

Legislative
Assembly
of Ontario



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législative
de l'Ontario

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(Hansard)**

No. 3

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(Hansard)**

Nº 3

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44th Parliament
Wednesday
16 April 2025

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44^e législature
Mercredi
16 avril 2025

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Clerk: Trevor Day

Présidente : L'honorable Donna Skelly
Greffier : Trevor Day

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CONTENTS / TABLE DES MATIÈRES

Wednesday 16 April 2025 / Mercredi 16 avril 2025

Members' roll

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly) 11

Leader of the Opposition

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly) 11

Tabling of sessional papers

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly) 11

ORDERS OF THE DAY / ORDRE DU JOUR

Throne speech debate

Mr. Steve Clark 11

Mr. Anthony Leardi 16

Debate adjourned 19

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS / DÉCLARATIONS DES DÉPUTÉES ET DÉPUTÉS

Cadets

Mr. Will Bouma 19

Home Renovation Savings Program

Mme France Gélinas 19

Ajax youth wellness hub

Mr. Lorne Coe 19

City of Ottawa

Mr. Stephen Blais 20

Interprovincial trade / Ring of Fire

MPP Lise Vaugeois 20

ProAction Cops & Kids

MPP Silvia Gualtieri 20

Highway safety / Sécurité routière

M. Guy Bourgouin 21

Maple heritage

Mr. John Jordan 21

Canada flag lawn signs

Mr. Billy Pang 21

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS / PRÉSENTATION DES VISITEUSES ET VISITEURS

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly) 21

Hon. Mike Harris 21

Ms. Peggy Sattler 21

M. Stephen Blais 22

Ms. Jess Dixon 22

Mr. Peter Tabuns 22

Mr. Adil Shamji 22

Hon. Victor Fedeli 22

MPP Wayne Gates 22

Hon. Mike Harris 22

Independent members

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly) 22

44th Parliament

Hon. Doug Ford 23

Mr. John Fraser 23

QUESTION PERIOD / PÉRIODE DE QUESTIONS

Employment supports

Ms. Marit Stiles 23

Hon. Doug Ford 24

Hon. David Piccini 24

Government contracts

Ms. Marit Stiles 24

Hon. Doug Ford 25

Government accountability

Mr. John Fraser 25

Hon. Kinga Surma 26

Government accountability

Mr. John Fraser 26

Hon. Kinga Surma 26

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy 27

Housing

Ms. Catherine Fife 27

Hon. Rob Flack 27

Hon. David Piccini 28

Government accountability

Ms. Stephanie Bowman 28

Hon. Kinga Surma 28

Interprovincial trade

Mrs. Michelle Cooper 28

Hon. Nina Tangri 29

Public health

MPP Robin Lennox 29

Hon. Sylvia Jones 29

Government accountability

Mr. Stephen Blais 30

Hon. Kinga Surma 30

Ontario economy

MPP Mohamed Firin 30

Hon. Stephen Lecce 30

Highway safety

Mr. Guy Bourgouin 31

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria 31

Government spending

| | |
|-------------------------|----|
| MPP Andrea Hazell | 31 |
| Hon. Sylvia Jones..... | 32 |

Employment supports

| | |
|-------------------------|----|
| MPP Billy Denault..... | 32 |
| Hon. David Piccini..... | 32 |

Board of Internal Economy

| | |
|---------------------------------------|----|
| The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly) | 33 |
|---------------------------------------|----|

**INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS /
PRÉSENTATION DES VISITEUSES
ET VISITEURS**

| | |
|-------------------------------------|----|
| Hon. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta | 33 |
|-------------------------------------|----|

**INTRODUCTION OF GOVERNMENT BILLS /
DÉPÔT DE PROJETS DE LOI ÉMANANT
DU GOUVERNEMENT**

**Protect Ontario Through Free Trade Within
Canada Act, 2025, Bill 2, Mr. Fedeli / Loi de 2025
pour protéger l'Ontario en favorisant le libre-
échange au Canada, projet de loi 2, M. Fedeli**

| | |
|------------------------------|----|
| First reading agreed to..... | 33 |
| Hon. Victor Fedeli..... | 33 |

**INTRODUCTION OF BILLS /
DÉPÔT DES PROJETS DE LOI**

**Robbie's Legacy Act (Honouring Beloved Organ
and Tissue Donors), 2025, Bill 3, Mr. Blais;
Mr. Fraser; Mr. Hsu; Mr. Shamji / Loi de 2025 sur
le legs de Robbie (hommage à nos chers donateurs
d'organes et de tissus), projet de loi 3, M. Blais;
M. Fraser; M. Hsu; M. Shamji**

| | |
|------------------------------|----|
| First reading agreed to..... | 33 |
| Mr. Ted Hsu | 34 |

**Peter Kormos Memorial Act (Saving Organs to Save
Lives), 2025, Bill 4, Mme Gélinas / Loi de 2025
commémorant Peter Kormos (Sauver des organes
pour sauver des vies), projet de loi 4, Mme Gélinas**

| | |
|------------------------------|----|
| First reading agreed to..... | 34 |
| Mme France Gélinas..... | 34 |

MOTIONS**Appointment of Integrity Commissioner**

| | |
|--------------------------|----|
| Mr. Anthony Leardi | 34 |
| Motion agreed to | 34 |

PETITIONS / PÉTITIONS**Soins de la vue**

| | |
|--------------------------|----|
| Mme France Gélinas | 34 |
|--------------------------|----|

Armenian community

| | |
|------------------------|----|
| Mr. Jonathan Tsao..... | 34 |
|------------------------|----|

University funding

| | |
|-------------------|----|
| Mr. Ted Hsu | 35 |
|-------------------|----|

Cancer treatment

| | |
|--------------------------|----|
| Mme France Gélinas | 35 |
|--------------------------|----|

Caregivers

| | |
|--------------------------|----|
| Mme France Gélinas | 35 |
|--------------------------|----|

Highway safety

| | |
|-------------------------|----|
| Mme France Gélinas..... | 35 |
|-------------------------|----|

Emergency services

| | |
|-------------------------|----|
| Mme France Gélinas..... | 35 |
|-------------------------|----|

Health care

| | |
|--------------------------|----|
| Mme France Gélinas | 36 |
|--------------------------|----|

Northern Health Travel Grant

| | |
|--------------------------|----|
| Mme France Gélinas | 36 |
|--------------------------|----|

Services de santé mentale

| | |
|--------------------------|----|
| Mme France Gélinas | 36 |
|--------------------------|----|

ORDERS OF THE DAY / ORDRE DU JOUR**Throne speech debate**

| | |
|---------------------------------|----|
| Ms. Chandra Pasma..... | 36 |
| Mme France Gélinas | 40 |
| Mr. John Vanthof | 42 |
| Mr. John Fraser | 44 |
| Mr. Stephen Blais..... | 46 |
| Mme Lucille Collard | 48 |
| Ms. Stephanie Bowman..... | 49 |
| Mr. Adil Shamji | 51 |
| MPP Bill Rosenberg..... | 52 |
| Ms. Laura Smith..... | 54 |
| Ms. Catherine Fife..... | 54 |
| Mr. Stephen Blais..... | 55 |
| Mr. Anthony Leardi..... | 55 |
| Mme France Gélinas | 55 |
| Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon | 55 |
| MPP Robin Lennox..... | 55 |
| Ms. Sandy Shaw | 58 |
| Mme Lucille Collard | 58 |
| MPP Andrea Hazell..... | 58 |
| Ms. Catherine Fife..... | 59 |
| Mme France Gélinas | 59 |
| Ms. Lee Fairclough | 59 |
| Mr. Chris Glover | 62 |
| Ms. Aislinn Clancy..... | 62 |
| Mr. Adil Shamji | 62 |
| Ms. Catherine Fife..... | 63 |

| | |
|--------------------------------------|----|
| Mr. Anthony Leardi..... | 63 |
| Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon..... | 63 |
| Mr. Joseph Racinsky..... | 63 |
| Mr. Matthew Rae..... | 66 |
| Mr. Terence Kernaghan..... | 66 |
| Mr. Anthony Leardi..... | 66 |
| Ms. Laura Smith | 66 |
| Ms. Peggy Sattler..... | 67 |
| Mr. Ted Hsu..... | 67 |
| MPP Lise Vaugeois | 67 |
| Mr. Matthew Rae..... | 70 |
| Mr. Terence Kernaghan..... | 70 |
| Ms. Laura Smith | 70 |
| Mme France Gélinas..... | 71 |
| Mr. Anthony Leardi..... | 71 |
| Debate adjourned..... | 71 |
| Appointment of House officers | |
| Mr. Anthony Leardi..... | 71 |
| Motion agreed to..... | 72 |

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 16 April 2025

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 16 avril 2025

The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers.

MEMBERS' ROLL

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I beg to inform the House that the Clerk has laid upon the table the roll of members elected at the general election of 2025.

LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I also beg to inform the House that Marit Stiles, member for the electoral district of Davenport, is recognized as the leader of His Majesty's loyal opposition.

TABLING OF SESSIONAL PAPERS

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I beg to inform the House that the following documents were tabled since the last sitting of the House:

—a report entitled Ontario School Boards: School Building Condition, Student Capacity and Capital Budgeting, from the Office of the Financial Accountability Officer of Ontario;

—a report entitled ServiceOntario Relocations: Financial Analysis of the Agreement with Staples Canada, from the Office of the Financial Accountability Officer of Ontario;

—a report concerning the Honourable Kinga Surma, Minister of Infrastructure and member of provincial Parliament for Etobicoke Centre, from the Office of the Integrity Commissioner of Ontario;

—a report entitled the Financial Impact of Expanding the Beverage Alcohol Marketplace in Ontario, from the Office of the Financial Accountability Officer of Ontario;

—a special report on the Community-Based Child and Youth Mental Health Program, from the Office of the Auditor General of Ontario;

—a special report on the Safety of Non-Municipal Drinking Water, from the Office of the Auditor General of Ontario; and

—a report entitled Government Spending Trends: 1990 to 2023, from the Office of the Financial Accountability Officer of Ontario.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

THRONE SPEECH DEBATE

Consideration of the speech of Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor at the opening of the session.

Mr. Steve Clark: I move, seconded by the member for Essex, 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.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Mr. Clark moves, 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 addressed to us.

I recognize the government House leader to lead off the debate.

Mr. Steve Clark: Thanks, Speaker. I'll be sharing my time this morning with the seconder of the motion, my colleague the member for Essex, who also acts as our deputy government House leader.

It's wonderful to see you in the Chair, Speaker. On behalf of the entire House, let me take this opportunity to congratulate you on your historic election as Speaker, the first woman Speaker in the history of the province of Ontario. Congratulations.

I've known the Speaker for a long time. I just want her to indulge me for a few moments. I first met our Speaker when she was a reporter for CKWS TV in Kingston and I was the young mayor of Brockville, the mayor with the curly hair—so lots has changed since then, but one thing hasn't changed, and that's the way that our Speaker operated. As a journalist, she had an incredible reputation of being incredibly fair and incredibly balanced, and I'm positive that you're going to take those same traits from your distinguished career in journalism and your distinguished career so far in politics to the Chair. So on behalf of everyone in this chamber, congratulations. It's great to see you there.

This is the first time that I've been able to rise in the Legislature, obviously, for the first session of the 44th Parliament. Also, I want to take a moment in my address today to thank the people of the incredible riding of Leeds–Grenville–Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes—longest name but great service. I just want to say to the people of my riding: Thank you for putting your trust in me, and I want you to know that whether you put an X

beside my name on the ballot or not, I will continue to work hard and get results for you in this Legislature. I also want to thank my constituents for putting their trust in me. This is the sixth time that I have been elected as an MPP. It's an incredible honour and a privilege, and, again, I just want to thank the folks in my riding for putting their trust in me and bringing me back to the Legislature for a sixth time.

Interjections.

Mr. Steve Clark: Thank you.

Interjection: You're old.

Mr. Steve Clark: I'm not that old. I'm the same age as you.

I also want to take this opportunity to congratulate all the members of our 44th Parliament, who were elected on February 27. I want to take this opportunity on behalf of the government to thank not just my colleagues and congratulate them, but the members of the opposition as well. This is an incredibly important place, a special place. Very few get to serve and sit in these seats, and I wish all the best for all of you and your ridings in this 44th Parliament. Congratulations to everyone.

We bring different responsibilities, different perspectives, different backgrounds to this place, but we all, despite our differences—members rise in debate, they do so with the commitment to bring forward the concerns of their constituents. They want to make sure they ensure that their constituents' voices are heard as part of the decision-making process. As well, as public servants, we've got a duty to represent those people that have put their trust in us. We also have a responsibility to uphold the traditions of this institution and our democracy that's entrusted to us by Canadians who have sacrificed so much to defend it.

None of us stands here alone. While our names were on the ballot, it takes an entire team to bring us here. I think we can all agree on that. I want to take the opportunity to thank my family and my wife Deanna for her love and unwavering support. I also want to thank the people who are always back home when I'm here, and that's the folks in my constituency office: Michael, Erin, Jo-Anne and Alishia. They're the unsung heroes. I think we can all agree our constit staff are the unsung heroes. When we're here, they continue to operate on our behalf and serve our constituents, so I want to thank them.

0910

Also, words can't express my deep thanks to my campaign team—to those volunteers who graciously gave up their time to knock on doors, to put up signs, to answer phones and to do every job in a campaign, both large and small. And let's remember, colleagues, that people did that while braving snow and ice and unprecedented conditions.

My by-election in 2010 was on March 4, so I have to admit I had a bit of experience from that 2010 election, knocking on doors in ice. The other challenge I had in my by-election in 2010 was the by-election was in the middle of the 2010 Winter Olympics in Vancouver, so no door-knocking on women's or men's hockey night. You also had to have your canvassers know exactly what was on television that night. Whether it was curling or downhill

skiing, they had to be knowledgeable about what was going on. But we had a big rule in that 2010 by-election: It didn't matter how much snow was on ground or how much ice; there was no knocking on doors when Team Canada was on the ice playing hockey. I think I probably bumped up my total by a couple of points because we had that.

So I just want to thank my campaign volunteers. We're actually going to have an appreciation breakfast for my volunteers. I encourage all of you, if you haven't done so, to thank your volunteers who have helped bring you here. We've got a little breakfast to thank them for their commitment, not just for me, but for my party as well.

Before I begin, I also want to take just a moment to thank Premier Ford. I want to thank him for the confidence that he's shown in me by reappointing me as government House leader and trusting me and the team to steer our legislative agenda through the House. As we heard from the Lieutenant Governor yesterday in the throne speech, it's a very ambitious agenda that we've set against a backdrop of an extremely serious and challenging issue that we're confronted as elected officials.

I had a very productive breakfast earlier this week with the House leader of the official opposition, with the third party and with the independents. I think we all started the day in an incredibly focused manner of working together and ensuring that, while our parties need to continue to put forward their voice, we're starting the Legislature on the right foot. So I want to thank all those individuals for that meeting. I found it was very productive, a great exchange and a great way to start.

Going back to the campaign, Speaker: We knocked on thousands of doors, both during the campaign and in the months prior to the campaign, and it became clear to me what the residents of Leeds–Grenville–Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes saw as their priority. Their priority was leadership: leadership from our Premier and our government that they can rely on in the very uncertain and unprecedented times that we're living in. That was a very clear direction that we heard.

President Trump's attacks on our economy here in Ontario are already impacting businesses and workers in our province. In my own riding, the uncertainty has already resulted in an investment not being made, which has cost hundreds of good-paying jobs, just because of the uncertainty that President Trump has created.

On February 27, Ontarians resoundingly put their trust in Premier Ford by giving us that third majority mandate. Voters chose us because they recognize that we were the party that could best protect Ontario and steer our economy through the headwinds that are rocking us.

It's a well-earned trust, Speaker, because Premier Ford has been front and centre in standing up against President Trump and taking the message directly to the American people. He's been a relentless and tireless champion for Ontario and for Canada, and he truly deserves the moniker of Captain Canada. He's shown leadership, he's been relentless and, as I said, he's taken that message directly to the American people.

Literally on televisions and households across the US, the Premier has told Americans that President Trump's actions aren't only going to harm our economy, but at the end of the day, his tariffs and the trade war that he's unleashed are costing jobs and making life more difficult and expensive for Americans as well.

Economies thrive on certainty. I think we can all agree we've lived in very uncertain times under President Trump. Canadians here in Ontario and across our incredible country need to work in partnership. We are always better and more successful when we work together with our southern partners. No nation, no continent on Earth can match the economic strength we can have when we work together. No one can match us.

The relationship has been strained. The Lieutenant Governor used the word, I've used the word many times—the “chaos” that's emanating from the White House. As a result, our government's priority is to protect Ontario from immediate economic uncertainty that the chaos has caused. I think we have to move forward.

I look forward to the Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade, with his words this afternoon and the document that will be tabled. We've talked about our plan—we talked about it during the election; we've talked about it many times since—to deliver \$11 billion in urgent relief for our workers and our businesses that are already feeling the impact. I've received a lot of very good emails and text messages and phone calls, as the Premier has, indicating how appreciative they are that our government will pull out all the stops to make sure we support our workers and support Ontario businesses. That's as it should be, Speaker. Those affected the most, the workers who are sacrificing as Canada fights back, have earned our support. They've earned our support, and we need to get them and their families the relief they need through these difficult times.

Our government is also working closely with industry and labour partners in the auto sector to fight those unprecedented challenges that we're seeing. We don't want to move back after all the progress that we've made. As part of that work, we have been clear, Minister Fedeli has been clear that we're going to stand by our investments in the auto sector, in the electric vehicle and battery plants that have indicated their interest and their support of our province. These investments represent a path forward—a path forward to new jobs, to new prosperity for families and communities across Ontario.

But you know, Speaker, the upending of the economic partnership with the United States has really taught us a lesson. As much as we've depended on the US and will work to convince them they must lift these harmful tariffs, we've learned we have to be more self-sufficient as a province. We can't put all our eggs in that big American basket because we know that President Trump will just upend it. So we have to look at other markets. We have to have an urgent response that can't be limited to providing relief to those affected. As important as that is, we have to also act for ourselves to be more economically independent from the US and to look for other markets for our

products in Ontario. That begins by leading the way to tear down barriers that have been put up far too long that have kept Canada's provinces from being able to trade with each other.

Who would have thought, who would have imagined that it would have taken President Trump to make us act finally on something we've talked about my entire life? I can see Morristown, New York, from my window at my constituency office, right across the St. Lawrence. We've done trade with the United States for so long, but our own interprovincial trade barriers have hampered us for so very long. So, again, I look forward to the initiatives coming out of the throne speech by our government that finally create that playing field across other provinces in our country.

I want to just talk a little bit about the economy in my own riding of Leeds–Grenville–Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes. It's extremely diverse. Obviously, we've got a tourism destination—it's second to none. We've got the world-famous Thousand Islands, the World Heritage Rideau Canal.

0920

We've got attractions like the Aquatarium, the Delta mill, cultural landmarks like the Thousand Islands Playhouse. We've got a myriad of festivals and events that take place, things like the Spencerville Fair.

We've got a tremendous agricultural sector. It's a real powerhouse. We're home to Burnbrae Farms, home of one of the largest producers of egg products in Canada, a fantastic corporate citizen.

We've also got the Port of Johnstown that supports our great farmers, that gives them access to markets around the world for their products. It's got a strategic location on the St. Lawrence River.

We're also fortunate to have some pretty strong industrial manufacturing companies, names like 3M, Northern Cables, Prysmian, Invista, Evonik, Cardinal Health and Greenfield Global.

During the campaign, Premier Ford got to tour one of those fantastic manufacturing facilities in my riding: It's the Canarm plant in Brockville. I've got a great picture of the president of the company, David Beatty, holding a stack of papers, going over them with Premier Ford—and those were shipping labels that detailed shipments of products that were leaving Brockville for cities across the United States. It's the same products that those other companies I listed—all of them sent products and are reliant on the US market.

I want to be clear: Americans aren't buying wire from Northern Cables or medical supplies from Cardinal Health or HVAC equipment from Canarm just because we're next door. They're getting those products because they're of the highest quality, made by workers who are second to none, and that's why the Americans want those high-quality products. It's not because of our location, it's because of the work that we do, the people we employ and the products that we manufacture that they need.

Remember that when Minister Fedeli is on one of his many television interviews where he talks about the fact

that nine million Americans wake up every day with a job because of what we do here in Canada. So it's incredibly important that we get it right. It's incredibly important that we act quickly and decisively as a government.

Again, we want to thank the people of Ontario for giving us that third majority mandate.

Under the leadership of our government, we're going to capitalize on those strengths: our incredible workforce, our visionary entrepreneurs, our amazing agriculture and our agri-food sector, world-class tourism attractions—the list goes on and on and on.

Our mandate and our mission for the next four years are to do absolutely everything necessary to ensure that Ontario is the best place in the world to invest and to do business.

This government's plan to protect Ontario will make us more self-reliant, will make us more independent, which will ensure that Ontario can withstand whatever comes our way.

We're going to be at the forefront—and it was so great to hear this yesterday in the throne speech—to champion these nation-building infrastructure projects like pipelines, ports, railways and highways.

We're going to speed up approvals to unlock the critical mineral resources in the Ring of Fire and bring new energy infrastructure, including nuclear. That's what we need as a province to power our growth.

These are serious times, Speaker. Our economy is under attack. It's not time to think small. It's a time to be bold, to streamline approvals on these generational projects that put Ontario and Canada on its way to economic independence.

Since we were first elected in 2018, our government has introduced more than 600 red tape reduction measures to help people and to help businesses save time and save money, and that's a good start, but I think we need to do more to cut red tape and some of the endless delays that have held back our economy and that have driven away jobs and driven away investment.

Just after the election, I wrote to the Minister of Infrastructure to seek her support in cutting red tape that's been holding back the township of Edwardsburgh/Cardinal from putting the Edwardsburgh land bank into productive use. The land bank, for those that don't know, is comprised of 10,000 acres, currently owned by the province, most of which is sitting idle. I have to say, our township council has had that vision: that spark of economic growth and activity. They want to capitalize on that asset. So here's a small township—they want to think big, with a big infrastructure project. And they want to purchase the land bank so that it can become an area that farmers can plant crops, that builders can build housing, that we can establish an industrial park for employers to invest and to create jobs.

The municipality has made a full-price offer to Infrastructure Ontario. We're hoping that they're going to say yes. But I'm highlighting them because they have the kind of vision that's going to allow that little township of Edwardsburgh/Cardinal to help our economy grow, to help our economy prosper and deliver on that protect-Ontario mandate.

I want to thank the minister for all the conversations we've had together. We had a fantastic meeting with the minister at the rural Ontario municipal conference, and I wanted to highlight that when we talk about big projects. So remember: 10,000 acres, agriculture, housing, infrastructure, all of those things—and they've got the cheque. They're just willing to give us that full-price offer to be able to deliver that. I want to thank them, and I wanted to highlight them today.

One of the other things we talk about is putting money back into people's pockets and cutting red tape. This might seem like a small thing, but it builds upon what I said earlier about tourism and economic development. One of the things we need to do to help our economy is a motion that I put forward that I'll be reintroducing, and it's a motion to create a one-permit trail system for ATVs.

