it is—it's probably maybe one in a thousand, but for that family, it's 100%.

That is what this bill is doing: making sure that we are protecting residents so that we are making sure there are strong mandates, because Ontario wants a government that is committed to pushing back against violent crimes and making sure that our communities are safer and stronger.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Quick question, quick response?

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: I mean, I just—it's just more of an urging: Please, fix auto theft in Ontario. Please don't do it with these devices, taking them away, forcing people to go to Amazon. Do real stuff.

In fact, I'm so interested that I would look forward to be able to talk a little bit more about that in the coming moments. So, do you pledge to fix the auto theft in this beautiful province?

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): And a quick response from the member for Mississauga–Malton?

Mr. Deepak Anand: Thank you, Madam Speaker. We are committed to make Ontario safer and stronger, and the most prosperous province in the world. That's what we're doing, and we will continue to do that.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Okay. *Second reading debate deemed adjourned.*

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Seeing the time on the clock, this House stands adjourned until Monday, May 12, 2025, at 9 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1757.

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Gates, Wayne (NDP)	Niagara Falls	
Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	
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Glover, Chris (NDP)	Spadina—Fort York	
Gretzky, Lisa (NDP)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	
Grewal, Hardeep Singh (PC)	Brampton East / Brampton-Est	
Gualtieri, Silvia (PC)	Mississauga East—Cooksville / Mississauga-Est—Cooksville	
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Khanjin, Hon. / L'hon. Andrea (PC)	Barrie—Innisfil	Minister of Red Tape Reduction / Ministre de la Réduction des formalités administratives
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Rae, Matthew (PC)	Perth—Wellington	
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Rosenberg, Bill (PC)	Algoma—Manitoulin	
Sabawy, Sheref (PC)	Mississauga—Erin Mills	
Sandhu, Amarjot (PC)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Sarkaria, Hon. / L'hon. Prabmeet Singh (PC)	Brampton South / Brampton-Sud	Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports
Sarrazin, Stéphane (PC)	Glengarry—Prescott—Russell	
Sattler, Peggy (NDP)	London West / London-Ouest	
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Schreiner, Mike (GRN)	Guelph	
Scott, Chris (PC)	Sault Ste. Marie	
Scott, Laurie (PC)	Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock	
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Tangri, Hon. / L'hon. Nina (PC)	Mississauga—Streetsville	Associate Minister of Small Business / Ministre associée des Petites Entreprises

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Thompson, Hon. / L'hon. Lisa M. (PC)	Huron—Bruce	Minister of Rural Affairs / Ministre des Affaires rurales
Tibollo, Hon. / L'hon. Michael A. (PC)	Vaughan—Woodbridge	Associate Attorney General / Procureur général associé
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Wai, Daisy (PC)	Richmond Hill	
Watt, Tyler (LIB)	Nepean	
West, Jamie (NDP)	Sudbury	
Williams, Hon. / L'hon. Charmaine A. (PC)	Brampton Centre / Brampton-Centre	Associate Minister of Women's Social and Economic Opportunity / Ministre associée des Perspectives sociales et économiques pour les femmes
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