I want the members of the House to know that Ontario is the second-largest province for ATV use, with more than 300,000 insured vehicles. We're the only province that doesn't have some sort of comprehensive trail permit system in place. A one-permit trail system will unlock an incredible potential in our province and could bring thousands of ATV enthusiasts from across Canada to experience the beautiful trails and the beautiful nature we have in our province.

We need to do this, as we did for Ontario's 30,000 kilometres of snowmobile trails—we did the same thing for them—and it will help better connect ATV owners to purchase that one annual pass to access the trail. The revenue that is received can then be reinvested into the trail system to ensure that we can expand it and ensure that it can grow.

I am told that there is an incredible potential that we could bring millions of dollars in tourism revenue to support businesses and communities through this system, through these ATV trails. Again, we're the only province that doesn't seem to have this type of system. Our riders go to many other provinces and experience this system.

I want to thank the Minister of Transportation and his parliamentary assistant, the member for Hastings–Lennox and Addington, for their support. I look forward to continuing working with them, with the OFATV. I look forward to working with clubs across the province for this one-permit trail system to make it a reality.

Whether it's the Ring of Fire or the Edwardsburgh land bank or housing projects or highway projects across Ontario, but certainly—I'm biased—in eastern Ontario, I want to make sure the 401 expansion in eastern Ontario continues. Whatever those projects that I have talked about, we're going to need a skilled workforce. We're going to need a workforce that's going to be sized appropriately to be able to deliver on all of these projects that are put forward.

Our government has led the way in education with our back-to-basics approach in schools, to give students the practical skills that they need in the real world. In terms of our colleges and universities, we're ready to make decisions about ensuring that colleges and universities can invest in programs to help graduates find jobs in our economy, and I was glad to see the reference yesterday. If that chosen

career is skilled trades, well, our government is making sure that that door is open for you.

Again, I want to thank the Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development for the investments that his ministry is making through the Skills Development Fund. In my riding, we've seen more than \$4.6 million invested. It will support over 2,600 workers in Leeds and Grenville. The program, with the support of the Upper Canada District School Board, is a fantastic partnership with the municipality and with the school board and with our government. It's really helped revitalize the Kemptville campus under this government. This was a campus that the previous Liberal government, under Kathleen Wynne, shuttered. We've been building it up ever since we became government in 2018, and Minister Piccini and his ministry have done a phenomenal job in supporting this.

0930

I was proud, last fall, to have Premier Ford come to the campus, to talk to those young men and women who really see a light at the end of the tunnel with that beautiful opportunity in the skilled trades. They were really glowing to talk to the Premier about their experiences. They were so thankful that we're funding these programs, to give them the opportunity to have a meaningful and lucrative career in the skilled trades.

I also want to talk just briefly about a situation I had. I was in Athens, one of the villages in my riding, just before the Premier's visit. I was actually going into Big Waters Bakery. I think I have a body by baked goods. Anybody who's in my riding, you've got to stop in Athens and go to Big Waters Bakery. I was walking across the street to the bakery, and a lady was calling my name, a young woman. She was running across to talk to me, and she was so passionate about the fact that this program, this skills fund program, changed her son's life. I went to the Leeds County Plowing Match a week later and met with a young person who said that program changed his life.

So we're really ensuring that this is working, and that these young people are having an opportunity to stay close to home and to get that skilled trades job. I want to thank the young lad and the young woman who came over and really talked to me, because that's what it means to be an MPP: to get the feedback that you've actually hit it right and you're making a difference in your own community.

We've had an unprecedented investment of \$1.5 billion in this fund. We've been able to train more than a million workers in in-demand careers. We know that making Ontario's economy stronger and more resilient is ensuring that we have a workforce that can build us up.

One of the projects I want to talk about briefly before I turn it over to the member for Essex is a project that needs some skilled workers to build, and that's a new Brockville jail. It's part of our government's plan to ensure that safety to our front-line staff, provide capacity in our correctional system and to keep violent and repeat offenders off our streets. The new Brockville correctional complex will replace the existing jail and it will add 184 new beds, more than doubling its size.

For those who don't know, the Brockville jail is the oldest operational jail in Ontario. It was originally built in 1842, so I think we can all agree that after 183 years we can build a new jail and create that capacity. It served our community well, it's very historic, but it's time for us to move on and it's time to get the job done.

On the same site, we've got the St. Lawrence Valley Correctional and Treatment Centre. We're going to expand it to accommodate a woman's treatment unit. This is a project that myself and my predecessor, Bob Runciman, have talked about and championed for a long time. I have to say that the project was originally announced in 2020 by Premier Ford. It's time to get it done. It's time to get shovels in the ground, and I'm looking forward to having that new jail begin construction in 2025.

The Minister of Long-Term Care was here earlier. I want to thank the government for supporting five long-term-care projects in my riding—incredibly needed. We've had one that's finished in Kemptville; another that will be finished, probably, at the end of the summer or early fall in Athens; one that has good construction just outside of Brockville; one that's getting ready to turn the sod in Prescott; and another one we're working very closely on with the ministry for redevelopment, the Carveth Care site in Gananoque. These five projects are going to ensure that hundreds more people will be able to get high quality long-term care close to the communities that they help build. That's why it's so important in my riding—a big, rural riding—to have five projects like I have that are able to be delivered.

Finally, Speaker, I just want to talk to my colleagues about primary care—a big deal in the campaign. We're responding to our primary care action team, led by Dr. Jane Philpott. It's an investment of \$1.8 billion. I want to thank all the health partners in my riding for working with me on my priority to establish an urgent care clinic in the city of Brockville. We've got physicians that I've met with that agree that there are two critical needs in Leeds and Grenville: provide unattached patients, including many who have been de-rostered by physician retirements—and to alleviate pressure on our local hospital emergency department with unattached patients, who either can't secure an urgent care appointment from their primary care provider or they don't have one.

I've got a letter that I've sent to our outstanding Minister of Health from the team that I'm working with at the Brockville General Hospital, the Upper Canada Family Health Team, Rideau Community Health Services and the Brockville Family Health Organization, indicating that they're ready to stand to deliver on that application.

We're working on more physicians, more nurse practitioners through the REDI pilot, through Minister Piccini. There are a lot of good things happening, and a lot of good things happening in the riding.

I just want to say that my time is over, so I want to be able to pass it over to the member for Essex. But I just want to say, in closing, how incredibly proud I am of the team we have here at Queen's Park. We're going to deliver. We're going to protect Ontario. And I really ap-

preciate the fact that I was given the chance to kick off the opening address to the speech from the throne.

Thank you, Speaker. I'll turn it over to the member for Essex.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): I recognize the member for Essex.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: Today we're discussing the speech from the throne, and I want to take this opportunity to thank the voters of Essex county for returning me to this chamber. I want to congratulate all the members elected and re-elected, but especially to welcome the newest members to this chamber.

In November 2024, the United States of America had an election, a presidential election. The new President took office in January 2025 and then embarked on a series of proclamations, pronouncements, reversals, re-reversals, contradictions and repeated contradictions. Many of these were related to the relationship between the United States of America and Canada.

We've have had a long, peaceful and successful relationship with the United States. Canada is the number one customer of the United States and Ontario is the number one customer of 17 of those states. We have a near-perfect trade balance with the United States. It is nearly perfect when you factor out the cost of energy, and there is no comparable trade relationship anywhere else in the world.

Many of our sectors are integrated. This was not done by mistake; this was done on purpose. Integration of two economies makes it possible for both economies to benefit, and that's what makes it possible for both the United States and Canada to successfully compete in partnership against the rest of the world. You might refer to this as fortress Am-Can.

It's an integrated production system, especially when it comes to the automotive industry, which is very important to Essex county. For example, an auto part might cross the border several times before it's finally put into an automobile and sold to a customer. It might be designed in the United States and then a prototype might be made, shipped across the border into Canada, and then tested at one of the excellent testing facilities located in Oldcastle. After being tested, that part must be put into production on the United States side—thousands of parts made—and then they might be shipped across the border again to be finished at a facility on the Canadian side, and then shipped back across the border to be put into an engine in the United States, and then shipped back across the border to be put into an automobile in Canada that will eventually be sold both in Canada and the United States. The end result is an automobile that cannot be said to originate either in Canada or the United States but both. This is a remarkable and successful achievement.

But the new President has sought to torpedo this arrangement, contrary to trade law, contrary to written agreements, which he himself negotiated and signed. Of course, the most outrageous comments coming from the new President of the United States are comments involving the involuntary annexation of Canada. But such threats are not new. These types of bellicose comments emanating

from the United States reverberate throughout history, and Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor made several references to those historic threats in her throne speech yesterday. I'm glad she did, because it illustrates that the threats of annexation are not new; in fact, they are very old. Every time these threats have been made, they have resulted in considerable losses to the citizens of the United States of America. And at the same time, Canadians have remained resilient, steadfast and dedicated to this project that we call Canada.

0940

One of the first of those threats took place 250 years ago. It was in 1775, and that was even before the Americans declared their independence, because the 13 American colonies that eventually declared their independence were not the only British colonies in North America. There were many British colonies in North America, but only 13 of them decided to declare their independence. Canada was invited to do so and declined, politely. The Americans, of course, commenced hostilities against their British compatriots in 1775. That was the year of the famous battle at Bunker Hill, but it was also the year that American military forces invaded Canada. Their goal was the Citadelle at Quebec and the adjacent naval installation. The Revolutionaries knew as long as the British were in possession of Quebec and the naval installation, British forces could continue to refortify Canada with supplies and troops and to do so by sea. And the Revolutionaries decided that it was in their best interest to capture Quebec and the naval base and incorporate Canada into a new republic.

An American army left Massachusetts to join up with another American army heading up the Hudson Valley. They headed toward Quebec; they joined forces at Quebec and this army was led by none other than General Benedict Arnold. The assault on Quebec failed, American losses were massive, and the defeated army had to march its way back to the United States.

As I said, Speaker, every threat to annex Canada results in massive losses to the United States of America. But the American Revolutionaries did not give up. That war of independence ended in 1783 and the new republic drafted for itself a Constitution. That Constitution made specific reference to Canada. It said that Canada could join the American union at any time. This is what that Constitution said:

"Canada acceding to this confederation, and joining in the measures of the United States, shall be admitted into, and entitled to all the advantages of this union."

In other words, there was an automatic recognition clause for Canada to join the United States, and that was actually in the original Constitution of the United States of America, and as we all know, once again, Canada politely declined to join. But winning their independence was not good enough for the American Revolutionaries. They still had their eye on Canada, so much so that conquering Canadian territories was the principal goal of the War of 1812. The Americans had their minds made up how easy it would be to annex Canada.

Speaker, I'm going to offer you a quote. This quote comes from Henry Clay, who at that time was the Speaker of the House of Representatives in the United States. He had the same job you have, Speaker. Here's what the Speaker of the United States House of Representatives had to say about how easy it would be to annex Canada:

"It is absurd to suppose we will not succeed. We have Canada as much under our command as Great Britain has the ocean, and the way to conquer Great Britain on the ocean is to drive her from the land. I am not for stopping at Quebec or anywhere else, but I would take the whole continent from her and ask her no favours. I wish never to see peace until we do. God has given us the power and the means. We are to blame if we do not use them. The militia of Kentucky alone are competent to place Montreal and Upper Canada at the feet of Congress."

That is a direct quote from Henry Clay, Speaker of the American House of Representatives from the state of Kentucky. The Americans didn't even think they needed an army to take Canada. They thought the volunteers from Kentucky could do it on their own.

Speaker, I have given you old examples of threats of annexation, and I'm glad they're old examples, because the relationship between Canada and the United States has been a successful and peaceful relationship for years and years—until January 6, 2025. As reported by NBC News:

"Trump has been unapologetic in his quest to conquer the Canadians—an effort he said in January would be conducted by 'economic force.' The result has been a disintegration of the relationship between the US and one of its closest allies, and a stock market plunge over fears of ever-increasing escalation of a trade war."

It's a sad, sad day when the President of the United States talks annexation. It's a sad day for Canadians and it's a sad day for Americans. But that's where we are, and that's where we have been brought. This is not a President who wants to talk about building a great trading relationship. He doesn't want to talk about building fortress Am-Can. He says one thing one day and a different thing the next. He is causing massive disruption and a worldwide realignment of economic and strategic alliances. This is what we have to be prepared for.

So the Ontario response must be strong and resilient, and our first step should be to protect Ontario from economic uncertainty, because uncertainty is bad for economies, bad for markets. It's bad for workers who don't know how to train for the future and it's bad for families who don't know how to plan for tomorrow. That's why the government of Ontario needs to take steps to counter the uncertainty.

0950

The first step is to offer tax relief, and I would like to refer all members of this assembly to the release of this Ontario government speaking specifically to the topic of tax relief. I would like to quote directly from that document:

"Ontario is granting relief to businesses remitting taxes under Ontario's 10 business-focused tax programs....

"Providing up to \$9 billion in cash flow support to about 80,000 Ontario businesses by offering six months of interest and penalty relief will allow them to temporarily delay payments for select provincially administered taxes, giving them more flexibility to deal with any challenges resulting from US tariffs.

"The six-month period begins April 1, 2025, and ends October 1, 2025. All taxes ... must be paid by October 1, 2025."

Speaker, this is an unprecedented move, and it's a move that I support in order to counter the uncertainty being created by the President of the United States.

In addition, the government has pledged to stand firm in favour of the financial support being given to electric vehicle and battery manufacturing in Ontario. We have managed to land \$46 billion worth of investments in that sector. This is a move that I also support.

In addition to taking steps to counter the uncertainty, we need a plan to protect Ontario. History and geography have placed us immediately next door to the United States, and it is inevitable that we must continue to bargain with the Americans. We must continue to engage with friends that we have in the United States and build partnerships with those states who seek a positive trade relationship with Canada and with Ontario. This will always happen, but we must not rely exclusively upon this relationship. We need to be leaner. We need to be more ambitious. We need to find excellence and cut red tape at every level.

In addition to that, we need to protect Ontario by unleashing our economy. Many Canadians and many people in Ontario will be surprised to learn that there are actual internal trade barriers inside Canada. Provinces erect barriers against other provinces to prevent trade. We can't do this anymore. It might even be questionable whether it was ever wise to do it in the first place.

We need to unleash our economy. We need to co-operate with the other provinces and reduce trade barriers and eliminate them wherever possible. This is called reciprocity. We need reciprocity between Canadian provinces, and that should be the rule across the country.

We need to unleash our economy through reciprocity in credentialing. This would be the same as goods and services.

We need to unleash our economy with new pipelines. This is absolutely unacceptable, that we would prevent Alberta oil from reaching every part of Canada. We need pipelines to bring Alberta oil to the Pacific Ocean. We need pipelines to bring Alberta oil to the Atlantic coast. And the federal government needs to be part of that solution.

There are no equalization payments without Alberta oil. Alberta oil makes equalization payments a reality, and the reality is that the provinces have jurisdiction in this area, but the federal government does too.

We need to unleash our economy through new highways, new railways and infrastructure. The primary architect of this Confederation called Canada understood this. His name was John A. Macdonald, and he built and assisted the construction of an iron rail across the country.

That was a nation-building project, and we must learn from that example and emulate it.

I have a special interest in the Ring of Fire. We need to unleash our economy by developing the Ring of Fire. It is a magnificent opportunity for Ontario and Canada. The Ring of Fire contains minerals which would produce gross domestic product in the billions of dollars, equivalent to the production of the existing city of Sudbury. We need to talk about the Ring of Fire and also how the Ring of Fire plays a role in national and international security.

On December 11, 2024, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, known as NATO published in a report the supply risk for critical raw materials in military applications. Here is the list of critical raw materials as identified by NATO: aluminum, beryllium, cobalt, gallium, germanium, graphite, lithium, manganese, platinum, rare earth elements, titanium and tungsten. Most if not all of these are found in Ontario and in the Ring of Fire.

And now let me quote directly from the report associated with that list:

“Aluminum, for example, is pivotal in producing lightweight yet robust military aircraft and missiles, enhancing their agility and performance. Graphite is crucial for the production of main battle tanks and corvettes due to its high strength and thermal stability. In submarines, graphite is used in the construction of hulls and other structural components, significantly reducing acoustic signatures and enhancing stealth capabilities. Cobalt is another critical material, essential for producing superalloys used in jet engines, missiles, and submarines, which can withstand extreme temperatures and stress.

“The availability and secure supply of these materials are vital to maintaining NATO’s technological edge and operational readiness. Disruptions in their supply could impact the production of essential defence equipment. Identifying these key materials is NATO’s first step towards building stronger, better-protected supply chains, crucial for allied defence and security.

“This initiative is part of a road map, endorsed by NATO defence ministers in June 2024, to protect allied supply chains from disruptions that could affect NATO’s deterrence and defence. The list was informed by the NATO Industrial Advisory Group, using a defence-capability focused methodology. The public release of this list highlights NATO’s commitment to support allies in securing essential materials for the development and delivery of allied defence capabilities.”

Speaker, we need to unleash Ontario’s economy, and we need to unleash the Ring of Fire, and we need to do this because our NATO allies are counting on it.

It can take up to 15 years to open a mine, and 15 years is too long. We need to do this. We need to mine these minerals, and we need to process them right here in Ontario, creating fantastic mining and job opportunity across the supply chain, from exploration to mining to refining, in our mighty northern cities like Thunder Bay, Sault Ste. Marie, Timmins and Sudbury.

1000

In summary, Ontario’s gross domestic product is approximately \$1.1 trillion, as measured in US dollars, and that puts us in the same league as Saudi Arabia and Switzerland. In other words, the Ontario economy is as powerful as the economy of Saudi Arabia or Switzerland, and we have not yet unleashed all of the great economic potential in this province. It is time we did. It is time to protect Ontario.

Speaker, it would be rare for me to give a speech in this Legislature without making some kind of reference to the 2nd Concession of Anderdon township, because that’s where I grew up. I had previously mentioned Henry Clay, the House of Representatives Speaker who originated from Kentucky, who had boasted about the fact that he believed the Kentucky volunteers, a militia group, could conquer Canada on their own.

Well, I happen to know a little bit about Kentucky volunteers because they actually invaded Essex county. If you go down the 2nd Concession, where I grew up, and you turn left on the North Side Road and go about a kilometre, you get to River Canard. That’s where my wife grew up. At the River Canard, there’s a bridge—it’s a modern bridge that goes over the River Canard north to south, south to north—but back then it was a wooden bridge, back in the War of 1812 when Henry Clay was boasting about the Kentucky volunteers capturing Canada.

There were about 500 of them who invaded Canada at that time. They crossed from Detroit across the Detroit River. They marched south toward River Canard, and they were searching about to find out what the area looked like because they were not familiar with it, and they got to the River Canard and they found the wooden bridge over the River Canard, and they were very excited about that because they could capture the bridge and that would allow them to get their cannon from their base, which was in Sandwich Town, down south over the bridge, and attack my hometown of Amherstburg, Ontario, where the fort was located that governed all of the river traffic. Those Kentucky volunteers were ecstatic that they captured that bridge.

But this is what happened: I have told you that American efforts to annex Canada always result in massive losses to the citizens of the United States. After capturing the bridge at River Canard, news arrived from the American fort at Mackinac Island, which is north near Sault Ste. Marie, that a bunch of Canadian fur traders and lumberjacks captured the American fort at Mackinac Island. That created a big problem for the Kentucky militia volunteers located in Essex county because now the British controlled all of the river traffic all the way up from Lake Ontario through Detroit, the Detroit River through Lake Erie up to Lake Huron, all the way up to Sault Ste. Marie and Mackinac Island. That meant the British had cut off all communication between the Kentucky militia located in Essex county and their base of supplies back in Detroit. They had no choice now, having been cut off from their base of supply. They had to turn around and go back. They abandoned their positions in Essex county, they aban-

doned their invasion of Canada and retreated back across the river to Detroit.

Their retreat emboldened the First Nations of the area to make war on the American republic and, in unison with the British force, they laid siege to the fort at Detroit, forcing its surrender. The Kentucky militia was humiliated. They surrendered the fort and the supplies and marched all the way back to Kentucky.

Speaker, let us protect Ontario. Let us remain resilient and strong.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Further debate?

Ms. Chandra Pasma: I move adjournment of the debate.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): The member has moved adjournment of the debate. All those in favour? The motion is carried.

Debate adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Orders of the day? The member from Essex.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: No further business, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): The House stands recessed till 10:15.

The House recessed from 1007 to 1015.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

CADETS

Mr. Will Bouma: Speaker, it's great to see you in the Chair, and if I may add: It's an incredible opportunity to be a part of history in the making. Good to see you there, ma'am.

As many of you are aware, my riding of Brantford–Brant is home to a vibrant, motivated and active cadet movement. Today we welcome the top cadets, as chosen by their commanding officers, for their dedication, excellence, and willingness to make our community the best that it can be. The cadets of Brantford–Brant not only improve themselves but also improve the communities where they serve.

For Navy League Cadet Corps Admiral Landymore we have: Leading Cadet Reyansha Kowai and Petty Officer Second Class Rajveen Pathak. They are accompanied by Lieutenant Richard Carpenter, who is also a recipient of the King Charles III Coronation Medal through the Navy League of Canada, and Acting Sub-Lieutenant John Sinden.

For the Royal Canadian Sea Cadet Corps Admiral Nelles we have: Chief Petty Officer Second Class Julia Wood and Chief Petty Officer Second Class Andrew Parkinson, who are accompanied by Naval Cadet Steve Long.

For the 2569 Royal Canadian Army Cadets we have: Master Warrant Officer Jeffrey Harrison and Master Warrant Officer Timothy Freeman, who are accompanied by Captain Josh Jenne.

And for the Royal Canadian Air Cadets 104th Starfighter Squadron, we have Sergeant Avery Shaw and Sergeant Wilson Presscator, who are accompanied by Captain Celina Corner.

Cadets and officers, the people of Ontario salute you for your hard work and contribution to Brantford and Brant. Thank you.

HOME RENOVATION SAVINGS PROGRAM

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

M^{me} France Gélinas: And I'd love to recognize the Speaker. Congratulations—really proud, really proud.

Speaker, heating your home is essential in the cold Ontario winters and can cost you a lot of money, so the good people of Nickel Belt were so happy when the government announced the Home Renovation Savings Program to help Ontarians improve home energy efficiency and lower their heating bills. However, the money that the government offered is through a program only available to Enbridge natural gas customers. Speaker, 95% of the good people of Nickel Belt, we don't have access to natural gas. I myself live a kilometre away from the big pipeline, but I don't have access to natural gas, which means that I do not qualify for the program.

Many seniors, many people on fixed incomes would love to have a heat pump, would love to have a smart thermostat or energy-efficient fridge etc., but because we do not have access to natural gas, because we are not Enbridge customers, the provincial program is not available to us.

People, we all know that the further up you go, the colder it gets. Residents of northern Ontario have a much greater need for an energy savings program. This year alone, we made it to minus 38 degrees. Toronto doesn't see that kind of weather; we do. People living in northern Ontario and I urge the government to help all Ontarians lower their energy bills. Make the program available to all Ontarians, not just Enbridge customers.

AJAX YOUTH WELLNESS HUB

Mr. Lorne Coe: Speaker, congratulations.

Our government is making it easier and faster for youth across Durham region to access vital services that will support their overall health and well-being by launching a new youth wellness hub in Ajax. The establishment of the new youth wellness hub, operated by the Durham Community Health Centre, is an important step toward simplifying access to care for young people in the region of Durham, all within one welcoming, youth-orientated facility.

This hub will provide key mental health, substance use and primary care services, ensuring that youth have easy access to the help they need. Through the ongoing expansion of our Youth Wellness Hub Ontario network, our government is making sure that youth across the

province can easily access top-tier mental health and addictions support, whenever and wherever they need it.

The new youth wellness hub will provide a safe space for young people to feel supported and connected to a community like Ajax and other parts of the region of Durham, offering them the resources and tools to navigate life's challenges.

1020

CITY OF OTTAWA

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Further members' statements—and my genuine apology to members of the third party.

I recognize the member for Orléans.

Mr. Stephen Blais: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and congratulations.

It's been a year since the so-called new deal for Ottawa was unveiled to great fanfare: a handshake, a couple of photo-ops and a lot of talk. But 12 months later, Ottawa is still waiting for results. What have we seen since? Transit chaos; infrastructure decay; rural roads falling apart; higher property taxes; cuts to bus routes; and higher transit fares. Just weeks after the announcement, the mayor was back in the news begging for more money. That's not a deal, Madam Speaker; that's a delay.

Ottawa deserves better. It's the second-largest city in the province. It's the capital of our country. Yet under this government, it's treated like an afterthought. While the Premier and the mayor might be enjoying their bromance, Ottawa families can't pay their bills with press releases and backslapping.

Progress is measured by outcomes, not chemistry, and so far, the people of Ottawa are getting all of the charm and none of the change. It's time that this government stopped playing favourites and started treating Ottawa with the respect and resources it deserves: a real deal, a fair deal, a deal that delivers.

INTERPROVINCIAL TRADE

RING OF FIRE

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize the member for Thunder Bay–Superior North.

MPP Lise Vaugeois: Thank you very much, Speaker, and congratulations on your new role and making herstory.

I want to comment on two issues outlined in yesterday's throne speech. First, there are serious unacknowledged risks with a remove-all-barriers approach to interprovincial trade. For example, are health and safety standards considered red tape? Are food safety regulations considered red tape? And what happens to collective agreements when labour mobility is the priority, and companies can undercut each other by hiring people from provinces with weaker agreements, ultimately lowering wages and benefits for everyone?

Unfortunately, removing red tape is often about abdicating government responsibility for setting and maintaining the

standards and regulations that are there to protect the people of Ontario.

Another issue of grave concern is the government's plan to accelerate development of the Ring of Fire. Representatives from five First Nations have come to Queen's Park repeatedly to meet with the Premier and have been turned away. This does not show a commitment to consultation. But beyond this, we also need to recognize that consultation is not the same as consent, and without consent, there is nothing but the politics of bullying, and that is a politics that will ultimately hinder the development of mining.

PROACTION COPS & KIDS

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize the member for Mississauga East–Cooksville.

MPP Silvia Gualtieri: Congratulations, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, I rise today to recognize a powerful new initiative that reflects the very best of public service and community care in the wonderful riding of Mississauga East–Cooksville and the region of Peel.

On April 4, I, along with Premier Doug Ford and Minister Nina Tangri, had the honour of attending Peel Appreciation Night hosted by ProAction Cops & Kids, a celebration that brings officers and children together in skill-building and mentoring programs.

Since the launch of the Peel chapter in May 2021, ProAction Cops & Kids has funded 22 impactful programs—programs like the Peel youth basketball program, the boys-to-men mentorship initiative and female empowerment workshops. These are just a few examples of how officers have been stepping beyond their daily duties to uplift our youth. The result? Real connections; real impact.

For the residents of Mississauga East–Cooksville, this work is indeed vital. Our riding is home to vibrant, diverse communities. Initiatives like these help build trust, help build hope and create pathways to brighter futures. They show our youth that they are seen, supported and capable of greatness.

I want to sincerely thank Chief Nish Duraipappah for his leadership and continued dedication to community-led solutions. I commend ProAction Cops & Kids and every officer and volunteer involved.

Madam Speaker, together, we're building a brighter future for the youth of Mississauga East–Cooksville and Peel, because when those who serve also inspire, entire communities rise.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I would like to remind members—in particular, our new members—we have time limits on the clock that we will, from this second moving forward, be abiding by. Members' statements are a minute and 30 seconds long, and as you will hear soon, we have other time allotted sections in our proceedings that we will be sticking with.

Further members' statements?

HIGHWAY SAFETY SÉCURITÉ ROUTIÈRE

M. Guy Bourgouin: Merci, madame la Présidente, et félicitations pour votre élection. Félicitations à tous les députés qui ont remporté leur élection. For some of us, it was a bit close for comfort, but that's okay.

Je suis profondément reconnaissant d'avoir été réélu pour une troisième fois. Je suis ici pour porter la voix de mes concitoyens, la voix du Nord, dans cette législature.

Ce que nous avons entendu aux portes cette élection et ce que nous savons depuis longtemps : le plus grand enjeu auquel nous faisons face en ce moment dans le Nord, c'est le danger sur nos routes.

Last week, our roads were closed because of yet another accident with a transport that cost someone's life. Just yesterday, we got 15 centimetres of snow, and they closed the road again for precautionary measures because there are too many accidents. This is not a partisan issue.

Quand c'est rendu qu'on risque sa vie chaque fois qu'on prend la route, le monde s'en fout de quelle couleur ils ont voté.

Alors, cette saison législative, je demande au gouvernement : travaillons ensemble pour apporter des solutions.

Let's work together this session to fix our northern highways once and for all.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Member, your election was not close; it was much more of a landslide.

Further members' statements?

MAPLE HERITAGE

Mr. John Jordan: Madam Speaker, I rise today to recognize the rich maple heritage of Lanark–Frontenac–Kingston. Maple syrup production is part of our national heritage, woven into the fabric of our past, present and future. In 2009, the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada designated maple syrup as culturally significant to Canada and mounted three bronze plaques to tell this story. I am proud to say that Wheelers pancake house and maple museum located in beautiful Lanark county is home of the only one in Ontario.

The heritage of the maple industry has long been a cornerstone of our local economy, supporting countless farm families, businesses and tourism opportunities. For generations, producers have passed down their knowledge and skills, instilling a deep respect for this time-honoured craft. This heritage not only fosters a strong work ethic in young people but also ensures that the wisdom and traditions of the past continue to shape the future. Maple syrup production is a truly sustainable industry, supporting agriculture, tourism and local economies for generations to come.

Today, I recognize and celebrate the maple producers of Lanark–Frontenac–Kingston and the many businesses that support them. Their dedication ensures that this proud heritage remains a vital part of our region's identity and prosperity, preserving an iconic Canadian tradition for future generations.

CANADA FLAG LAWN SIGNS

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Members' statements? I recognize the member for Markham–Unionville.

Mr. Billy Pang: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Congratulations again.

I would like to begin by expressing my gratitude to the people of Markham–Unionville for placing their trust in me once again.

It is an honour to be re-elected as a member of provincial Parliament, and I will continue to serve our community with dedication, integrity and a strong sense of responsibility.

1030

As we all know, Ontario and Canada have been facing new challenges as a result of the US tariffs. That's why our office launched the Canada flag lawn sign initiative: to bring our communities together and show patriotism in our country during these uncertain times. Through this initiative, we deliver Canada flag lawn signs directly to residents' doors. It was a simple yet powerful way to stand strong for Canada and display our unity across Markham–Unionville.

Speaker, the response from the community was overwhelmingly positive. Families, seniors and youth came together to proudly display the maple leaf on their lawns, reminding us of the strength we have when we stand united. Together, we are strong.

It's great to be back, and I am truly humbled and honoured to continue serving the people of Markham–Unionville.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Before we begin introductions, I'd like to take a moment to draw the attention of the House to standing order 34, which provides a time limit of five minutes for the introduction of visitors proceeding. I intend to start this new session of Parliament by strictly observing this rule, and I ask all members to be aware that I will be ending the proceeding at the five-minute mark. Should members attempt to introduce additional visitors by raising points of order, I will inform them that this is also out of order in accordance with standing order 34. I ask all members to please be mindful that the five minutes allotted to the proceeding is to be shared amongst all members of this House.

Fortunately, any member who is not able to introduce their guests in the morning will have another opportunity to do so during the time for introduction of visitors in the afternoon routine.

Hon. Mike Harris: I want to wish a very, very happy birthday to my daughter Gemma today. She's turning nine. We'll get the clip, we'll show it to her later—very excited to be able to do that today. See you later, Gemma.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I want to welcome a long-time friend of mine, David Pepper, who divides his time between Ottawa and Sault Ste. Marie, and who worked

together with me as a staffer in Parliament Hill in the 1980s. Welcome to Queen's Park.

M. Stephen Blais: Je voudrais souhaiter la bienvenue à l'École secondaire publique Gisèle-Lalonde à L'assemblée législative aujourd'hui. J'ai hâte de les voir plus tard dans la journée.

Merci aux deux enseignantes qui ont accompagné les étudiants à Queen's Park, Hanan Maanane et Souad Ben Chahra, et tous les autres qui ont rendu cette visite possible.

Bienvenue à Queen's Park.

Ms. Jess Dixon: It gives me great pleasure to welcome one of our new pages Nathaniel Mollison; his mom, Thanh; his dad, Mark; and his brother Andrew. Nathaniel comes from my old school St John's-Kilmarnock.

Nathaniel, welcome. I hope you enjoy your stay here.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: It's my pleasure to welcome Louise Morin and family and friends today. Louise works in my constituency office and does amazing work. Welcome, Louise.

Mr. Adil Shamji: I'd like to welcome the Armenian National Committee of Toronto, notably co-chairs Katya Derhovagimian and Hrag Dadayan.

I'd like to encourage all members to join us at the lunch reception commemorating the 110th anniversary of the Armenian genocide.

Hon. Victor Fedeli: I want to recognize Dan and the folks from the Ontario Chamber of Commerce. They've been long advocates of the removal of interprovincial trade. You'll hear more from us later today.

MPP Wayne Gates: I'd like to welcome Ahmed. He's waving up there in the corner. It's the first time he has ever been to Queen's Park. Welcome to Queen's Park, my friend. He's an intern in our office.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Introduction of visitors? Wow.

Interjection: We're scared of you.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Oh, there is one. I recognize the Minister of Natural Resources.

Hon. Mike Harris: I see we've got two minutes left on the clock, so I'll make it quick. I did just want to welcome a great contingent that is here from Ducks Unlimited. They're our great partners in conservation. I'm looking forward to meeting them a little later this afternoon.

INDEPENDENT MEMBERS

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I would like to address the House regarding the participation of the independent members.

While the current Legislature marks the return to a configuration consisting of three recognized parties, it nonetheless has amongst its membership two MPPs elected as candidates of the Green Party of Ontario, and one MPP elected without party affiliation. None of these members belong to recognized parties, defined by standing order 3 as a party with a membership consisting of at least 10% of the total seats in the House, which is

currently 12 seats. Accordingly, these MPPs are independent members for procedural purposes.

The standing orders provide the Speaker the discretion to permit independent members to participate in certain proceedings, notably question period, members' statements and during certain debates, pursuant to standing orders 35(g), 33(c) and 24(d) respectively. To exercise this discretion, I aim to ensure that each individual independent member would have the same opportunities for participation as any other individual member of the Legislature if recognized party status were not a factor. I wish to now explain to the House how I have chosen to facilitate the independent members' participation in these proceedings.

In determining how best to accommodate the three independent members, I have drawn on the precedents of the 42nd and 43rd Parliaments, which both included large groups of independent members. The approaches taken in these two previous Parliaments are described in the Journals for July 16, 2018, (at pages 18 to 19), July 19, 2018, (at pages 26 to 28) and August 10, 2022, (at pages 31 to 33).

The first substantive business before the House is the debate on the address in reply to the speech from the throne, or throne speech debate, to which standing order 44(a) allocates a total of 12 hours. Using the same mathematical approach that was taken in the 43rd Parliament, in a 12-hour debate, each of the 123 individual members of this Legislature could expect to be allotted approximately six minutes of speaking time. Accordingly, the three independent members will each be granted one six-minute allotment of speaking time for this particular debate.

I will take a similar approach to debates on second and third reading of government bills and on substantive government motions. The allotment of speaking time for individual members in the previous two Parliaments was calculated based on the assumption that a typical debate is at least six and a half hours long, as that is the point at which the government can allocate time to the remaining stages of the debate, pursuant to standing order 50. Members can therefore reasonably expect that debates on second reading of government bills and on substantive motions will last for at least 6.5 hours, which breaks down to about three minutes of speaking time per individual member.

The three independent members will thus be allotted three minutes for all debates on second and third reading of government bills and on substantive government motions. As was the case in the two preceding Parliaments, this time may be banked. If the members do not wish to participate in a certain debate, their three-minute allotments will be recorded in a time bank which they may draw on in future debates. This will allow them to make longer speeches in debates that may be of greater importance to them. Over time, this will ensure that these members have approximately the same opportunities to participate in debates as any other individual member.

I have taken a similar approach to determining the allotments for question period and members' statements. For these two proceedings, I have calculated the frequency with which each individual eligible member can expect to participate by either making a statement or asking a question. I have also considered the best way to incorporate the participation of the independent members into the usual routines of the House in a way that will be predictable to anticipate and straightforward for the Chair to facilitate.

1040

During question period, I am prepared to recognize each independent member once per eight-day period. When recognized, an independent member will have the opportunity to ask one question and one supplementary. Similarly, each independent member will be able to make a member's statement once per eight-day period.

Given that the House will not be sitting next week as per standing order 7(b)(ii), nor on Monday, April 28, due to the federal election as per standing order 9(i), we will begin this cycle on Tuesday, April 29, with questions and statements from independent members on the first Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday of the eight-day period. I believe that following a repeating cycle that allows for the recognition of one independent member during question period and during members' statements on those three consecutive days, followed by a gap of one sitting week, is a reasonable and fair way to respect and ensure the participation of the independent members of this House. This provides a consistent and predictable flow to both of the daily members' statements and question period proceedings, and is also suitably proportional to the independents' membership in the House, neither favouring nor penalizing when it comes to the overall opportunities for participation.

I would like to remind the three independent members that they are required to inform the Chair in advance when they intend to participate in any of the proceedings I have addressed today.

While I have exercised the discretion accorded to me by the standing orders to arrange the participation of the independent members in this way, I would like to remind the House that it is the master of its own proceedings. If, at any time, the House might have any recommendations regarding the participation of the independent members, I would welcome that direction going forward.

I thank you all for your attention to this matter.

44TH PARLIAMENT

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Point of order? I recognize the Premier of Ontario.

Hon. Doug Ford: Well, Madam Speaker—I love that word, “Madam Speaker.” Congratulations. It's amazing. I still can't believe it's taken us to 2025 to get to this point, but the first woman ever to be Speaker—you're going to go down in history. You're blazing a new trail, and congratulations on that.

I also want to congratulate all the members that won. No matter what political stripe you come from, we all have a common cause: to serve your constituents, to fight against Donald Trump's tariffs. We welcome you aboard on fighting the tariffs and coming up with new ideas, constructive ideas to create opportunities here in Ontario. There's a battle like we've never seen before, an economic battle, and I just welcome each and every one of you for constructive ideas.

Again, welcome to the new members, congratulations to the members that won again and let the games begin. Thank you.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize the leader of the third party on a point—

Mr. John Fraser: Thank you as well, Speaker, and I wanted, on behalf of our caucus, to congratulate you as the first woman to be the Speaker here in the Legislature of Ontario. We're all very proud of it. We're looking forward to it. We're closer, so I guess I'll have to be on my best behaviour.

I do want to say welcome to the new members of all parties. It can really accentuate the differences—elections—between us. But I think there's one thing that the Premier and I can agree on today: that this election, it's brought us closer together, as you can see right here. I'm hoping that he's looking forward to seeing as much of me as I am of him.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): It's now time for question period.

QUESTION PERIOD

EMPLOYMENT SUPPORTS

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize the leader of His Majesty's loyal opposition.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Thank you very much, Speaker. I'd like to start by congratulating you again, Speaker, on your election. You have made herstory, as we all know.

I want to also join my colleagues in welcoming everyone back, and some of you for the first time, here into the chamber. Welcome back, and congratulations.

For me, it is absolutely an honour and a privilege to be able to stand here again as the elected official opposition leader in Ontario, so thank you very much.

My question is for the Premier. Trump's tariffs have absolutely caused enormous uncertainty and fear in Ontario, especially for those workers and their families in tariff-exposed industries like auto and steel. Some 28,000 people in Ontario actually lost their jobs this March, in March 2025, with thousands more now on the line in places like Oshawa and Windsor and Ingersoll.

People are going to need help to weather this storm, and because we didn't hear it in the throne speech yesterday, I want to ask the Premier specifically what steps the Premier has taken to ensure that there are strong income protec-

tions in place to get workers through the turmoil that's ahead.

Hon. Doug Ford: I just want to thank the Leader of the Opposition for that question. I look forward to her supporting our agenda as we move forward to create more jobs—the \$11 billion that we put in for a security net to make sure that we support businesses and employees and families. And we're going to continue moving forward.

Today, we have the privilege of having two Premiers come to our province, Premier Holt from New Brunswick and Premier Houston from Nova Scotia, to sign an MOU about the free trade agreement. We are creating history today, making sure that we get rid of all the exceptions right across the country. We have two already signing today; there's going to be 10 more. This is going to add another \$200 billion—

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Response?

Hon. Doug Ford: I'm sorry.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Response?

Hon. Doug Ford: Oh, sorry—8%, to the GDP. We look forward to your support in making sure we welcome all the other 10 provinces and territories today.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Question?

Ms. Marit Stiles: While I do appreciate a lot of the language in the throne speech yesterday, and I do think it spoke to the fears that Ontarians are feeling right now, but we need to see action. We need to see the government stepping up and stopping the loss, particularly, of jobs today.

Instead, what we're seeing is companies that are loading up. They're loading up their trucks with tools, with equipment, and ready to move themselves. In fact, it's the workers themselves that have been forced, in places like Windsor, to blockade those trucks. We know that it is Ontarians that have invested their hard-working tax dollars into many of those companies we're talking about. So as Trump is setting his targets on the auto sector, for example, I want Ontarians to know that those investments are going to stay here in Ontario.

So my question to the Premier is: Will the government prevent American companies from stripping equipment and resources from our communities?

Hon. Doug Ford: To answer your question directly, how we stop it is by making ourselves more competitive: create the environment and the conditions for companies to come and invest here.

I think you were having a little bit of a déjà vu seven years ago when companies were leaving. Let me tell you some stats here. There's been over \$70 billion in investment. StatsCan just came out a month ago saying there's over a million more people that have jobs that didn't have jobs under your leadership. Did you know, last week alone, because of the hard work of our Minister of Economic Development and Trade, that there was \$1 billion invested right here in Ontario last week alone, creating 1,700 jobs. There was another announcement of \$656 million being invested again.

I challenge each and every one of you from the Greens, from the Liberals, from the NDP: Please, once in seven

years—you've never come to me once to say there's a job here, there's a company that wants to invest—

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: Well, Speaker, that's an unfortunate tone coming from the Premier, who says he wants to talk about collaboration.

I asked two very specific questions that people are asking me. One was on what income supports they can expect if there are lost jobs; the other one was, very specifically, what are you going to do to stop companies from moving down to the south right now, moving their equipment down there? That's happening right now.

1050

Look, Donald Trump's tariffs aren't just worrying people about their jobs today. They're also worried about their financial security in the future. Hard-working Ontarians have contributed to their pensions with the expectation that they're going to be able to retire with some degree of dignity and financial security. When Sears went belly up, we remember that it was workers who lost those pensions while the executives cashed out. So we are now seeing layoffs already, tariffs threatening to close major manufacturing facilities and even the recent liquidation of Hudson's Bay. I mean, workers are worried about their pensions. They need to know they're going to be protected.

So my question to the Premier is, will the Premier reassure Ontarians that the provincial government is going to step up and protect those pensions?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Response? I recognize the Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development.

Hon. David Piccini: I just want to start by thanking the good people of Northumberland—Peterborough South and thank the Leader of the Opposition for that question.

Speaker, for a decade, we sat on the sidelines under the previous Liberal and NDP government and watched investments go anywhere but Ontario. Under this Premier—he got on the field and played, and we've attracted billions in investments. Let me tell you what that means for workers. I was down in Windsor quite often over the past number of months: \$14 million per week in payroll going to good union jobs—good union jobs.

We also invested in skills development that resulted in new training centres, new training programs that have helped people get meaningful employment. We met with the Automotive Industries Association—and I've got stories to share there—Unifor workers just yesterday with the Premier and building trades that have resulted in thousands of good union jobs. That's why—

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Further questions?

GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS

Ms. Marit Stiles: Wow, plus ça change, right? Not much is changing here.

Back to the Premier with my second question: While we're dealing with threats from south of the border, people

all over Ontario are re-evaluating how we spend our money. We're proudly choosing Ontario-made, Canadian-made products over American products. People want to know that their money is going towards supporting our farmers, our communities, our workers. Ontarians want to know that their government is actually doing the same thing.

So I wonder if the Premier will commit to re-evaluating the very many contracts that his government has made with American companies in favour of Canadian alternatives.

Hon. Doug Ford: To the Leader of the Opposition: Madam Speaker, you know we're fixing that. We do over \$30 billion from the Ontario public service. We're making sure that Canadian companies—Ontario first, Canadian companies second—have an opportunity to bid, no matter if it's computers or software that we've saved over a billion dollars on so far through Supply Ontario, or if it's manufacturers that we're encouraging to come here.

We found out that we don't manufacture steel beams here in Ontario or anywhere across the country. We're bringing a steel-beam-manufacturer company here to create more jobs. Aluminum cans, beer cans, soda cans, soup cans and everything else—we're attracting a company to come here to start producing cans. That's two—just a billion dollars, each sector. And we're bringing—as simple as private label cereal. We don't manufacture it here.

We're going to make sure we attract these companies and—

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Supplementary?

Ms. Marit Stiles: I mean, what I'd like to know is whether American companies are also going to get to bid on these contracts that are using Ontarians' taxpayer dollars.

I want you just to imagine for a minute that you're a worker who has just lost their job because of some tariff that's been imposed, and then you have to go get social assistance and you're showing up at a Staples, an American company. Ontario tax dollars should be creating good jobs here in Ontario, not lining the pockets of American shareholders. From Staples to 7-Eleven, a lot of Ontario's taxpayer dollars have been doing just that.

So my question, again, to the Premier: Will he ensure that what we make in Ontario, we buy from Ontario too?

Hon. Doug Ford: Again, we have banned American companies bidding on the \$30 billion. We've banned American companies on the \$200 billion of infrastructure.

You know, as I always say to the Americans, it's not the American people; there's one person causing this problem and that's President Trump. We are not the problem. The problem is China. China is shipping in cheap parts through Mexico. Mexico is not playing fair in the sandbox, slapping made in Mexico stickers on, costing American and Canadian jobs.

I believe in the Am-Can fortress. Making sure we put a ring around the two countries. We'll be the most powerful, the richest, the wealthiest, most prosperous two nations in the entire world. That's our message to our American

friends. We're going to get a deal. We're going to keep fighting for Canadian and Ontario jobs.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Supplementary?

Ms. Marit Stiles: With respect, what we need in Ontario is a buy Ontario strategy—a commitment to local procurement and investment in our communities.

Projects that receive public funding should have a requirement to include Ontario workers and businesses, and that does not exist currently in anything that we've seen from this government.

The vehicles for the Ontario Line aren't even being made in Ontario; they're being made in the US right now. There are existing contracts with companies like Staples and 7-Eleven that this Premier won't even commit to reviewing.

Ontarians want to know that their government shares their values of buying Ontario. To the Premier: Will the Premier increase Canadian-content requirements for all future public projects?

Hon. Doug Ford: I'm not too sure if the Leader of the Opposition has heard of BOBI. I think you've heard of BOBI; at least you should have heard of BOBI, Building Ontario Businesses Initiative.

We're creating the plan for companies to come here and invest—again, the great work of my Minister of Economic Development and Trade, travelling around the world, attracting companies, and we are just so proud of the job that he has done, our team has done, attracting \$70 billion of investment. We have another \$70 billion on the table right now. We want to make sure that we land them.

Guess what? The number one thing is cutting red tape, cutting regulations, lowering taxes. And I get it, you don't believe in that. We do believe in cutting taxes to attract jobs, which will create jobs for people that might not have one.

The training on the Skills Development Fund—we added an additional billion dollars to make sure someone has a skill when we do \$222 billion of infrastructure. Until we have the electricians and the masons and the carpenters and every other trade union out there that—

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Further questions?

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Mr. John Fraser: My question is to the Premier. Ontarians need to have, especially right now, confidence in their government. The New York Times has done what this government hasn't done—they haven't done their job—dig into Therme's credentials. What they found is stunning. A company with one small spa, only €1 million in equity, and an interconnected web of shell companies. Yet, somehow, they convinced the Premier that they had a global track record. It didn't just stretch the truth, it led the Premier down the garden path, and Infrastructure Ontario signed right off on it.

Why did the Premier green-light a 95-year deal with a company that inflated its portfolio and couldn't pass a basic financial sniff test?

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

Hon. Kinga Surma: Therme passed the financial test that was done by the world-renowned arm's-length agency in Infrastructure Ontario. Now, I think that the professionals and the experts at Infrastructure Ontario have far more experience doing a financial test than the member opposite.

Speaker, 4,700 new jobs will be created during the redevelopment of Ontario Place, and another 2,000 permanent jobs will be created once Ontario Place is redeveloped. Not only are we creating jobs but we're also creating a wonderful place for families to visit. Nothing is more important than protecting our economy, protecting jobs and standing behind the Premier as we fight for Ontario and fight for our country.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Supplementary?

Mr. John Fraser: We now know that bidders had to sign non-disclosure agreements and those non-disclosure agreements allowed the government to choose any company it wanted, qualified or not, bid or not, and then call that a procurement process.

1100

The winner was a firm with no real experience, no transparency and no money. Therme didn't win a contract; they won a prize, and the deck was stacked behind closed doors.

Will the Premier finally admit this was not a competitive process and explain why Infrastructure Ontario ran a done deal rather than a fair one?

Hon. Kinga Surma: We've done this dance already. We've had the Integrity Commissioner review. We've had audits done already. Infrastructure Ontario is a world-renowned agency, full of professionals and experts that have built hospitals in the province of Ontario, highways—that are expanding our subway system right now by 50% in the city of Toronto and are doing a great job for us.

We are creating jobs. We are supporting good, well-paying jobs at Ontario Place throughout its redevelopment, and 2,000 new permanent jobs once Ontario Place is done. Families from all over Ontario can come and enjoy themselves by the water.

We will continue to support and protect jobs as we fight against the tariffs and continue to stand behind the Premier as he fights for Ontarians—and has been throughout the months.

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

Mr. John Fraser: Speaker, it's clear that the Premier has friends with benefits, and the benefits are a luxury spa on the crown jewel of Ontario.

So it's a luxury spa for the Premier's friends and hallway health care for everybody else. It kind of feels like greenbelt 2.0, doesn't it? A small group of people are benefiting to the tune of \$2.1 billion on public land.

I'll give you a chance, Premier. Will the Premier just cut this deal like he did with Starlink and the greenbelt? Just do the right thing, Premier.

Hon. Kinga Surma: No, we will not, because during the current economic conditions, and while we continue to fight our neighbours to the south to protect Canada and Ontario, we will do everything possible to support and create jobs here for the hard-working people of Ontario.

Let's talk about Infrastructure Ontario's record. Let's talk about the 50 hospitals that they are building and expanding in the province of Ontario, such as Trillium, for example—the largest hospital in the province's, country's history.

We will continue to support Infrastructure Ontario and the work that they do, and we will continue to create, support jobs and support the Premier while he fights for Canada.

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Mr. John Fraser: Speaker, \$2.1 billion is a lot of money. You can do a lot with \$2.1 billion. And I might want to remind the minister that they cleared out the island and started construction before Therme got the investment they need to build. They don't have the money they need to do it, and you're already starting the work.

On top of that, let's take the number down: \$800 million. That's how much you're spending on a parking garage—of people's money, for a company that had no money, that had no portfolio, that had no business doing that. You gave it to them.

What would \$800 million do? Well, the hospitals that the member talked about—that would actually fund the local share for all those hospitals. That's what it would do.

How can the Premier expect people to have confidence in him when he's spending all that money for a foreign company on a parking garage, when their local share—

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

Hon. Kinga Surma: I find it incredibly hard to believe—*Interjections.*

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

I apologize to the minister. You'll be able to make your response with full time.

I will ask the members of the House to come to order.

I recognize the Minister of Infrastructure for a response.

Hon. Kinga Surma: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I find it incredibly difficult to understand the angle here. We are dealing with a difficult economy, we are dealing with a tariff war to the south, and the Liberals propose eliminating and cutting jobs for Ontario families. That is not what Ontarians need right now. What Ontarians want—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Order.

You may continue.

Hon. Kinga Surma: What Ontarians want is a leader, a leader that will negotiate, that will fight for this country, that will fight for Ontarians, that will protect jobs and fight for all of that. And we have that. The Premier won a third

majority. Why? Because he stood up for Canada, he stood up for Ontario, and he's protecting jobs.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Supplementary?

Mr. John Fraser: It looks like the Premier's new speech writer is writing for the minister.

Speaker, back, through you—

Interjections.

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

Interjections.

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

Mr. John Fraser: I got you all talking, eh?

Yesterday in the throne speech, the Premier said that taxpayers' money belongs to taxpayers. Well, apparently not \$2.1 billion of it. That \$2.1 billion, that would pay for a tax cut the Premier promised in 2018 and then again in 2022. But in yesterday's throne speech? No relief like that for families, but a luxury spa for his friends.

How is the Premier justifying a process that wasn't a process, that was done behind closed doors, that rewarded a foreign company with \$2.1 billion of taxpayers' money while he won't make good on his promise to cut income taxes in this province, a promise he's made multiple times?

Hon. Kinga Surma: I think Ontarians recognize that he's doing exactly what he's supposed to do. They just gave the man a third majority. We are back in this House, we are leading this province, we are running the government and we will continue to protect Ontario, to protect Canada, to fight for the interests of Ontarians, to rebuild our economy, to make it more resilient, to invest in energy, to build the infrastructure that the people depend on, and we will continue to support him and stand behind him throughout this time. Thank you.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Supplementary?

Mr. John Fraser: Again, \$2.1 billion—it's a lot of money. Taxpayers have a right to know the answers, and the Premier and the government aren't willing to do that, aren't willing to open the books. As I said, the \$2.1 billion, that would have paid for the tax cut the Premier has promised multiple times. I hope we see one in the budget; maybe somebody can let us know whether or not that's going to happen at some point today.

Mr. Adil Shamji: Don't hold your breath.

Mr. John Fraser: Thank you.

Mr. Adil Shamji: Sorry.

Mr. John Fraser: You made me lose my train of thought. There we go.

Interjections.

Mr. John Fraser: On my own side, can you believe it?

The Premier also promised to end hallway health care. That didn't happen. The \$2.1 billion could have helped there. He promised he'd fix health care; 2.5 million Ontarians don't have a family doctor. So who's the Premier in this for? His friends, or Ontarians?

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

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: I'm going to have to go to the pharmacy and get some earwax, because I thought I

heard that the Liberals want to cut taxes. They had 15 years, and you know what they did? They raised taxes, they raised fees. And you know what they got for that? Credit rating downgrades.

We've been cutting taxes, cutting fees, and we've been getting credit rating upgrades, which is lowering borrowing costs and helping us to invest in social services and the economy. I look forward to the member opposite going to the pharmacy and getting some earwax for me so I can hear him correctly.

HOUSING

Ms. Catherine Fife: My question is to the Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade.

This week the CMHC reported that housing starts in Ontario are down nearly 40% from the same time last year. Housing starts in Ontario have fallen every year since 2021. When home construction is down, that means employment in skilled trades and residential construction is down as well. No skilled trades person or residential construction worker in Ontario should be underemployed in the middle of a housing crisis. Unemployment in this province is at 7%. Will the province make direct investments to build homes and get people working in this time of great economic uncertainty?

1110

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Response? I recognize the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Hon. Rob Flack: I think we all know that—and we've talked about it today already—we've hit a wall of uncertainty in this province. The Trump tariffs are punitive. They're hurting the cost of building, and that has certainly caused chaos. Our Premier is doing a great job on limiting it.

Our single, focused job is to create the conditions for building to get kick-started again. We're going to work with our municipal partners. We're going to work with the federal government. We're going to look at any idea or bold initiative to get shovels in the ground faster. We're going to have a relentless focus to improve the time it takes to get a building permit, to lower taxes and lower DCs where possible, and finally create the talent pool and keep the talent pool in place.

Working with my Minister of Labour friend right here, we're going to get the job, we're going to protect Ontario, and we're going to get the homes built.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Supplementary?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Housing starts in the province of Ontario are at 1955 levels. This is a missed opportunity for all of us. Unfortunately, housing starts are continuing to fall in Ontario at a time when people need new, affordable housing more than ever. We all know that new public investment in affordable housing is the only solution to homelessness. They need homes in Ontario.

We also need stimulus spending on housing to keep people working during the trade war and to provide certainty for home builders and suppliers. The Trump administration has slapped tariffs on Canadian home building

materials that Ontario workers could be using to build new Ontario homes.

Will the government make direct investments in affordable housing to sustain demand for Canadian natural resources and building materials, get people working and get homes built? This is actually an opportunity for the government to fill this gap—

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Response? I recognize the Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development.

Hon. David Piccini: I appreciate the member's question. You want to know what we can do to get workers working? Well, let's look at some of the new training centres we've invested in to help good, union-paying jobs—jobs across Ontario.

I would challenge that member. I just got off the phone with one of the locals in her region who spoke to me about development charges, who spoke to me about new permits: Speaker, six weeks to get a signed permit for the new training centre to train the next generation of workers. You know who backs that kind of dithering and delay? It's when we don't support streamlining our permits.

I challenge that member: support us—streamlining, regulatory predictability, so we can get shovels in the ground that unleash our economic potential. Get good workers working—the very workers she claims to speak about.

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize the member for Don Valley West.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and congrats. It's wonderful that we will finally have a woman Speaker's portrait hanging on these walls.

We're only three days into this 44th Parliament and already this government's bad deals are in the news. This morning, the New York Times published an article stating that a foreign company won a multi-billion dollar deal based on wrong information. The company claimed to have multiple spas across Europe, and yet it turns out they only had one. The AG report showed that this government's bidding process was flawed and unfair, but this is unbelievable. It makes you wonder why this government doesn't know how to do its due diligence on Therme.

My question to the Premier: How does a government in charge of the largest economy in Canada let this happen?

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

Hon. Kinga Surma: Again, I'll repeat it. I'll repeat it 10 times over if that's how you want to utilize your question. They passed the financial test by an arm's-length agency, world-renowned Infrastructure Ontario, that is filled with professionals and experts in the field.

But while they talk about that, we're going to talk about what's important to Ontarians. What's important to Ontarians is providing stability and consistency during this difficult time. What's important to Ontarians is providing that support to our Premier, who is leading the nation in

tariff negotiations to protect this country, to protect Ontario, to protect Ontario families and to protect the jobs here in Ontario.

We're focusing on rebuilding our economy, removing interprovincial barriers so that we can improve trade.

Madam Speaker, while they talk about that, let's talk about rebuilding the economy and—

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Question?

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Speaker, do you know what's important to Ontarians? A government that you can trust.

We now know, from the New York Times, that “the government could choose whatever company it wanted, whether or not it had met the bidding requirements—or even submitted a proposal.”

We already knew from the AG report that the process was flawed; that the company's financial position was weak, with only €1 million in equity; but this government still went ahead and signed a multi-billion dollar deal with Therme, making them rich, and maybe others, on the backs of Ontario taxpayers.

This deal is the grift that keeps on grifting. Why would this Premier, who was a businessman, give a multi-billion dollar deal to a company without checking them out?

My question to the Premier: When will he admit that his deal with Therme was a mistake and fix it?

Hon. Kinga Surma: Madam Speaker, what we are doing is we are rebuilding and redeveloping a site that was left abandoned by the very members that are asking the question. Concerts had to be cancelled because of flooding issues, Madam Speaker. The truth is, the site was once enjoyed by Ontarians, back in the 1970s and the 1980s, but it was abandoned, and this government is rebuilding it.

We will be creating 4,700 jobs throughout the construction. We will have 2,000 permanent jobs. We will also have a wonderful place with 50 acres of public realm space for families to enjoy, and it's under construction, Madam Speaker. I can't wait until it's done, and I can't wait to have a big celebration and invite all of Ontario to come and enjoy Lake Ontario.

INTERPROVINCIAL TRADE

Mrs. Michelle Cooper: My question is for the Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade. Tariffs from the US have reminded the world of the importance of free trade. For the past four decades, Canada and the US have had a strong trading relationship guided by successive free trade agreements. Free trade has brought jobs, investment and affordable North American goods to families and businesses on both sides of the border, but unfortunately, the threat of US tariffs on Canadian goods undermines our trading relationship.

The Premier and our government continue to push the US to remove the tariffs, but we also need to look at ways that we can boost free trade within Canada. Speaker, can the minister share with this House why we need to remove interprovincial trade barriers, and what our government is doing to address this issue?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Response? I recognize the Associate Minister of Small Business.

Hon. Nina Tangri: Thank you and congratulations, Madam Speaker.

Congratulations to the member for Eglinton–Lawrence, and thank you for the question.

Speaker, for too long, interprovincial trade barriers in Canada have driven up costs, discouraged investment and harmed Canada's economic growth.

Internal trade barriers can add up to 14.5% to the cost of everything we buy here in Canada, making Canadian-made goods more expensive for Canadian families and for businesses. By removing these barriers, we will see Canada boost its national growth by 4% to 8% annually, which would represent a potential gain of over \$200 billion per year.

We need to take bold and ambitious action to tear these costly barriers down. As the largest interprovincial leader and trader in Canada, Ontario is determined to lead that charge, and we look forward to sharing these details of our plans this afternoon.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Question?

Mrs. Michelle Cooper: Thank you to the minister for the response.

1120

As our government puts forward an ambitious plan to tackle interprovincial trade barriers, we hope that more provinces and territories will follow our lead and do the same. These are important actions that will strengthen our country's economy and lower costs for households and businesses, but the uncertainty of tariffs still looms large over the global economy.

I have heard from businesses and constituents in my riding who are worried about what this might mean for them. These are businesses who have been in Ontario for years and have consistently expanded and grown their workforce in our province. Now, with tariffs, they are struggling to plan and make prudent investment decisions.

Can the minister provide an update on what our government is doing to ensure Ontario remains competitive during these uncertain times?

Hon. Nina Tangri: Thanks again for the question.

Speaker, our government has always worked to ensure Ontario is the best place for businesses to invest and expand. We've cut 550 pieces of red tape. We've lowered the cost of doing business here in Ontario by \$8 billion. As a result, we've seen tens of billions of dollars of investment flow into this province, which has propelled businesses to create over a million new jobs since we took office.

Now, US tariffs threaten to undermine the progress we've made. They have created chaos and uncertainty in the global economy, which has resulted in markets shedding off trillions of dollars in value and plunging consumer and business confidence levels across the province and around the world. We can assure businesses and workers in Ontario that this Premier and this government will continue to push the US to remove these tariffs

and do everything to support you during these challenging times.

PUBLIC HEALTH

MPP Robin Lennox: Good morning, Madam Speaker. This question is for the Premier. We are seeing report after report about measles outbreaks across our province. The numbers are unprecedented, with 155 new cases just last week. This is not where we should be. Measles is highly contagious but highly preventable. But too many children are still unvaccinated, vaccine misinformation is rampant, and thousands of students are at risk of suspension.

We need to urgently provide support to public health units and family doctors to ramp up vaccination campaigns to prevent more outbreaks. Why haven't we heard of a plan from our province?

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

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Thank you, Speaker. Great to see you in the chair.

To the new member from Hamilton Centre, congratulations on your victory. I hope that we can work together.

It's important that you raise this issue because, obviously, measles is a 100% preventable illness. As a result, we have been working very closely with the Chief Medical Officer of Health. In fact, in March 2023, he was sending out memos reminding public health units that they had to refocus their efforts to ensure childhood vaccines were caught up.

That work is ongoing. We have ensured that our public health units have all of the support they need. They have additional vaccines when they need it. They have additional opportunities to do those very important awareness campaigns.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Supplementary?

MPP Robin Lennox: No parent wants to see their child get sick, or worse, from a preventable disease like measles. And now, more than ever, Ontarians need an accessible, publicly funded and publicly delivered health care system. Public health care is an essential service and a core Canadian value.

Yesterday, during the Premier's throne speech, he said that this government would "prioritize patients and their health above ... dogmatic ideology." Can the Premier please clarify which dogmatic ideology he was referring to?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Respectfully, I'm not sure what ideology the member is talking about. But I can tell you, every single investment we have made in public health units across Ontario—every time we put it in our budgets, the NDP vote it down.

We have had investments in public health units across Ontario since 2018—20% increases to ensure our public health units have the support and investments they need. We will continue to ensure that caregivers—that parents, that educators—understand the importance of vaccines, but I also respectfully ask the member to look at her caucus

and say, “Why are we voting against investments in our public health units?”

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Mr. Stephen Blais: My question is for the Premier. Madam Speaker, the Premier’s own analysts at Infrastructure Ontario flagged Therme’s weak finances. As the minister has already explained to us, the analysts at Infrastructure Ontario are world-renowned. This is what they noted: They noted that Therme wasn’t cash-flow positive. They noted that they had low liquidity, and they noted that they had no real business footprint. But instead of walking away, the Premier’s government leaned in, investing public dollars and giving away public land. Now more than ever, we need a government that is focused on strong financial fundamentals.

Madam Speaker, why did the Premier and his minister ignore every financial red flag and still push forward with a deal that any reasonable government would have shut down on day one?

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

Hon. Kinga Surma: Again, they passed the financial test. We’ve had several auditor reports. We’ve even had an Integrity Commissioner report. But, Speaker, we are here; we are constructing; we are rebuilding Ontario Place. And do you know what’s most important? Yes, the jobs; of course, the jobs. Of course, the fact that we’ll have a wonderful place to go, that all families can enjoy. But also, we’re going to make it a self-sustaining site. We will have tenants that will be paying the province in order to be there. That way we know Ontario Place will not be left to fall apart, like it was under the Liberals. It will continue to be there for families to enjoy. It will continue to be there for new workers that will work on the site.

We will continue to invest in Ontario Place. We will continue to protect jobs, and we will continue to stand up for Ontario families every—

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Question?

Mr. Stephen Blais: My supplemental is also for the Premier.

Let’s be honest: This isn’t a one-off. We’ve seen this government bend the rules for their friends before, from the greenbelt to ServiceOntario centres. At every turn, this government blurs the line between public service and private interest.

Therme wasn’t chosen because it was the best choice; it was chosen because the government made sure no one else stood a chance.

As the government considers billions in stimulus and support spending, will the Premier just finally admit that there’s a broader pattern where insiders win and Ontarians are left footing the bill?

Hon. Kinga Surma: Madam Speaker, there were over 30 participants in the process. Therme was recommended by Infrastructure Ontario, an arm’s-length agency. We’ve done Auditor General reports; we’ve had Integrity Commissioner reports. What’s most important to Ontarians

today is to protect Ontario, to fight for Ontario, to fight for Canada, to protect jobs. That is what our government is doing. That is why the people elected us. That is why the people elected the Premier, because the Premier has been leading the nation in this fight. He has been relentless. He is making extraordinary changes, leading the way to removing barriers for interprovincial trade that will boost our economies here, especially in Ontario. And we will continue to focus on that: the economy, protecting jobs and standing behind the Premier as he fights for all Canadians.

ONTARIO ECONOMY

MPP Mohamed Firin: My question is for the Minister of Energy and Mines. Ontario workers are worried: The US is talking about new tariffs—big ones. And that puts jobs here at risk—steel jobs, mining jobs, energy jobs. We can’t count on Washington to protect us. We need to protect ourselves.

1130

Speaker, Ontario has the tools. We have clean power, we have critical minerals and we have the workers ready to build, but we need to use what we have to stand strong, to build up our economy and protect our future.

Can the minister please tell this House what our government is doing to protect Ontario’s industries from tariffs and to grow a strong, self-reliant economy right here at home?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Response? I recognize the Minister of Energy and Mines.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Let me thank and congratulate the member from York South–Weston, the first Somali Canadian elected in our party history. We are proud of your achievements.

I want to join my members and our government in really reaffirming that with the threats of President Trump we are standing strong and we are ensuring we’re buying Canadian, built by Canadian workers, using Canadian materials to lead the way.

It’s why we issued a directive to all Canadian utilities in Ontario to buy Canadian. It’s why we put in place a procurement policy, led by the Treasury Board minister, that ensures that everything we do in government, to the extent humanly possible, is built by and supported by Canadian workers. It’s why just yesterday in Ottawa we reaffirmed this to our partners in Estonia and other eastern European markets, where we’re trying to get clean nuclear tech exported into that part of the world.

It’s why, Madam Speaker, we are working to get our critical minerals to market, to end the human-rights-abusing regimes of China and Russia, who dominate the space, to use democratic Canadian resources to power the world. This is our moment as Canadians. We’re going to lean in, buy Canadian, built by Canadians.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Question?

MPP Mohamed Firin: I want to thank the minister for his answer and his strong leadership. Western allies are searching for dependable access to critical minerals. Time

and time again the Premier has made it clear Canada is not the threat. The real threat is China.

Other countries and regions are moving faster. They're cutting red tape, they're building the roads, the rails and the energy systems to get their minerals to market. We have the resources, we have the workers and we have the will, but we need to get moving now. Canada could add billions if we sped up permits and got the mines open faster.

Madam Speaker, what is our government doing to speed up permits and make Ontario the best place in the world to mine, refine and build the clean technologies of the future?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: The member is right. We, I think, accept that it cannot be business as usual with the election of President Trump. When we see Western Australia, a Commonwealth ally that we have so many similarities to, being able to open mines in six or seven years—in the EU it's taking eight or nine years; and in Saskatchewan and Alberta, closer to 10, and yet here in Ontario, unacceptably, we rank number 10 out of 10 when it comes to subnational jurisdiction mining investment attractiveness—it is clear we have a problem we have to resolve. We've got to step up in this critical minerals race and ensure that we get our products to new markets. We need to stand on our own two feet as Canadians—self-reliant, economically independent.

It's why we're bringing forth a plan that will respect our obligations under the Constitution but ensure that we get shovels in the ground with speed and purpose and that we end the duplication—end the delay—and use one window to deliver mining projects for the prosperity of Canada for another generation.

HIGHWAY SAFETY

Mr. Guy Bourgouin: My question is to the Minister of Transportation. The number one issue for the north we heard when door-knocking this election was highway safety. People fear for their lives every time they drive on Highways 11 and 17. This winter we saw fatal accident after fatal accident and constant road closures. Just yesterday, after a snowstorm, they closed the road again as a precautionary measure because the risk of an accident is too high.

Before the election the minister told us over and over that Ontario had the safest roads in North America. Can he stand here today and tell us honestly that Highways 11 and 17 are safe?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: It continues to be a priority for this government to ensure that we have the safest roads in North America, as we do. But as you saw during the campaign, and in many of the investments that this government has made, we are committed to highway infrastructure across the province and that includes Highway 11.

During the campaign and previously, Premier Ford committed to ensuring that we have the 2+1 pilot all the way from North Bay to Cochrane. We are the only

government that is investing \$28 billion over the next 10 years to support highway infrastructure improvements across the province. Unfortunately, the members opposite and the Liberals have refused to support the investments that we are making, especially in the north with respect to Highway 17 and Highway 11, including increasing enforcement across those highways as well. We will continue to ensure we make those investments.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Question?

Mr. Guy Bourgouin: This pilot project was never even started last election, and how it's going to start this election is left to be seen. And a pilot project is not what we need. We need more passing lanes.

Again, Minister, before the election, my fellow northern MPPs and I put together a plan with real solutions that we could implement today to save lives on our highways. This is not a partisan issue. When you risk your life every time you drive, it does not matter who you vote for.

Again to the minister: Will he commit today to working with us to implement our northern highway safety plan?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Madam Speaker, that is why this government has led by example all across North America when it comes to safety—when it comes to 103 hours of in-person training before granting a commercial vehicle licence, and in this House, examining other measures, as my colleague from Brampton West had put forward many motions to strengthen not only that training process, but build in more experience before getting behind a commercial vehicle.

That being said, we have invested significantly to improve highway infrastructure across this province but also enforcement.

I have to mention that every time that members from the NDP or Liberals have an opportunity to support this government's investments, whether it's a \$30-million new facility in Shuniah, Ontario, to help support and keep vehicles safe in the north—they voted against it. Whether it's increasing MTO enforcement officers across this province, including an operation deterrence, which has been very successful—the NDP and Liberals have voted against that as well.

We will continue to support highway safety and invest in our highways.

GOVERNMENT SPENDING

MPP Andrea Hazell: We know the reality in this province: 2.5 million people in Ontario don't have a family doctor; 19,000 people in my riding of Scarborough-Guildwood are without primary care. And it gets worse. Today, we learned that the Premier's \$2.2-billion sweetheart deal at Ontario Place was given to a company that misrepresented their experience, that barely had €1 million in equity. To top it off, it only had one spa, so I don't know where the experience came from.

My question is to the Premier. Why did this Premier give more money to this company than it put in its plan to get Ontarians a family doctor, the people that got us into this chamber?

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

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Well, as is often the case, the member opposite and her party forget all of the investments that are outside of the primary care expansion but absolutely are a key part of it.

Of course, you will remember, in February 2024, 78 new primary care expansion teams that are already offering services and matching patients in Innisfil, in Minto-Mapleton, in Kingston. We have communities across Ontario who have benefited from that.

Perhaps the member opposite did not notice last week that we did a second round of applications that will lead to 80 new primary care multidisciplinary teams.

We have a plan, and it is working. You should get on board because you are going to see those changes impact your community very soon.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Back to the member for Scarborough–Guildwood.

MPP Andrea Hazell: I think we're all asking what this government's priorities are. What is it? Some 2.5 million people don't have a family doctor. People are losing their jobs. People are losing their retirement savings. Our kids' schools are crumbling. And while all of this is happening, this government has given \$2.2 billion of taxpayers' dollars to a company that, again, misrepresented its claim, has less than €1 million in equity, and you can barely find it online. Where is it online?

My question is to the Premier and it is very simple: How on earth could you let this happen?

1140

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Oh, Speaker, there is a reason why they are third party.

Where were the Liberal caucus members when we were investing in two new medical schools in the province of Ontario? Brampton—we have medical students who are going to start training and learning in the city of Brampton in July 2025. Where were the Liberal caucus members when we were investing and expanding nurse practitioner-led clinics, multidisciplinary teams across Ontario? We've already had an expansion of 78 that are already operational. We, last week, made another expansion that will lead to 80—across Ontario.

Those are the investments—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Order. The House will come to order.

I will allow the minister to respond.

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Respectfully, chirping clearly did not lead to electoral victory.

We have a plan. Our investments in health care, whether it is ensuring that individuals who want to get licensed in the province of Ontario can do so in less than 10 days, whether it is new expanded seats that, frankly, the Liberal government actually shut down—we are making those investments. Fifty capital builds in hospitals across Ontario—

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Further questions?

EMPLOYMENT SUPPORTS

MPP Billy Denault: My question is to the Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development. Ontario workers are facing real pressure because of the threat of US tariffs. These tariffs could hurt our businesses and put jobs at risk.

But workers know they have a government that's on their side. Under the Premier's leadership, Ontario is stepping up to protect jobs and support the people who keep our economy moving. We've seen quick action to help businesses stay open and to keep workers on the job. We know that our government is working hard to push back against these unfair tariffs.

Speaker, can the minister please tell the House what steps our government is taking to protect Ontario workers and make sure they are supported during this time of global economic uncertainty?

Hon. David Piccini: I just want to start by saying a big congratulations to the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke. He's got big shoes to fill, and hopefully he has the same voice of his predecessor.

Speaker, it's an excellent question. It's twofold: One, you have to create the conditions for economic prosperity. You have to drive a low-tax environment with streamlined regulatory approval to provide certainty for employers and businesses. Then, two, you have to back it up with a plan for workers and that's what this Premier has done. We've provided an immediate injection of over \$11 billion in cash flow, we've ensured payroll taxes are at their lowest level in over 50 years, and we're investing in skills training and development.

I look forward to elaborating on that in the supplementary.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Question?

MPP Billy Denault: I want to thank the minister for his answer as well as his continuing leadership in standing up for Ontario workers. It's clear that our government is not just reacting to the threat of US tariffs, but that we are planning ahead and getting results. Programs like the Skills Development Fund are helping people train for better jobs. Investments in training centres are giving workers the tools they need to succeed. Stronger rules are keeping people safe on the job. Under the Premier's leadership, we are seeing more apprentices, more good jobs and more action to protect workers than ever before.

Speaker, can the minister please explain how these investments will help workers in key sectors like the skilled trades and how they will help keep Ontario strong for the future?

Hon. David Piccini: Thank you again for that question. Let's look at our Skills Development Fund. This is the largest investment in training and development in this province's history that's partnering with employers and training agents.

I want to look at the example of the Automotive Industries Association. They sent me a few success stories from the recent Skills Development Fund and the successful round. David M. was a newcomer from Nigeria who

wanted to work in the automotive sector. He went through a skills development program, became an automotive technician, and is now driving a bus, fulfilling a lifelong dream and supporting rural communities like mine, taking youth to school in a safe and productive manner.

Speaker, this is what it's all about: Giving people a leg up, giving them the skill sets to succeed and to thrive in an ever-changing economy. Folks know that Premier Ford has their back to stand up to President Trump, to protect workers, to ensure they have the skills for success. We're never going to stop, and I look forward to continued ideas from this House.

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

The House recessed from 1145 to 1300.

BOARD OF INTERNAL ECONOMY

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I beg to inform the House that in accordance with section 87 of the Legislative Assembly Act, the names of the following persons appointed to serve on the Board of Internal Economy have been communicated to me as Chair:

The Honourable Paul Calandra, MPP, continues as the commissioner appointed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council from among the members of the executive council;

Steve Clark, MPP, is appointed by the caucus of the government;

John Vanthof, MPP, continues as the commissioner appointed by the caucus of the official opposition; and

John Fraser, MPP, is appointed by the caucus of the third party.

The names of the following persons appointed respectively to serve as alternates on the Board of Internal Economy have also been communicated to me as Chair:

The Honourable Andrea Khanjin, MPP, continues to serve as the commissioner appointed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council from among the members of the executive council;

Anthony Leardi, MPP, is appointed by the caucus of the government;

Chandra Pasma, MPP, is appointed by the caucus of the official opposition; and

Lucille Collard, MPP, is appointed by the caucus of the third party.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Hon. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta: Good afternoon. I'd like to take this opportunity to wish a very happy birthday to Mr. Burdett Sisler, who celebrated his 110th anniversary this week. He is the oldest man in Canada—a decorated World War II veteran, where he served as a radar technologist.

On behalf of a very grateful province and country, thank you for your service and happy birthday, Burd.

INTRODUCTION OF GOVERNMENT BILLS

PROTECT ONTARIO THROUGH FREE TRADE WITHIN CANADA ACT, 2025

LOI DE 2025 POUR PROTÉGER L'ONTARIO EN FAVORISANT LE LIBRE-ÉCHANGE AU CANADA

Mr. Fedeli moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 2, An Act to enact the Buy Ontario, Buy Canadian Day Act, 2025 and the Ontario Free Trade and Mobility Act, 2025 and to amend various other Acts / Projet de loi 2, Loi édictant la Loi de 2025 sur le Jour « Achetons ontarien, achetons canadien » et la Loi ontarienne de 2025 sur le libre-échange et la mobilité et modifiant diverses autres lois.

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 comment on the bill?

Hon. Victor Fedeli: The proposed legislation, the Protect Ontario Through Free Trade Within Canada Act, will help remove interprovincial trade barriers that hinder economic growth in Canada. We're proposing to work with provinces so that goods and services that meet one province's regulatory standards are automatically recognized as equivalent in another. We are also going to rapidly expand labour mobility and work towards the direct-to-consumer sale of alcoholic beverages. The proposed actions will ensure Ontario and Canada can continue to remain competitive, attract more business investment and boost our economic growth.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

ROBBIE'S LEGACY ACT (HONOURING BELOVED ORGAN AND TISSUE DONORS), 2025

LOI DE 2025 SUR LE LEGS DE ROBBIE (HOMMAGE À NOS CHERS DONNEURS D'ORGANES ET DE TISSUS)

Mr. Hsu moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 3, An Act to amend the Gift of Life Act in order to recognize organ and tissue donors / Projet de loi 3, Loi pour modifier la Loi sur le don de vie afin de souligner la contribution des donneurs d'organes et de tissus.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Is it the pleasure of the House that the bill be read for the first time? Agreed.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Would the member like to comment?

Mr. Ted Hsu: This is a bill that I'm reintroducing from the last Parliament, and it allows the named recognition of organ and tissue donors.

I just want to mention who the bill is named after, Robbie Sherren. He was a blood donor while he was living and donated his heart to bring new technology, heart-in-a-box technology, to Canada. It took some work to be able to recognize him by name, but his family is very proud of him. This is a way of continuing his legacy, by naming the bill after him. Thank you.

PETER KORMOS MEMORIAL
ACT (SAVING ORGANS TO SAVE
LIVES), 2025

LOI DE 2025 COMMÉMORANT PETER
KORMOS (SAUVER DES ORGANES
POUR SAUVER DES VIES)

Madame Gélinas moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 4, An Act to amend various statutes with respect to the removal and use of tissue from a human body for therapeutic purposes, medical education or scientific research / Projet de loi 4, Loi visant à modifier diverses lois en ce qui concerne le prélèvement et l'utilisation de tissus d'un corps humain à des fins thérapeutiques, pour l'enseignement de la médecine ou pour la recherche scientifique.

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

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Would the member like to speak to the motion?

Mme France Gélinas: The bill is called the Peter Kormos Memorial Act (Saving Organs to Save Lives). This is a bill that Peter Kormos had introduced many times. This is the seventh time that I introduce this bill.

This bill is often called "assumed consent"; that is, we have a system right now where people have to sign on to say that they would like to be an organ donor after death. Some 90% of Ontarians say that they want to be an organ donor, but only 35% of us go through the trouble of signing up. The bill would switch this, where we would assume that you want to be a donor and give you many, many opportunities to sign off. Even after death, your family, your next of kin, could sign off.

The bigger issue with organ donation is the lack of organs available. We have 1,500 people on the wait-list in Ontario alone. Every third day, somebody dies because there's no organ. Other provinces have done the exact same thing; I sort of copied-and-pasted the bill from another province to bring this to Ontario. I hope everybody agrees that this is something that would help to save a lot of lives.

1310

MOTIONS

APPOINTMENT OF INTEGRITY COMMISSIONER

Mr. Anthony Leardi: I seek unanimous consent that, in accordance with subsections 23(2) and 23.1(2) of the Members' Integrity Act, 1994, S.O. 1994, c. 38, Cathryn Motherwell be appointed Integrity Commissioner of Ontario for a term of five years, commencing on April 16, 2025.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The deputy government House leader is seeking unanimous consent that, in accordance with subsections 23(2) and 23.1(2) of the Members' Integrity Act, 1994, S.O. 1994, c. 38, Cathryn Motherwell be appointed Integrity Commissioner of Ontario for a term of five years, commencing on April 16, 2025. Agreed? Agreed.

Motion agreed to.

PETITIONS

SOINS DE LA VUE

Mme France Gélinas: Merci beaucoup, madame la Présidente, et toutes mes félicitations pour avoir été choisie Présidente de l'Assemblée.

J'ai une pétition ici qui a été signée par des centaines de personnes, mais incluant Oliva Roy ainsi que sa femme, Huguette Roy, de Chelmsford dans mon comté. Ils demandent d'assurer une vision claire pour toutes les personnes âgées.

On sait tous que la vision est une partie fondamentale de notre qualité de vie. Une bonne vision est essentielle pour que les personnes âgées maintiennent leur indépendance, leur santé, leur sécurité.

Un nombre élevé de personnes âgées ne sont pas capables de payer le prix pour de nouvelles lunettes, donc ils gardent leurs anciennes lunettes trop longtemps et ça les met à risque.

Donc, ce qu'ils demandent, c'est, pour les personnes de 65 ans et plus, qu'un nouveau programme soit créé pour les aider à payer pour des lunettes correctives, et d'établir un programme de remboursement ou de rabais pour permettre aux âgées à faible revenu de plus de 65 ans d'acheter des lunettes avec une prescription.

Je crois que c'est une bonne idée. Je vais signer la pétition et je l'envoie à la table des greffiers avec Josephine.

ARMENIAN COMMUNITY

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: It is my pleasure to present my first petition to this honourable House, calling on the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to continue to recognize the month of May as Armenian Heritage Month, and to

commemorate April 24 as Armenian Genocide Memorial Day in memory of the 1.5 million Armenians murdered in the failed attempt to eradicate their ancient language and culture.

I wholeheartedly support this petition and affix my signature to it and pass it on to page Finn for consideration.

UNIVERSITY FUNDING

Mr. Ted Hsu: This petition comes from my constituents, many of whom are associated with Queen's University.

Universities drive economic growth and future prosperity. They also provide a lot of contacts—economic contacts and academic and scientific contacts—to countries other than the United States.

Funding for Ontario universities has not been adequate. This petition calls on the government to invest in Ontario's future by boosting base operating funds to the levels recommended by the government's own Blue-Ribbon Panel on Financial Sustainability in the Post-Secondary Education Sector.

CANCER TREATMENT

Mme France Gélinas: I would like to thank Mr. Pierre Leveillé from Hanmer in my riding for these petitions: "Coverage for Take-Home Cancer Drugs."

Cancer drugs, when they are administered in a hospital or in other health care settings, are free. But the minute that you get discharged, then you have to pay for your own cancer drugs. British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Quebec all cover take-home cancer drugs to make it easier for patients to follow their plan of care. The Canadian Cancer Society has asked the Ontario government for over a decade now that we follow suit, that we make sure that cancer patients are able to follow their plan of treatment and able to afford take-home cancer drugs.

So the people that have signed the petition ask that the Ontario government prioritize access to cancer treatment by developing a provincial program that provides full coverage for eligible cancer drugs that are taken at home.

I think this is a good idea. I will affix my name to it and ask page Parker to bring it to the Clerk.

CAREGIVERS

Mme France Gélinas: I would like to thank John-Luc Vautier from Val Caron in my riding for this petition. It's called "Enact Family Caregiver Day." Family caregiver is a term that most people understand. It is a member of your family—but sometimes it's a friend, sometimes it's a neighbour—that comes and helps someone in need with the activities of daily living. There is a lot of stress put on family caregivers. We have seen the statistics showing us that a lot of family caregivers get isolated, get depression, even physical health decline. There are 3.3 million people, or 29% of Ontarians, who do unpaid family caregiving. They would like to show a bit of support so they're asking

for a family caregiver day so that one day a year people get to have a little bit of education, people get to learn a little bit and hopefully support all of the family caregivers that we have right here, right now in Ontario to show how important the work that they do is and that we appreciate them.

I think that's a good idea. I will affix my name to it and ask page Parker to bring it to the Clerks. Thank you.

HIGHWAY SAFETY

Mme France Gélinas: I would like to thank Joffre LaBelle from Hanmer in my riding for this petition. It's called "Make Highway 144 Safe". Speaker, you would know Highway 144 because of where you grew up. Highway 144 is the highway that goes from Sudbury to Timmins. People that travel Highway 144 are really afraid for the safety of the traveller. Although it's called a highway, Highway 144 has no shoulders. You are in the bush the whole time until, at the watershed, there will be a gas station. The rest of the time, it's you. Last time, I saw seven moose on Highway 144 but, remember, there are no shoulders to pull over on, and lots and lots of trucks. All of the trucks from mining, all of the trucks from forestry travel Highway 144. There have been many, many collisions on Highway 144. There are hour-long, sometimes day-long closures of Highway 144 because of an accident.

Northerners deserve safer roads. They ask the government to recognize and put together a round table with representatives from the Ministry of Transportation, the police, the ambulance services, the tow-truck operators, shipping companies, mining companies, school bus drivers and other road users to find a solution for the dangerous highways, especially in the winter.

I fully support this petition. There have been many deaths on Highway 144. We need to make it safer. Thank you, Speaker, and I would ask Parker to bring it to the Clerk after I sign it.

EMERGENCY SERVICES

Mme France Gélinas: I would like to thank Michel Huard for this petition. It's called "911 Everywhere in Ontario". Everybody knows that when you face an emergency, you dial 911. Fire, accident, heart attack—you dial 911. But did you know that there are wide areas of northern Ontario where 911 is not available? In my riding, you have to memorize eight different 1-800 numbers. The ambulance is there, the fire trucks are there, the police are there, but 911 is not. You have to memorize those numbers.

Tourist season is upon us. A lot of people will come to the north. Please do come to the north. We have beautiful, beautiful areas for you to visit and to camp in. But most people don't know that if something happens, they will dial 911 and get, "This number is not in service." Ontario is the only province in Canada that has not made 911 available throughout. This has to change. Every year,

people die, people's health is at risk because they dial 911 and realize in their times of need that it doesn't work. It's easy to fix. Every other province has found a fix. Please, let's bring 911 everywhere in Ontario. We need it in northern Ontario, in my riding, quickly.

1320

I am happy to support this petition, to affix my name to it and ask Parker, who has been very patient, to bring it to the Clerk.

HEALTH CARE

M^{me} France Gélinas: The next petitions that I have come from Madame Dimatteo from Val Caron in my riding. The petition is quite simple. It's called "Health Care: Not for Sale."

Basically, Ontarians get care based on their needs, not on their ability to pay. But there have been a lot of privatizations happening to our health care system in the last few years. We have seen requests for proposals and funding of CAT scans and MRIs, private for-profit clinics opening up. The requests for proposals for hip and knee surgery have gone out. We expect those proposals to be funded soon.

There already are many cataract-surgery private clinics that exist in Ontario. Speaker, you can go to any senior's club and ask, "Have any of you had to pay for cataract surgery?" If it's done in the hospital, zero. There is no cost. The same surgeon, the same surgery done in a private clinic—they all have to pay. They all have to pay for an extra lens that the optometrist likes better, the ophthalmologist likes better than the other. They have to pay for an extra measurement of the lens. They have to pay for all sorts of stuff, often to thousands of dollars per eye. There's no reason for that.

We need to make sure that health care is not for sale, that our care is based on our needs, not on our ability to pay. So they ask the Ontario government to immediately stop the privatization of the Ontario health care system and to fix the crisis in our health care system.

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

NORTHERN HEALTH TRAVEL GRANT

M^{me} France Gélinas: It is my pleasure to thank Gisele Raymond from Hanmer in my riding for these petitions. It's called, "Let's Fix the Northern Health Travel Grant."

Most of you will know that there are lots of health care services that are not available in northern Ontario. If you need those services, you need to travel, either to Ottawa, sometimes Barrie, but most of the time Toronto, to gain access to those services. When you do, the Northern Health Travel Grant helps cover part of the expenses.

So I was happy to see that the government has made some changes to the Northern Health Travel Grant, but people are asking for more changes. Right now, to get \$100—it used to be \$100; it has been bumped up to \$150 a night. If you have to stay overnight in Toronto or Ottawa,

it is impossible to find a hotel room for \$150 a night. If you have to go a number of times—and often, many people that are really sick need to come to Toronto a number of times—they end up having so much debt from transportation, from parking, from accommodations, from meals, that they stop their plan of treatment simply to be able to balance their budget rather than follow their plan of care.

So they ask that the Ontario assembly establish a committee with a mandate to improve the Northern Health Travel Grant, so that people of northern Ontario have equitable access to services that are not available in the north.

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

SERVICES DE SANTÉ MENTALE

M^{me} France Gélinas: I'm happy to bring this petition from Melissa Anderson in Val Therese in my riding.

C'est une pétition pour investir dans les services de santé mentale. Vous savez probablement qu'une personne sur cinq a des problèmes de santé mentale. Ça, c'est dans les adultes seulement. Le financement pour les programmes de santé mentale au niveau communautaire n'a pas augmenté depuis longtemps. On parle d'organismes qui n'ont pas reçu d'augmentations de leurs budgets de base depuis plus de sept ans. Ils n'ont pas été capables de donner des augmentations de salaire à leurs travailleurs et travailleuses depuis les sept dernières années. Ce qui fait que c'est très difficile de recruter et de retenir du personnel, ce qui fait qu'on a de très, très longues listes d'attente pour avoir accès à des services de santé mentale.

La santé mentale, c'est une partie fondamentale de la santé. Sans santé mentale, on n'est pas en santé. Donc, ce qu'ils demandent, c'est vraiment de prioriser la santé mentale comme un élément intégral des soins de santé en investissant dans les services et les professionnels indispensables pour garantir des soins accessibles et rapides à tous les Ontariens et à toutes les Ontariennes.

J'appuie cette pétition, je vais la signer et je demande à Parker, qui est vraiment patient, de l'amener à la table des greffiers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

THRONE SPEECH DEBATE

Resuming the debate adjourned on April 16, 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): Further debate?

Ms. Chandra Pasma: I will be sharing my time with the members for Timiskaming—Cochrane and Nickel Belt.

I want to begin by congratulating you, Speaker, on your historic election as the first woman speaker of this Ontario Legislature. It's quite shocking that it took until 2025, but

I know that it's very important for young women and girls to see themselves in this role. And not just our daughters, but the young women who come through this House every day: the pages, the interns, the staff who work here, the students who join us. I know you will do amazing work in this role.

I also want to congratulate all the new and returning members on your election to this Legislature. It is such a privilege to be here to represent the members of our ridings, but also a real responsibility to serve and always ensure that we are always putting their interests first.

I, of course, want to thank the residents of Ottawa West–Nepean for having put your trust in me once again. It's an honour and a responsibility that I do not take lightly. I will work hard for you and bring your voices here to bring Queen's Park. My door is always open to you, but I also won't wait for you to come to me—I will come and talk to you in the community, hear your concerns and fight to bring solutions here to Queen's Park to address the challenges you're facing.

I have to say thank you to my campaign team, who were amazing during the February election—not only cold temperatures, but so many slips and falls; I, myself, had four of them. We even had a canvasser who broke his hand because of the conditions; they were definitely not easy conditions. We're all grateful for the support of the people who came out to help us get elected.

I need to say a special thank you to my family, to Matt, Mira, Luc and Clara, for all the sacrifices that you made during the election, that you're making now. I really appreciate it. I love you guys, and thank you so much.

Interjections.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Thank you, guys. Applause for my family.

I'm rising today on behalf of the residents of Ottawa West–Nepean to speak to the government's speech from the throne. A throne speech lays out the priorities of the government, what their agenda will be for the next four years, what sorts of things the residents of Ontario can look forward to.

This is also an opportunity for the public to ask: Does the government's agenda match what is needed in this moment? This is a difficult moment for the people of Ontario. It is unprecedented to face an attack on our economy and our sovereignty from our neighbours to the south. There's a lot of uncertainty, particularly as the situation is changing from day to day, sometimes from hour to hour.

1330

So we need a strong plan, a strong reassurance for the people of Ontario that their representatives, their government, will be there for them, will have their backs, will defend our economy, will get building the homes and the infrastructure that we need, but that we will also protect jobs, that we will protect incomes, that we will be there for people, and the services and supports that people need will be there for them day in and day out.

Unfortunately, the speech was an opportunity to offer that reassurance, but we did not hear that reassurance in

the speech. The speech was heavy on rhetoric but very light on actual details. The government talked a lot about what the challenges are, but they didn't lay out a real plan to address the challenges that we're facing in the moment: a plan to look after people, to get Ontario building and to grow our economy.

There were some recycled promises in there that the government is trying to shoehorn into their agenda, pretending that they're about stimulus or economic support, like a tunnel under the 401—which I don't know is going to help a single auto worker in Ontario save their job. It's certainly not going to help the constituents of Ottawa West–Nepean who desperately need a family doctor or who need to be able to stay housed and put food on the table, and I think that's a big part of the problem.

A big part of the concern I have with this speech from the throne is that the government doesn't seem to realize the position that the people of Ontario are in, where they really cannot sustain another blow, that we were in such a precarious position before this happened that we are not resilient enough to face this.

We can't just hope that things won't happen to people. There could be another pandemic. We have a lot of global uncertainty, a changing world order. We never know what's going to happen from one day to the next, which is why we need to concentrate on doing what we can to build a strong province that looks after the people of Ontario so that we can withstand a strong headwind when it happens, and that just hasn't happened. People already can't afford housing, they already can't get a doctor and their child can't get the supports that they need at school.

So this was a missed opportunity, but we still have a chance to get things right, particularly with the budget but also with legislation coming forward. Since the government said yesterday during this throne speech that they have never hesitated to reach across the aisle for good ideas—although, honestly, in the almost three years I've been here, that has yet to happen, but I live in hope.

The Premier himself said this morning that he is open to constructive ideas from everyone in this Legislature, from all parties. And so, in good faith, I'm going to offer some ideas this afternoon, Speaker, about what we can do constructively to respond to this trade war but also on the issues that Ontarians are saying are their priorities.

In response to Trump and this tariff situation, as I said, there's a lot of defending language, but there wasn't a clear plan on how we are going to defend people, how we are going to defend Ontario workers, Ontario jobs and our economy.

There was no mention of real income supports for affected workers or for emergency relief, and that's what people are really looking for. Without income support, you're not able to put food on the table, you're not able to keep paying rent or the mortgage. This is really critical for people. They need to be able to see what the government has in mind to make sure that they will be able to keep paying the bills and keep feeding their children.

There was no "Buy Ontario" directive for public agencies or a clear public procurement strategy. We heard

in question period this morning that the Premier wouldn't even commit to restricting American companies from bidding on public procurement projects in Ontario. That's what we really need to see. This can't just be Ontario businesses getting the opportunity to bid; we should be prioritizing bids from Ontario that create Ontario jobs here.

There was no commitment to a Team Ontario approach that would bring all of the players together, all the people who represent residents of the province of Ontario—workers, labour unions, industry—all together at the table with one unified approach to defend our province and our economy.

And so, I and my colleagues in the official opposition will be watching closely to ensure that, moving forward, there are concrete measures implemented that will actually protect workers, protect families, and not just recycled Conservative vanity projects.

During the campaign, knocking on doors across Ottawa West–Nepean, there were actually two very, very clear priorities that I heard day in and day out, and one of them was health care. So many people said, “I do not have a family doctor. I do not know who to turn to when I have a question. I don't want to go to the emergency room and wait 13 hours for something that may not actually be a big health concern, but I need somebody to talk to. I need somebody to run tests for me.”

There are 160,000 people in Ottawa who do not have a family doctor. The government committed yesterday in the throne speech to connecting two million people with a family doctor in four years, but the Ontario Medical Association has said that by next year there will be four million people in the province who don't have a family doctor. So, the commitment that we heard was to solve half the problem by four years from now, and there are actually things that the government could be doing today that would expand access to primary care by taking paperwork off the desks of doctors, by expanding team-based care. These are things that we could do immediately that won't take four years, and I think the people of Ontario deserve those kinds of solutions.

There are also incredibly disturbing, challenging stories about long wait times in emergency rooms and long wait times for surgeries and other treatments. I spoke with one constituent who had sat with her mother in the emergency room of the Queensway Carleton Hospital for 13 hours while her mother had a pulmonary embolism. It was incredibly painful for her mother and incredibly terrifying for both of them, and that should not be happening in a province as rich as Ontario.

I spoke to another senior at the door who has been waiting two years for surgery with an incredibly painful condition that she feels day in and day out. Nobody should be waiting two years in pain just for a surgery in Ontario.

At the Queensway Carleton Hospital, we have 18 patients on average per day being treated in the hallway or some other unconventional space. This also shouldn't be happening in Ontario; we need to make the investments that hospitals need. We don't need some kind of lean

process that treats people as if they are auto parts. I've worked in an auto part factory, Speaker. I know how fast that conveyor belt moves past you. That is not the kind of health care that people deserve in Ontario. They deserve to have a timely appointment with a doctor who takes the time to listen to them and to address their concerns meaningfully. So we need to invest and stop breaking the system and then using that as an excuse to privatize.

I hope in the commitment the government made yesterday to funding and building new hospitals and hospital expansions that they will include the Queensway Carleton Hospital, which was built to serve 100,000 people and is serving 500,000 people, which is part of the reason why we have such overcrowding at the hospital. The people in the west end of Ottawa really deserve a hospital that is the right size to meet their needs.

The second-biggest concern I heard from people at the door was the challenges of the cost of living. There are so many people who are paying 80%, 90%, 100% of their income on rent, and so there's no money left over to buy groceries, let alone pay any other bill, to provide any opportunities for their children. People are being kept up at night with the anxiety of figuring out how they are going to pay their expenses from day to day.

Last year, there were over a million meals served by the Ottawa Mission, and that's just one of the many services in Ottawa that provides meals. In my riding of Ottawa West–Nepean, the Caldwell Family Centre is serving hundreds of thousands every year. People desperately need action, but there was nothing in this throne speech that will actually provide that action that they're looking for.

There are so many things that we could get to work on today if the government was interested in doing so. We could get to work building the deeply affordable homes that people need, and that would also provide employment opportunities—good, high-paying jobs in the trades—while also meeting the needs of our residents to provide this housing that they can afford.

We also can protect against price gouging, especially at this time when tariffs are contributing to inflation, making sure that no company is taking advantage of the inflation to gouge consumers, and to provide real income support, which is what people in Ontario need in order to be able to make ends meet. So I will be looking and pushing for that action that will help people make sure they have a roof over their heads and can feed themselves and their children every day, which is what we should want and expect for every person in the province of Ontario.

The other big issue that I heard on a daily basis throughout the election and I continue to hear now that the election is over is the need to fix our education system so that it is properly supporting our children and meets the needs of every single child in Ontario. Our education system is in a desperate situation, Speaker. The needs of our children are not being met. They are in classes whose sizes are increasing every year. In some classrooms in my riding, they can't even have desks because the kids are elbow to elbow. The teachers are being run off their feet,

but when you have 12 IEPs in a class of 28 students, it's pretty hard to make sure you are delivering what each child needs in order to meet their needs.

1340

That's not even to get into the question of the staffing shortage—the fact that we do not have enough qualified teachers and education workers in our system; that there are absences that need to be filled every single day; that we have principals and administrators whose number one job every day is just trying to make sure that there's an adult in every classroom. This is an opportunity for us to invest in skills in a profession that is highly in demand. At a moment when we're talking about expanding employment, let's put more caring adults in our classrooms to support our children.

That's not even to get into the question of special education. Unfortunately, we've heard—from parents who came to Queen's Park just last month—many more stories of children eloping from their school. Another child with autism was found in the middle of a multi-lane intersection. That's the second one that I'm aware of within the course of a year. We are very lucky that we have not had a serious tragedy with a child escaping. Unfortunately, we've already had one tragedy in our schools. We don't want to have any parent in the province receive that phone call that their child is not coming home at the end of the day. In order to ensure that no parent receives that phone call, we need to make sure that our kids with disabilities, with special education needs, actually have the caring, trained, qualified adults around them that they need to keep them safe at school.

We're also seeing real challenges with the health and safety of our students and our workers at schools because of a repair backlog that has ceilings leaking, roofs crumbling, ancient heating and ventilation systems. We are seeing a lack of air quality, faulty fire alarms, doors and windows that won't open. This makes our children and the workers who are in these buildings every day unsafe.

But again, this is an opportunity: \$16 billion—and actually, it's probably more than that, but the previous Minister of Education wouldn't tell us what the real number is. So I have high hopes that the new Minister of Education—the fourth in the last year—will actually be transparent with the people of Ontario and provide that number. But this is an opportunity, again, to get people building, to expand employment in Ontario, while also providing a badly needed service to our children by giving them safe, healthy schools to be in.

We also know that school boards are cutting essential supports for kids. There are school boards that do not have enough money for toilet paper. Just imagine, Speaker: Our kids are going to schools that can't guarantee we're going to offer them toilet paper. There are classrooms that don't have pencils or books. There are teachers who are trying to ration how much paper they use because our schools are that threadbare, and yet school boards are still being forced to cut.

There was no reference to any of this in the throne speech. The only reference that the government made was not a commitment to fill the funding gap that they have created by cutting education funding by \$1,500 per student over the course of the last seven years. The only reference they made was once again an attack on school boards. They threw in a line about making sure that funds go into the classroom, but they did not acknowledge that they are the ones forcing school boards to take money out of the classroom by underfunding student transportation. We saw two school boards that did not have student transportation for eight full weeks of the school year because the government would not provide the actual amount of funding that it took to get school buses on the road. And how did they finally get school buses on the road in Renfrew county? The Minister of Education sat down and forced them to cut funding that was going to the classroom to pay for the school buses.

The government is also not providing the funding that is required to actually cover the cost of EI and CPP even though they know full well that the school boards don't set the premiums for EI and CPP. That's set by the federal government. But somehow the school boards are supposed to wave a magic wand and make half the funding turn into double the funding. Instead, the only option they have is to take that money out of front-line classroom resources again. If the government wants education funding to be going into the classroom to make sure that our kids have their needs met, then the government needs to make sure that they are properly funding every aspect of the education system, and that is just not happening here.

We also know that we have a real mental health crisis for our students. Many of them are struggling. They are asking for help, and they are too often not getting the help that they are asking for, sometimes not even until the following school year. I know as a parent it can be hard for a child to reach out and say that they need help, to ask for help. Every time a child does that, we should provide that help. That help should be there for them immediately, but only one in 10 Ontario schools has regularly scheduled access to a mental health professional. This isn't good enough. It's not near good enough.

This is another opportunity that, if we invest in our schools, we can create more employment, having those caring, qualified mental health professionals who our kids need to support them. That's an amazing opportunity. Again, it's expanding employment, it's making sure that people have a way to support their families, and we are providing our children with the desperately needed supports that they need.

The government also made reference to basics when talking about education yesterday; that, in the face of this uncertainty, what we need is a basic education system. But now more than ever, when we're facing this uncertainty, we need a world-class education system. We need the best possible education system—a system that will create creative, thoughtful, inventive, resourceful citizens and workers. We shouldn't be talking about basic. We should be investing in an education system that meets the needs

of every child, that provides those economic opportunities and makes sure we are setting up our citizens and workers of the future.

Just to conclude before I pass it on to my colleague, there are so many things that we could be doing to provide the support that people need to build the more resilient province that we need, and the Ontario NDP will keep working, will keep pushing the government to strengthen Ontario, look after people, get Ontario building and grow our economy.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Lorne Coe): Further debate?

M^{me} France Gélinas: It was a very respectful and very important event that took place in this chamber yesterday with the speech from the throne that was read by the Lieutenant Governor. I especially liked the fact that she was able to do some of it in French. I very much appreciated that.

The government throne speech acknowledged the economic threats ahead but failed to offer reassurance to the families who are looking for reassurance in the face of economic uncertainty and rising costs. The families need that reassurance in the form of a clear and immediate plan, and unfortunately, none of that was in the throne speech.

We had to wait until about 50 minutes in before health care was mentioned in the throne speech. Health care is the number one priority of a provincial government. Close to \$80 billion of the government's budget goes into our health care system, and it made not quite two minutes of a close to hour-long statement during the throne speech.

There are many things that would have reassured people. As I said, the little part about health care used words like "dogma" to push ahead a privatization agenda. Do you know what that means, Speaker? That means that the government is ashamed of the privatizing of the health care system that they are doing, but they cannot use the words and say, "We are going to give a big part of our health care system to private, for-profit companies." They're ashamed to say this, so they use words like "dogma." But the dogma is that we have a public, not-for-profit system where care is based on needs, not on ability to pay, and they intend to change it.

1350

Four years from now, we won't recognize our health care system. It doesn't matter if you need surgery, if you had a heart attack, if you're giving birth, if you need mental health—it doesn't matter; there will be a cost attached to it, because there's a lot of money to be made off the backs of sick people. Once you're sick, your spouse is sick, your children are sick, nothing else matters, Speaker. You will pay, whatever the price, because we care about our family, because we care about our kids and our spouse and our mom and our sisters and brothers and everything else, and big companies know this. They know that there are billions of dollars to be made, and the government said in the throne speech that they will open the door even wider to private, for-profit delivery of our health care system.

As you know, Speaker, the request for proposals went out last summer for private CAT scans and MRIs. Those have been allocated, and private, for-profit CAT scans and MRIs are being opened in Ontario. The request for proposals has gone out for hip and knee surgeries. Although the lucky investors who will get those private clinics have not been announced, they're already in construction. They're already spending millions of dollars to build ORs, operating rooms, in Ontario, when it doesn't matter where you go throughout our province, there are operating rooms sitting empty.

In my hospital, Health Sciences North in Sudbury, there is an operating room that never opened because they don't have the money to run it. But the private, for-profit clinics will be guaranteed a number of surgeries to make sure that the investors regain the millions of dollars that they've invested, not in decades but in a couple of years, in a couple of months. Why? Because there's lots of money to be made off the backs of sick people, and investors know that. So, quite disappointed that this was the little part of health care that was mentioned in the throne speech. That had very little to do with improving our existing health care system.

Another part is the AED registry. Automatic defibrillators have been—a law was passed. A law is in the books right here, right now, in Ontario. I put forward a private member's bill. The government put forward a bill. It received third reading. It received royal assent. It's the law in Ontario that every 911 dispatch should know where all of the AEDs are located. It has been six years, Speaker, and it's not done. How long does it take to have a spreadsheet with the addresses of where the AEDs are located, when we know full well that if 911 has access to that information, they will save lives each and every day in Ontario. The body of evidence is there. It exists. There are multiple private companies, little cafes that have bought AEDs, and if you happen to know where it is, they use it. But most of the time, when you dial 911 because someone just collapsed with a heart attack—you dial 911 and the 911 operator doesn't know that on the wall behind you, there's an AED. That has to change. It should be the law in Ontario.

There was lots of mention in the throne speech about making things move faster, especially in the mining industry. My riding, Nickel Belt—I'm lucky—is the riding with the most active mines. We have gold mines, nickel mines, cobalt, copper, you name it. Precious metals, rare—we have them all. But things as easy as little communities—so there's a gold mine across the street from Gogama. Gogama is a very nice little community in Nickel Belt along Highway 144. Across the street is a gold mine called Iamgold. It's clear this is a gold mine. They produce lots and lots of gold. It's all automated. Anyway, worth seeing if you've never seen an automated mine—very impressive.

But workers need a place to stay. Gogama has lots of vacant, beautiful homes that the provincial government owns. Because they're not a municipality—when people move out, it doesn't go to the municipality; it goes to the

province. The Premier was there, the Minister of Mines was there, tourism—everybody—and five years later, the government hasn't had the time to put those homes up for sale in Gogama.

How could that be? We have 900 workers sleeping in bunkers every single night at Iamgold mine. We have beautiful, empty homes that the government pays for. They pay to have the snow removed, the grass cut, the trees trimmed, the heat in the home. And in five years, they haven't had time to do due process to put them up for sale. How could that be? They were ready to sell the greenbelt in less than three months, but they cannot sell a \$200,000 home in five years. This is really hard to understand. We would like it to change.

Other things that we would like to look at: Some of you will remember Bishop Brigante. He was a very well-known hip-hop singer who came to Queen's Park. He got diagnosed with colon cancer really late because he could not gain access to diagnostic testing because he was too young, because Ontario has set the bar at 50 for testing and he was in his forties.

Bishop Brigante just passed at the end of March, on March 30, but he had come here to Queen's Park. I still remember him sitting in the gallery and he had gathered 38,000 names on a petition to ask the government to consider lowering the age of testing for colon cancer to 30, rather than 50, if it is recommended by a primary care provider, either a physician or a nurse practitioner.

Let's be honest: Between you and I, nobody wants a colonoscopy. It's not the kind of thing—"Oh, let me, let me, let me." No. You go have a colonoscopy because your primary care provider has convinced you that you should have one. But they are not available to people under the age of 50.

Mr. Brigante has passed. We would certainly like the government to answer his 38,000-signature petition about changing the age for access to colonoscopies and early cancer detection.

Another issue that is specific to the north has to do with the fertility program. As you know, Speaker, the fertility program is a \$70-million envelope that the government gives. We have 50 clinics in Ontario. Except for Mount Sinai, all of them are private, for-profit clinics. Eighteen clinics provide IVF, in vitro fertilization. None of those clinics are located in northern Ontario. People in northern Ontario need access to in vitro fertilization. It doesn't matter where you live; fertility issues could happen to anybody.

We hope that, as the government looks to expand the Ontario Fertility Program, it puts in place a number of IVF—in vitro fertilization—cycles that would be specifically for people in northern Ontario. Because when you live in Kap and in Hearst and in Timmins and in Sudbury and the closest clinic is Markham and Toronto, they tend to pick people who live close to where they do business. This means that for the people of the north, we don't have equity of access. It becomes really, really difficult.

A lot of the testing that needs to be done can be done in northern Ontario. We do have clinics—NEO fertility—in

Sudbury that offer that type of service, but they also need to be given a number of cycles to be able to provide this service to the people of northern Ontario.

Letters have been written to the previous Minister of Health, letters have been given to the present Minister of Health, and so far, we have dead silence. We certainly hope for all of northern Ontario that things will change.

1400

Something else that I talk about often in this House but needs to be repeated—well, first of all, this week is 911 dispatcher week. I wish all of the people who work for 911 dispatch a happy week. Thank you very much for the hard and very stressful work that you do. Calling 911 often happens on the worst day of your life. This is what they deal with every day at work—so certainly to recognize them and thank them for the hard work that they do and to continue to push so that 911 is available everywhere in Ontario.

Is it not available in a huge part of northern Ontario, the riding that I serve. We have to memorize 1-800 numbers, depending on where you are on Highway 144 or Highway 101, because there is no 911 operator when you call—and people call every year, especially during the summer when the tourists are there. You get, "This number is not in service." So you dial again, and you get again, "This number is not in service." Then you dial zero and the operator who answers you at zero says, "No, no. Dial 911." "I tried that and nobody answers." By that time, the person you are trying to help—I don't wish any harm upon anybody, but last year it was a drowning. The year before, it was a severe car accident. Every year, people that could have been helped if a 911 operator had answered the call would have been helped. But I want to reassure people: The ambulances are there, the firefighters are there, the police are there. You just have to know the 1-800 numbers that nobody knows. We want 911 just like every other province has.

We hear a lot about the care in home care for people who get admitted into our hospitals. They are not able to go back home because our home care system is broken. It fails more people than it helps on every single day.

The people in the home care system cannot recruit and retain a stable workforce. You are put on home care, you are allowed two baths a week and help with your laundry and help with your activities and daily living, but most of the time the worker doesn't show up because they have a better-paying job greeting at Walmart. There's nothing wrong with Walmart or anything but I wish people who have gone to school to be a PSW would be respected enough to have a pay grid that allows them to do their work and pay the bills, feed their kids and be there for people who need them. Our home care system is broken. It needs to be fixed.

You will remember when Mike Harris was there, he privatized our home care system and promised that the private, for-profit was going to make home care better, faster, cheaper. None of that happened. What we got is a broken home care system that cannot recruit and retain a stable workforce, which means a lot of people who want

to live at home, who would be able to live at home if they had a little bit of support, end up in our hospitals, end up labelled as ALC, alternative level of care, and then are waiting to go to a long-term-care home.

It doesn't matter where you go, Speaker. You can ask anybody, "Who's looking forward to go to a long-term-care home?" Nobody raises their hand—nobody. "Who would like support and respect to stay in their own homes?" You will get a whole lot more people to do this.

How do you do this? You do this by fixing our home care system. How do you fix our home care system? You take the for-profit out of it and you make sure that the money that the government invests—we're close to \$3.8 billion now that we invest into our home care system—doesn't go to profit, it goes to front lines so that people get the care that they need to stay home.

Another question that we also hear about are take-home cancer drugs. I have been filing a petition on this issue for a long time. All other big provinces have a take-home cancer drug plan in place. Ontario does not. It is very expensive to have some of the new pharmaceutical treatment, but they work. Some of them are phenomenal for cancers where before your chances of survival were very low. Now, with the new pharmaceutical treatments, cancer becomes an almost cured disease, sometimes a chronic illness that you will live with, but you're not going to die from your cancer. Why? Because we have new treatments. But if you cannot afford to pay for those drugs, then the prognosis is not good. Often, you're looking at death. It wouldn't be that hard to put such a program into place. Most other provinces already have them.

The last thing I'll have time to talk about is access to primary care. This is your point of entry into health care. Everybody in Ontario should have access to a family physician or nurse practitioner. We have a good, not-for-profit system that exists: community health centres, Indigenous primary health care, nurse practitioner-led clinics, community-governed family health teams. Most of them are ready to take on new patients if only they would get funded. They haven't seen a base budget increase in seven years. They haven't been able to give their staff a pay increase in seven years since this government has been in place. It's really hard to retain a nurse practitioner, a nurse or a physiotherapist when they can find better-paying jobs in the same community. Just go to the hospital; you will get a better paying job.

This has to change. Primary care has to be a priority, not just for-profit primary care but not-for-profit like we have here in Ontario. Those community health centres and others have asked for funding increases. I hope the government will listen to them.

I will sit down and let my colleague continue.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Lorne Coe): I recognize the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane, please.

Mr. John Vanthof: It's always an honour to be able to speak in the House. This is my first time speaking since the election. I would like to welcome all the new members and all the returning members. It's an honour for us all to be here.

I remember when I was walking a couple of days ago— a couple of my colleagues were walking and we were looking at the building and talking about what it was like the first time we walked into the building. I said, "The first time, I didn't have a clue what's going on, and now it's my fifth time walking into the building after an election, and now I really know I don't have a clue what's going on." But I try and I learn something every day. The way this place works the best is if we all learn something every day.

We also have the ability, a unique ability—and we're losing it in a lot of places, and that's one of the reasons we're having trouble with our American neighbours in the south. They are losing—seem to be losing—the ability to have reasoned debates and disagree on things but still work together on other things. That's something that we haven't lost here, and something hopefully we don't lose. I think that's important to recognize.

In that vein, I'd like to thank the people who not just worked for our campaign in the recent election, but the people who worked on all campaigns and the people who voted for me and the people who voted for everyone else. I'd also like to thank the candidates who—sometimes I complain about this job, but there always seems to be other people who really want this job, and that's also a very good thing. That's a very good thing. I lost the first election I ever tried here, but this was my sixth campaign, and this was the toughest one.

Just to back up a little, to me, I think when you're in an election, the election is determined by what the ballot box question is, what people are thinking when they go in to put their X. For many in the province, including Timiskaming–Cochrane, President Trump and his actions were very high on that list, but there's one thing that was higher, and that isn't unique to northern Ontario, but actually highway safety was higher. We focused on highway safety. The reason I'm standing here today, honestly, is because, among the other things the NDP stands for, we focus very heavily on highway safety.

1410

This is the first time since I've been a provincial member of Parliament that the Premier of the province came to the riding to campaign on safer roads. The reason why I'm here is because it fell very flat, because this government has been in power for seven years, and the roads in Timiskaming–Cochrane have not gotten any safer, not at all. I use this fact quite a bit: If your car is registered in the district of Timiskaming and it's involved in an accident on a provincial highway, the likelihood that it's a fatality is four times as high as if your car is registered anywhere else in the province. So it's cold comfort when we hear that we've got the safest roads in North America—cold comfort.

Sometimes I remember things that I find humorous, and there's nothing humorous about that stat, but this morning it came up again when my colleague from Mushkegowuk—James Bay asked a question about road safety. During the election campaign, the Premier came to Timiskaming–Cochrane and promised to extend the 2+1 highway project from Temiskaming Shores to Cochrane, which happens to

be my riding. The 2+1 highway project is an innovative way to try to make your highway safer. It was promised as a pilot several years ago by then Minister of Transportation, Caroline Mulroney, who I respect for having tried that. She approved it, but they never built the pilot. They never built the test project. So, when the Premier came to Timiskaming-Cochrane and promised to extend it, he promised to extend something that they've never built, and the minister did it again today. We are happy to work with the minister, with anyone, to fix these issues, but it's a tough—it's hard to believe.

During the campaign, we put a little video—and I'll say the same thing again: When the Premier came, he flew into Timiskaming-Cochrane, flew to Timmins, maybe he should have driven from North Bay, and then he would have seen that they never built the pilot project that he was saying he was going to extend. So, you wonder.

I'm speaking to the throne speech. I listened intently to the throne speech, and the overall theme of the throne speech, how we need to defend our province, our country, from our former best ally—and hopefully again some day our best ally—I agreed with that. When I heard that their plan is to increase spending infrastructure, I agree with that—to unite the country. I agree with that, but Highways 11 and 17 are the Trans-Canada Highway. When you want to move goods or people, it has to go over Highway 11 and Highway 17. I challenge members to take that northern route.

And what's really dangerous about that northern route—it's our main street. In Timiskaming-Cochrane, you don't go anywhere unless you go on Highway 11 and 17.

A typical day on Highway 11: Yesterday, a school bus was stopped on Highway 11. The video is on Facebook; I posted it. A cross-country transport slowed down behind the school bus—the school bus was stopped with the lights on—and it decided to pass. That's a typical day on Highway 11. So you can tell me all you want how you're improving the licensing and improving this and—but that's a typical day.

This winter—I posted this video too—a snowplow was coming one way; a car was going the other way. The passenger was a girl coming home from school. There were two cars behind the snowplow, and a transport decided to pass the snowplow. The dash cam was on, and the thump you heard was the transport taking off the mirror on the passenger side of the car—another typical day on the Trans-Canada Highway.

So when you tell me that you want to increase infrastructure to strengthen this country, I am 100% behind you. But when you drive up to northern Ontario on the Trans-Canada Highway, it's hard to believe that that was your focus for the last seven years, or, quite frankly, the focus of the previous government.

North of Englehart, on the Trans-Canada Highway, where they're going to build this two-plus-one, supposedly, they replaced the culverts last year. They didn't put any extra passing lanes. And they're going to do the pavement now. I had to post the forms where you can

apply for damages to the MTO because of the potholes in the Trans-Canada Highway.

I'm not criticizing the people who work for the MTO. They try to do everything they can. But when I hear that there's going to be a tunnel built under the 401—how about we actually make sure that people can actually cross the province, that goods and services can actually cross the province? You haven't done that.

People say, "Oh, all you guys do is complain and criticize"—no. We've been working on highway safety for quite a while. Before the election, we put out the Northern Highway Safety Plan—things that could be done immediately, short term, medium and long term; things that I think are very, very doable.

The first one: Everyone who gets a commercial vehicle licence should actually be tested by an MTO-certified tester, as opposed to some companies that test their own drivers. I don't think that's a bad thing. How about we actually increase enforcement so that when we have cases where drivers are—we know they're not following the rules. Once in a while, they do a blitz in northern Ontario, and that's great. I'm not criticizing a blitz, but the one last February—I believe 76 trucks were pulled over and 32 were pulled off the road.

I've got to mention something that a local contractor brought to my attention. He said, "Hey, Vanthof, has anybody ever told you that you're causing us a problem?" I said, "Why?" He said, "Because you complain about highway safety so much that the MTO is now inspecting our local trucks more, too, because we're there and we're easier to inspect." That is an issue. It's harder to catch people on the highway, but that's where they've got to be, on the highway. It's not rocket science.

1420

I'm going to back up a second. We heard that northern Ontario and the Ring of Fire is the key to prosperity for the future, and I'm not really going to comment on that. I am going to comment on—we have heard in northern Ontario that story so many times.

I am sure that the Cobalt silver rush—when they first discovered silver, when they first discovered precious metals in eastern Canada, it was in Cobalt. They built huge things in Toronto from that silver rush. The poor little town of Cobalt can't pay its bills.

The Kirkland Lake gold rush financed World War II. Around Kirkland Lake, mining is a huge thing—Agnico Eagle is a great company—but the municipality of Kirkland Lake can't get funding from this government to put infrastructure in to build houses.

We have heard this so many times before: "We'll come, and we'll get this, and we'll get to it the market and hopefully you'll get something at the end." That's what we hear again. Again, "Oh, it's going to be great in Ontario, and if there's anything left, yeah, maybe you'll get something." We've heard this story so many times in northern Ontario.

I'm not Indigenous, but Indigenous people have heard it so many more times than I have. Agnico Eagle, the biggest employer in my riding, has very good relations

with the surrounding First Nations. When I was listening to this, you know, we're going to—you know, faster—basically, they were going to wrap a bulldozer in a Canadian flag. That's basically what I heard. That's what I heard.

I just hope that you don't set things back instead of moving things forward, because there is a big possibility that you're going to do that—there's a big possibility. There's a difference between doing things fast or doing things right.

The Minister of Labour actually mentioned something that—I think it was in a question—I agree with: What this province needs is regulatory predictability. A mining company has to raise multi, multi, multi-millions of dollars. It could be a billion dollars for a big project, so they need regulatory predictability so they know if they can go to their investors—“if we do everything right, this is the ladder.” And that ladder is too long in Ontario. I don't think anybody is denying that, but I'm a bit worried that this government is more intent on—instead of putting a better base on the ladder so you can go up a bit quicker, they're just going to take some of the rungs out and think that it's going to work better, and it's not going to work at all.

We remember. I'll go back to Cobalt. There were not rules about mining in Cobalt, and we're still dealing with the problems left by those mines in Cobalt. We're still dealing with them, and we're all paying for them.

Mining now has got a much better reputation. It's very strongly regulated here, as it should be, but it needs better predictability.

But again, this government is not great at predictability. They've introduced legislation, and I'll use the greenbelt as an example. They've introduced, they've retracted, they've changed the municipal guidelines so often that you don't really know what you're doing as far as predictability.

Hon. Paul Calandra: They got fired for it.

Mr. John Vanthof: Thank you.

They need predictability, and we are willing. We are happy to work with the government to try and make that happen, but just shortcuts aren't going to make it any faster. There's a difference. We want to work with you to make this province as great as can be, to help this province withstand some of the mistakes that, I believe, the American President is making. But he is the President, and he was elected. He can make those mistakes. Our responsibility here is that we don't make some of the same mistakes here that the President of America is making in his country.

That's very easy to do, and I'll use the greenbelt as an example. The government was told many times in this Legislature, “Are you sure this is a good idea?” They barrelled ahead anyway and then they had to retract. And, actually, they hurt investor confidence in the housing market instead of helped—because we do have the lowest housing starts since the 1950s here. That doesn't make any sense at all in such a great place, but we do.

In my last minute—I'm a farmer by trade and agriculture critic. It was interesting in the throne speech—not one

word about food, not one word. If something is going to be important in the future, it's going to be food production. The number one industry in this province: cars and food. I didn't hear anything about it. The issue is that if you think that paving over 320 acres a day of class 1 and 2 farmland is a good idea in the long term, we're all sadly, sadly, sadly mistaken. I come from northern Ontario and have farmed my whole life. I'm proud to farm in northern Ontario, but you can't just trade two acres in the north for one acre in Oxford county. It just doesn't work. Or five acres in the north for a quarter acre in the Niagara food belt. It doesn't work.

Thank you very much for this time. We hope we can work together.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Lorne Coe): Thank you very much for your presentation.

I recognize now the member from Ottawa South, please.

Mr. John Fraser: I'm going to be sharing my time with the member from Orléans, the member from Ottawa—Vanier, the member from Don Valley East and the member from Don Valley West.

I do want to say, just before I get started, that I didn't know how I drew the short straw and I had to follow this member, because he's thoroughly entertaining. I want to guarantee you, if you need to get a little extra shut-eye or you've got something else to do, it won't be as scintillating as that member.

I just want to say right off: I want to work with all of you. If we all succeed, then all Ontario succeeds. We're facing a threat—a very, very serious threat—and it's on all of us. So people expect us to work together to address that threat. Over here on this side, we have that role. You get to decide what to do, but also, we have to say to you, “I don't think you're doing enough,” or “I think you're doing this the wrong way.” Please accept it in the spirit in which it's given, which is what I just said, that we all work together so that we can protect Ontarians, protect their jobs, and make sure their livelihoods and the things they depend on most are there for them when they need them.

We just had an announcement on interprovincial trade, and we're aligned on that. We've known for years that we need to break down those barriers, and maybe this is the impetus for that to happen. Now, the proof will be in the pudding to see how far we get with that. I haven't had a chance to take a look at the legislation, so I don't want to make any comments on it. I think that's a good step. Again, we'll have to see exactly how we're going to execute this and make sure that it works for Ontarians and indeed all Canadians.

There's a lot of uncertainty created by Trump's tariffs—not just uncertainty about jobs, uncertainty about prices. I spoke to a woman who was losing a significant amount of her retirement savings, that she'd saved with her husband her whole life, not taking a vacation. She saw it drop—I'm not going to mention the number, but it was a big number. She was only 65. Pretty scary—scary for so many people. But we can't let it paralyze us.

1430

Our job in here, our job in this environment of uncertainty, is to create certainty for people, to make sure that they know that there are things that they can count on, things that they depend on: the things that matter most. I think when you believe that maybe your job is not secure or it might change, or you might not have as much money to take care of yourself in your retirement, you want to know the things that we actually do for each other here in Ontario, the most important things, health care and education, are there for you when you need it. I won't say I was disappointed; I was a bit surprised to see them buried at the end of the throne speech, and in some ways saying the things I heard so many times before, like "historic." Everything is historic around this place. Every government has made historic investments. It's not the size of the investment as much as it is what you do with it.

I want to talk a little bit about certainty as it relates to health care. The government keeps saying, "We've made historic investments." They were saying that again yesterday. The reality is, they've been saying the same thing for a while, saying, "We're going to fix health care. We're going to end hallway health care." It's worse than it's ever been. "We're going to make sure it's there for you when you need it." Guess what? Some 2.5 million Ontarians don't have a family doctor. How did we get there? It's almost seven years, folks. We're going in the wrong direction.

Right now, if you're retired and you are in fear of not having enough money to live—not just to live well, but to live—you want to know. You want to know that you won't have to use your credit card instead of your OHIP card. Right here, on page 17, for those of you who are following at home, it says here—and I've heard the Premier say this many times, and a number of ministers: "As it does, your government will ensure people in Ontario are able to access health care services with their OHIP card, never their credit card." I can't count how many times I've heard the Premier say that.

I'm going to tell you a story. Here's the story: It's a family. Grandfather falls and hurts his knee, twists his knee. He's a lucky guy; he's got a family doctor. He goes to his doctor. The doctor says, "Well, you're going to need an MRI. But you know what? What do you want? You can get your credit card and we can get you in there in a week. Here, it's going to be three months, four months. I can't actually tell you. You won't be able to do anything with your knee for three or four months, so what's your choice?"

The grandmother goes to the optometrist. They have an exam. The optometrist says, "You're getting cataracts. You're going to need cataract surgery. Don't wait in the government line. Just go and pay \$3,000 over here." There we go: another credit card.

So then the daughter, with the grandson, ends up going to another optometrist because he's having vision problems. He's eight years old, nine years old. He's in school and having a hard time seeing the board. "Oh, you're covered by OHIP. You'll have to wait a year," with the

implication being that if you pay for it, you can get in sooner.

You know whose family that was? My family. That's not a story without a name; that's my family. For me, that's not a problem, but for the vast majority of Ontarians, that's a really big problem.

It's not addressed in here. It's not addressed when you say, "You'll never have to pay with your credit card," because it's happening, and it's happening more and more and more. Just saying it doesn't make it go away; you actually need to do something about the problem, and the government has done nothing about it for almost three years right now, and it's getting worse everyday. Thousands and thousands of people are being asked to pay for the health care they need with their credit card, and that's just fine. And I'm fully on board with the Premier having a hat that says "Ontario Is Not For Sale," but we might have to put, "But Our Health Care Is" on the back of that hat.

My point here is, protecting people and protecting jobs is about protecting the things that they depend on. They depend on health care. One of the agreements that I think we all have here is that we take care of each other and that our health care is there for us when we need it, no matter how much money we make, and that we don't prevent or inhibit or reduce the access for people just based on their income. At least that's what I hear. I think that's what all the members of the other side expect. I wouldn't think they'd think otherwise. So I'm not accusing you of not caring or doing it intentionally, but it's happening, and people are taking advantage of it, and it's bad for people. That's not protecting people.

This morning—and I don't want to recount my question this morning, because it got a little bumpy—

Mr. Matthew Rae: You're out of practice, John.

Mr. John Fraser: I'm out of breath.

I like this conversation we're having right now. But how is it, at this time when we need to have confidence in this government—we need to build confidence; we need to build trust—that we have a government procurement worth about \$2.2 billion, a 95-year lease and a great piece of land, and it has a non-disclosure agreement? Inside that NDA, what it essentially says—because we found out. The government didn't tell us this, but the New York Times did, so thank God for the New York Times. Something good is coming up.

In that NDA, it says the government can choose any company it likes, even if it doesn't qualify, even if it doesn't make a bid. They said that's a procurement process. That's a process to have no process. The reason the government is doing that is, they don't want people to know how the decision was made and who made the decision. Thankfully, the Premier said he's going to triple-check today, after months and months of questions.

Has it taken a New York Times article and a question to know that, actually, not providing a proper process and transparency, and spending \$2.2 billion on a company that has a million dollars in equity—it has one spa, but a very small spa. It doesn't actually have an international

footprint or any experience. What do you think regular people would say as you spent \$2.2 billion on that? That's more than the government is spending on its plan to get people family doctors. It is more than the government's plan to get people family doctors—those 2.5 million people.

I see the member from Bay of Quinte up there. Yeah, you. He's nodding because he knows there are like 32,000 people in his riding who don't have a family doctor. So why are we spending \$2.2 billion on a luxury spa for the Premier's friends and hallway health care for the rest of us?

We'll work here to protect people's jobs. We will. We'll work with you to make sure that we break down interprovincial trade. But do you know what? You guys have got to do what you said you were going to: Fix hallway health care. Make health care better. It's only gotten worse.

How do we have somebody who claims they're going to fix the health care system when 2.5 million Ontarians don't have a family doctor? You haven't done what it takes. I know the government has a plan and they're spending more money on a luxury spa than they're spending on the plan for family doctors. It is crazy.

1440

I won't go into now because I've only got a couple of minutes, but actually that plan is not ambitious. It's not actually going to get you where you need to be. So I don't know where you thought you could put \$2.2 billion into a luxury spa.

If you went to the people in your riding today—everybody, think about this—and you said, “Should we put \$2.2 billion in this company that has no money, no experience and is moving money around to put a spa in downtown Toronto—a luxury spa—or should we spend it on getting people family doctors?” Is there anybody out there who thinks people would pick the luxury spa? Just put up your hand. I won't call you out; I just want to make sure. I didn't think so.

Don't forget what matters most, because that's what's happened for almost seven years in health care. You've got to get the basics right. People need to know that care is going to be there for them when they need it and that they're not going to be asked for their credit card. And it's happening way too much. It's just like, “We're going to let that slide. We're going to let it slide.” Because it's really hard to see those people when they're not in here every day shouting out, “I'm having to use my credit card.” But it's happening every day to thousands and thousands of people. The health care that they depend on is costing them money, and they're already paying.

So while we're going to work with you and support you in protecting jobs and fighting for our sovereignty and standing up for Canada, we're not going to let you forget that you've got to get the basics right. You haven't got it right up until now, and you better start working on it.

Thank you very much, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Lorne Coe): I recognize the member from Orléans, please.

Mr. Stephen Blais: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's great to see you in the chair and it's great to be back.

The government has only had the Legislature in session for seven weeks in the past 10 months, so it's an honour to be back here at the Legislature to respond to the speech from the throne, which lays out their upcoming legislative agenda, which I hope is stronger and more robust than it has been of late.

At a time when families across Ontario are facing economic anxiety, health care delays and rising costs, the throne speech was the government's opportunity to show bold, responsive leadership. Instead, what we got was a string of recycled promises, misplaced priorities and a startling lack of urgency on the issues that matter most to Ontarians.

Let's be clear: No amount of flag-waving can hide the fact that this government has failed to get the basics right. The Premier talks about building Ontario but what people actually see are crumbling schools, health care wait-lists and infrastructure stuck in the last century. They hear big talk but very little about what they need today, which is access to a doctor, a classroom that isn't overcrowded and a job that pays the bills.

Now, this government came to power promising tax cuts for families and for small businesses—relief to help people keep more of what they earn and make life more affordable. But after seven years, those promises remain unfulfilled.

Ontario still has the highest small business tax rate in the country. Working families continue to feel the squeeze, and the throne speech made no mention of these broken promises—no plan for real, permanent tax relief, and no acknowledgement that people are struggling to make ends meet. Instead of cutting taxes, this government has offered deferrals disguised as solutions, which leaves Ontario with higher bills and fewer answers.

Over the past year, Ontario has lost tens of thousands of jobs, including more than 24,000 in construction and hundreds of jobs in manufacturing, while other provinces have seen the gains. And this was before tariffs, Mr. Speaker. Youth unemployment is now the highest in the country, and while the population keeps growing, good jobs aren't keeping pace. The government points to headlines and ribbon cuttings, but those numbers don't reflect the reality for too many Ontarians, and that is fewer opportunities, lower job security and rising costs with shrinking paycheques. A government that truly cared about economic resilience wouldn't just chase press releases, it would focus on protecting and creating the jobs people actually depend on.

Tariffs aren't just headlines. They're hitting real people in real communities. Just ask the more than 100 workers at the Ivaco Rolling Mills plant in L'Orignal, just east of Ottawa, who are now facing layoffs because of the uncertainty caused by Donald Trump's tariffs. This is the real human cost of economic instability: families suddenly without an income, workers unsure of what comes next and small towns bracing for the ripple effect.

These workers didn't cause the crisis but they're certainly paying the price. That's why the government must move beyond slogans and deliver real support—targeted relief for affected businesses, income protection for workers, re-training programs to help them get back on their feet. If we're serious about protecting Ontario, we need to start by protecting the people who keep it running. If we want to build a resilient province, we can't keep leaving entire regions behind. The challenges facing workers in places like L'Orignal aren't isolated. They're part of a larger pattern of neglect across eastern Ontario.

I mentioned this in the past, in this place, I mentioned it earlier this morning and I'll continue to mention it until it's solved, Mr. Speaker: Nowhere is the problem of lack of focus on all of our regions more obvious than in Ottawa. Ottawa is the second-largest city in Ontario and the capital of our country. It deserves more than handshakes and headlines.

Frankly, the Premier's bromance with the mayor has delivered next to nothing for the people who actually live in the nation's capital. While transit ridership is recovering, there still remains the need for investment to stabilize and modernize the system—investments that are coming to Toronto, but not investments that are coming to Ottawa. Housing starts have dropped dramatically and instead of partnering with the city to accelerate new goals, the province has stood by, watching. Meanwhile Ottawa's infrastructure deficit continues to grow, with crumbling roads, aging pipes and delayed upgrades holding our city back.

Now, whether it's reliable transit, affordable housing or core infrastructure, Ottawa is falling behind, and the current relationship between Queen's Park and city hall simply isn't delivering the results that people need. It's not shocking, Mr. Speaker, that we see no cabinet minister from Ottawa to represent the city at the most important decision-making table in the province. The city contributes enormously to Ontario's economy, and it's time that the provincial government started to act like it.

Now, the fundamentals continue to be ignored and nowhere is that more evident than in our schools. Ontario has a \$22-billion school repair backlog. That's 1,800 schools in a state of disrepair, and yet the throne speech said nothing about addressing the crisis. Students are learning in buildings with failing HVAC systems, leaky ceilings and overcrowded portables. Teachers are doing their best with aging resources and deteriorating facilities. You can't talk about student achievement while ignoring the conditions students are forced to learn in every day. It's like asking someone to run a race with their shoelaces tied together. It's just not going to work out. Fixing schools isn't just about education, of course. It's also about jobs and it's about economic stimulus. School repairs are shovel-ready investments that can create good local employment while improving the daily life of our students and our teachers. But instead of investing in the basics, this government has chosen, once again, to focus on its friends and its insiders.

As we know, education isn't the only place where the government's neglect shows. The cracks are just as visible and just as dangerous in our health care system. Once again, the government has recycled its plan to connect every Ontarian with primary care—a laudable plan, but there was no new money, no new timeline, no accountability. Meanwhile, 2.5 million Ontarians are without a family doctor. People are waiting in the cold just to get on a waiting list. ERs are still closing, wait times are still climbing, and surgeries are still being delayed.

1450

You can't build economic resilience when the health care system people rely on is crumbling under pressure. If this government truly believed inefficiency, it would invest in the most effective and affordable form of health care, and that's primary care, because early detection leads to better outcomes, shorter wait times, less pressure on the emergency room and more confidence in the system.

Monsieur le Président, pour bâtir une province forte, il faut aussi reconnaître et soutenir la richesse de la francophonie ontarienne. La francophonie n'est pas une revendication régionale, c'est une richesse collective pour tout l'Ontario. Elle contribue à notre identité, à notre culture et à notre prospérité.

Prenons l'exemple du MIFO, le Mouvement d'implication francophone d'Orléans, qui propose un projet d'expansion essentiel pour continuer à offrir des services culturels, éducatifs et communautaires aux francophones. Ce projet incarne également l'innovation et le dynamisme de la francophonie ontarienne. Il devrait être une priorité provinciale. Et pourtant, aucun mot, aucun engagement, aucun soutien concret par le gouvernement.

Si ce gouvernement veut vraiment protéger l'Ontario, il doit aussi protéger sa diversité linguistique. Il doit investir dans des institutions francophones qui enrichissent notre province, qui créent des emplois et qui donnent aux jeunes une fierté de leur langue et de leur culture.

Mr. Speaker, the government speaks about protecting Ontario, but what we heard in the throne speech was a government protecting itself. Protecting itself from accountability, from responsibility and from reality. There is no plan to fix what's broken in health care; no plan to make life more affordable with permanent, meaningful relief; no investment in public education; no support for educators; no mention of student mental health; no recognition that our schools are literally falling apart.

Leadership isn't about slogans, it's about solutions. Ontarians aren't looking to their government for headlines; they're looking for help. They want to know that their kids will learn in safe, clean classrooms. They want to know that if they get sick, they'll get care without needing to wait weeks or travelling for hours. They want to know that their government is focused on them, not just insiders and special interests.

Now, to the families in Orléans and across Ontario: If you're struggling to find a family doctor, you're not alone. If your child is learning in a portable, you are not alone. If you feel like you're falling behind while the Premier is focused on his friends and his insiders, you are not alone.

We here in the opposition see you, we hear you, and we will continue to fight for you.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Lorne Coe): The member from Ottawa–Vanier, please.

M^{me} Lucille Collard: C'est vraiment un plaisir et un privilège de contribuer au débat du discours du trône, et je veux saisir l'opportunité de remercier tous les électeurs d'Ottawa–Vanier, tous les membres de ma formidable équipe de campagne et les nombreux bénévoles qui ont bravé le froid pendant une élection en plein hiver—ce n'était pas ma première; ma deuxième, en fait—incluant une journée d'élection qui a été très difficile avec des conditions hivernales qui ont mis un peu tout le monde dans le pétrin, mais on a fini par remporter quand même. Alors, c'est un grand plaisir et, vraiment, c'est une responsabilité que j'assume avec beaucoup d'humilité et de détermination pour obtenir des solutions aux enjeux qui préoccupent les gens d'Ottawa–Vanier, car en effet, les résidents d'Ottawa–Vanier ont de grandes attentes envers leur gouvernement pour adresser ces besoins. L'opportunité d'en parler aujourd'hui est certainement un devoir que je prends au sérieux.

Le discours du trône que nous avons entendu hier est malheureusement sans surprise, une autre preuve du manque d'ambition de gouvernement pour régler les problèmes majeurs qui continuent d'empirer en Ontario.

Tous les partis reconnaissent la gravité de la guerre commerciale, et nous appuyons les mesures de riposte tarifaires. J'invite tous les membres de cette Assemblée à se rallier derrière l'esprit d'Équipe Canada, à placer le pays au-dessus du parti et les gens au cœur de nos priorités.

Mais en dehors de cet enjeu où il y a consensus, le reste du discours du trône démontre une chose : le gouvernement n'a aucune intention de changer de cap en matière d'éducation, de logement, de santé ou de services en français.

Les Ontariennes et Ontariens méritent mieux. Ils méritent un gouvernement qui adresse les enjeux prioritaires.

Commençons par notre système d'éducation, qui souffre d'un sous-financement chronique.

Partout en Ontario, les conseils scolaires sont contraints de faire des choix impossibles : couper dans les programmes, congédier du personnel, entasser davantage d'élèves dans des classes déjà surchargées. À Ottawa, par exemple, le conseil scolaire public anglophone a été obligé de redéfinir les secteurs de fréquentation pour leurs écoles. Cet état de choses a entraîné un vent de panique chez les familles, qui craignent que les frères et sœurs seront séparés et qui éloignent les enfants de leur quartier.

Le manque d'enseignants est généralisé. Les programmes d'éducation spécialisée sont dramatiquement réduits. Depuis 2018, nous avons perdu plus de 5 000 éducateurs dans nos salles de classe. Et malgré cela, le gouvernement continue de couper. Nos enfants sont les grands perdants et nos enseignants sont de plus en plus en danger.

Soyons clairs : les actes de violence en milieu scolaire sont en forte hausse. Un sondage récent a révélé que 70 % des membres de la FEEO ont été témoins ou victimes de violence. Chez les enseignants de la fédération des écoles secondaires, c'est 30 %. C'est totalement inacceptable. Il ne faut pas s'étonner d'avoir de la difficulté à recruter des enseignants ou de pouvoir les retenir. C'est vraiment un défi aujourd'hui.

Nos enseignants sont des professionnels qui sont dévoués, qui donnent leur cœur et leur énergie pour nos enfants. Le minimum qu'ils méritent, c'est un lieu de travail sécuritaire. Un environnement d'apprentissage sans violence ne devrait pas être une revendication; ça devrait être un droit fondamental. C'est aussi simple que ça.

La situation est encore pire en éducation spécialisée. Les élèves à besoins particuliers perdent l'accès aux ressources dont ils ont besoin pour réussir. Les conseils scolaires sont forcés de choisir entre les programmes essentiels et les services d'accompagnement.

Ce gouvernement économise sur le dos des élèves les plus vulnérables. Et ça, ce n'est pas seulement irresponsable, c'est carrément honteux.

Malgré tout cela, il n'y a aucun plan pour recruter ou retenir davantage d'éducateurs. Il faudrait investir dans la formation, offrir des incitatifs, faciliter l'accès à la profession, mais on n'a rien vu de proposé à cet égard-là.

Cette pénurie est particulièrement grave dans nos écoles francophones. Les élèves francophones sont privés de leur droit à une éducation en français, faute de personnel. Le groupe de travail du gouvernement a publié un rapport en 2021. Leur propre groupe de travail a fourni des solutions claires, et quatre ans plus tard, toujours aucun progrès : aucune stratégie pour former plus d'enseignants francophones, aucun programme passerelle pour les enseignants formés à l'étranger, aucun leadership.

Et pendant ce temps, les infrastructures se détériorent. Speaker, il y a 15 ans, j'ai fait mon entrée en politique parce que je trouvais ça scandaleux que l'on accepte que nos enfants apprennent dans des salles portatives. Aujourd'hui, en Ontario, en 2025, encore beaucoup trop d'élèves doivent encore apprendre dans des classes portatives qui sont surpeuplées.

Le gouvernement vante un investissement de 16 milliards de dollars—on a vu les belles pancartes bleues devant les écoles durant la campagne électorale—mais lorsqu'on divise cette somme sur 10 ans et à travers les milliers d'écoles dans la province, ce n'est tout simplement pas suffisant. C'est, en fait, la moitié de ce que le rapport du directeur de la responsabilité financière, que j'ai commandé moi-même, estime. On demande qu'il y ait 31,4 milliards sur 10 ans qui soient investis. C'est ce dont on a besoin pour répondre aux besoins d'entretien et la capacité dans nos écoles.

Une fois de plus, le gouvernement se contente d'annoncer de gros chiffres pour masquer un manque cruel d'investissement réel. Mais lorsqu'on tient compte de l'inflation et de la croissance démographique, la réalité saute aux yeux : ce gouvernement est en train d'étrangler nos écoles, pas de les soutenir.

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Le même schéma de négligence s'applique aux services en français, malheureusement. Le dernier rapport du commissaire aux services en français est accablant : trop de francophones n'ont toujours pas accès à des services gouvernementaux dans leur langue. Les sites Web sont incomplets, les documents non traduits, et les services publics souvent non disponibles.

Pour les francophones unilingues—je vais prendre un exemple comme ma mère—ça peut vouloir dire ne pas recevoir le soutien nécessaire. Et pour ceux d'entre nous qui sont bilingues, devoir s'exprimer en anglais dans des moments critiques—comme pour des soins de santé—peut mener à des malentendus dangereux.

Recevoir des services en français n'est pas un privilège, c'est un droit, et ce gouvernement ne respecte pas ce droit. Rappelons-nous que dès sa première année, ce gouvernement a coupé dans les services en français. Ces coupes n'ont jamais été annulées, et leurs impacts se font toujours sentir.

Je vais aborder la crise du logement parce qu'il me reste une couple de minutes et je veux m'assurer que mes collègues aient le temps de donner leur point de vue également. Mais la crise du logement ne cesse de s'aggraver. Dans Ottawa-Vanier, les loyers explosent, les hypothèques deviennent inaccessibles et, pour beaucoup, devenir propriétaire semble hors de portée.

Il n'y a aucun doute que mon fils de 24 ans, qui habite à la maison, apprécie beaucoup ma cuisine, mais ce n'est pas la raison pour laquelle il est encore à la maison. Parce qu'il a soif d'indépendance—à son âge, c'est normal—mais la perspective de manger de la misère, au lieu de ma bonne cuisine, s'il déménage le fait encore hésiter à faire le grand pas.

Nous avons besoin de logements abordables, nous avons besoin de plus d'unités de logement social, et nous avons besoin d'une approche axée sur le « logement d'abord ». Actuellement, on a des sommes importantes qui sont gaspillées pour héberger des nouveaux arrivants dans des hôtels. Le nombre de personnes qui vivent dans la rue, qui dépendent des services sociaux qui sont tout à fait insuffisants—ça les pousse vers la criminalité et ça affecte la vie du quotidien des gens qui résident dans le secteur. C'est vraiment un nombre alarmant et on doit revoir cette situation-là. Ce qu'il faut vraiment, ce sont des logements stables avec des services de soutien pour les aider à sortir de l'itinérance, à surmonter leurs dépendances et à retrouver une autonomie.

Les Ontariens et Ontariennes méritent mieux. Ils méritent un gouvernement qui fait correctement les choses fondamentales, et ce que nous avons entendu dans ce discours du trône ne répond pas, malheureusement, à ces besoins.

Merci, monsieur le Président.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Lorne Coe): Further debate?

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also want to thank the voters of Don Valley West for returning me to this very special place in the Legislature

to represent them. I want to thank my campaign team and many volunteers. It's been a whirlwind campaign during a cold winter. They were resilient and determined, and I really appreciate all of their help.

It's a pleasure to rise today to respond to the speech from the throne, and I do hope that a new Speaker and a new Parliament might be joined with new ways of thinking about how we can tackle this trade crisis. Sadly, most of what we heard yesterday is more of the same, and I'm afraid that it misses the mark.

Ontario's Legislature was the only Canadian one not sitting until this week while we had this huge trade crisis confronting us; the only one not back in the Legislature to find solutions and a way to work together to move forward. And the people of Ontario are looking to their government to do that, to steer them through this very scary storm. They want assurances that people will keep their jobs, they'll keep working and providing for their families. They want to know this government is hard at work for them, not just the government's friends.

We talked a lot this morning about how the government could enrich a foreign-owned company with a multi-billion-dollar contract even though that company misrepresented their experience. The Premier didn't answer the question in question period, but I'm glad in the media conference, the one that he spent a few hundred thousand dollars of taxpayer money building, he said that he will actually ask his people to look into it. I hope he does, and I hope we get answers.

With all the time we hear this government talk about record investments, which we heard again during the throne speech, it's fair to ask ourselves, for residents of Ontario to ask themselves, "What these record investments are doing for me? What are they doing for the people of Ontario?"

This government has added over \$100 billion in debt because of their large deficits, mismanagement and pet projects like the Therme spa, and their misguided decision to move the Ontario Science Centre along with it to help their friends at Therme.

We do now have record levels of debt after seven years of this Conservative government. Last year, the government spent a record amount of money—just over \$206 billion—but we also have a record number of crises: 2.5 million people without a family doctor, record numbers of ER closures, a record number of people visiting food banks, a record number of people without a home and record numbers dying from the opioid crisis. As I have been saying for over a year, never has a government spent so much to deliver so little.

And now, while we face the most serious economic crisis in generations, we have a province and people who are in a financial pinch. Before the US election, while this government was preparing to call that unnecessary, expensive election here in Ontario, let's look at where we were.

Real GDP per capita, the broadest measure of economic prosperity, has been falling at a faster rate in Ontario than the rest of Canada since 2022.

Ontario's unemployment rate has gone up during the seven years of this government and has been above the national average since 2020, because this government just isn't doing enough. Seeing it above the national average is actually very unusual. It's only happened twice in the past 50 years: during the 2008 financial crisis, and then again during the pandemic.

We know business investments drive productivity growth, create jobs and boost workers' income, and yet this government isn't doing enough. We have productivity at a record low, on par with Alabama.

Ontario families are seeing their after-tax income decrease. It's growing more slowly than the national average. In fact, an average Ontario household has \$2,000 less in purchasing power than they did in 2018.

The only thing the government has achieved with its debt strategy is to stabilize the debt-to-GDP ratio, but it still doesn't leave very much room to support workers and invest in Ontario businesses as we need to grow and as we face US tariffs.

Fewer manufacturing jobs are being created under this government, and they know it. The sector's share of total employment hit a new record low of 10% in 2024, significantly below the historical average of 16.5%. Construction job losses totalling 14,000 in 2024 were on top of an additional 24,000 in 2023, setting another record, the biggest two-year decline since the early-1990s recession.

In 2024, Canada-US trade topped \$1 trillion. That relationship supports 2.4 million jobs in Canada and 1.1 million in Ontario. Those jobs are at risk. A record number of jobs are at risk because of the dramatic shift in US trade policy.

The government had the opportunity yesterday to put forward a credible plan to address this crisis and protect jobs. Sadly, it didn't do it. The throne speech did talk about \$11 billion in relief, and there is some relief there, but it's mostly temporary—\$9 billion. It's a tax deferral. The bill will still come due in October. This temporary measure just isn't enough to shore up confidence, so we will see companies that are having to close their doors or lay off workers just to try to keep afloat. What they actually need is permanent relief. They need tax cuts. They need investment credits that will help them innovate, diversify their supply chains and pivot away from their reliance on trade with the US.

I've been speaking to small businesses in my riding of Don Valley West, and like all small businesses across the province, they are worried. They're seeing an increase in the cost of materials, a decrease in sales, slowing contracts, slowing sales funnels. They're worried about the uncertainty that this whole situation is causing. But do you know what, Speaker? Small businesses were not mentioned once during the throne speech—astonishing. One of the biggest drivers of jobs in this province—two thirds of private sector jobs—didn't merit a mention.

As this vital part of our economy now deals with the fallout of US tariffs, these people are worried. Those job losses, if they occur, would be another blow to our economy and, more importantly, to those workers and

those families whose livelihood is at risk. Just last month the CFIB, an important voice for small business, reported that "Ontario's long-term business confidence level nosedived"—another bad record—"this month to an all-time low and second worst in the country," worse than "during the 2020 pandemic, the 2008 financial crisis and 9/11." That is a record low, Speaker.

1510

The CFIB goes on to say, "Small businesses urgently need all the help they can get to weather this storm," and that "the Ontario government can best help with measures like lowering the small business tax rate." Last year, I tabled a bill, the Cutting Taxes on Small Businesses Act, that would've done just that. But this government voted against it—voted against helping small businesses—and defeated the bill. And we heard nothing yesterday about new measures to reduce taxes for small businesses or other businesses and provide the relief they need.

The Premier said today that he wants to hear good ideas from the opposition. Heck, he might even listen to them. That would be great. I hope he does, and I hope that he means he will consider the small-business tax cut that I proposed last year as one of those good ideas that could actually help small businesses weather this tariff storm.

Speaker, one of the best parts of this job is having students visit here at Queen's Park. Last week, a grade 5 class from my riding, Thorncliffe Park Public School, was here. Their visit certainly made me ask myself, like the show does, "Are you smarter than a fifth grader?" These young kids had some great questions. The last one was, "What do you think about the tariffs?" This is a 10-year-old, Mr. Speaker. I know they didn't use that word because they've been watching the Premier on CNN. They used that word because their parents—their families—are talking about tariffs and the negative impact it could have on them and their families as we face this crisis. They might lose their jobs. But what is the Premier banking on to get us through this crisis? Another pet project. Yesterday, a stakeholder I was talking to nicknamed it the "duggle." A pet project—a tunnel under the 401.

This government isn't listening to experts. The experts say the complexity of building the "duggle" under this existing highway could add tens of billions of dollars to cost estimates and come with years of construction and years of congestion. Tunnelling engineers have pegged the cost—it didn't come from the government; it wasn't a transparent estimate from them—from \$60 billion up to \$150 billion. But instead of spending \$150 billion on the "duggle," the province could address the \$52 billion infrastructure backlog by fixing roads and bridges and fund the \$22 billion to fund school repairs as they crumble around the kids who are sitting there every day, and the education workers and teachers who have to put buckets under drips in the ceiling. That investment would cost a lot less than the tunnel and it would help people now.

We know the government likes to put all of its eggs in one basket, kind of like the EV battery plants, and spending \$150 billion on the "duggle" would be almost as much as the province's current \$200-billion capital plan.

So let's put this in perspective: Canada's most expensive infrastructure project out in BC has an estimated cost of \$16 billion. That's a tenth of the size of this project that the government is talking about. And as I said earlier, there just isn't enough wiggle room in the province's finances for a pet project that costs \$150 billion. It makes no sense to sacrifice the investments we need in health care, education and building housing for the sake of a fantasy tunnel.

People are indeed worried, and I know the government members and all members in this House know that and they feel it too. So in the spirit of giving the Premier and his government some ideas to help make a real difference with their policy, let's think about some guiding principles to guide us during this challenging time:

(1) Solutions need to be permanent, not temporary. Temporary solutions like tax deferrals are just Band-Aids.

(2) Ontario must be a leader, not a laggard. That means we don't wait for other provinces to realize what must be done to protect us. The throne speech said that the province will only treat goods and services from other provinces the same as Ontario goods and services if those provinces do the same for us. That's not leadership, Speaker. We need leadership, and we must lead.

(3) We need to build up Ontario in every part of this province.

Speaker, I've talked about a couple of ways to do that, I'm going to throw out a few more in my remaining couple of minutes.

We know we're talking about interprovincial trade. I do hope the Premier and his government will be a leader in that. Let's cut those small business taxes. Let's offer low-cost financing to innovative sectors like AI, life sciences, advanced manufacturing. Let's invest in colleges and universities. They are our workforce of the future. They have the ideas that we will need to continue to grow our economy. Let's invest in them.

Let's work with the auto sector now to determine what measures government can take to reopen plants and keep them open; for example, through government procurement. Let's develop a reindustrialization policy for Ontario to develop new industries and jobs that don't just mine critical minerals but do the value-added activities leveraging the know-how of the exceptionally talented workforce we have here at home.

As consumers shift away from buying US products to buying Canadian, let's use the Building Ontario Fund to support Ontario businesses. Let's help them scale up, let's help them commercialize so they can meet that growing demand, where we all want to do our part and buy local.

Speaker, we do stand ready to work with this government to develop good ideas, to offer good ideas, to implement good ideas that will help the people of Ontario. So let's do this together.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Lorne Coe): The member for Don Valley East, please.

Mr. Adil Shamji: It's always an honour to rise in this august chamber and discuss the issues that matter most to Ontarians. That honour today is two-fold as I return for a

second term in this 44th Parliament. I'd like to begin by thanking the voters and people of Don Valley East, as well as my family, the supporters and volunteers who made it possible for me to be here. I want to reaffirm my commitment and say that I am more committed than ever before to serve my constituents and the people of Ontario by providing solutions and the leadership that I worry we're not seeing from this government.

Now, I must admit, it was a relief for the Legislature to finally convene earlier this week for the first time since December 12. December 12—that's four months; four months during which tens of thousands of people have lost their jobs, during which entire industries have been decimated and during which measles has spread throughout our province. And we started with the throne speech. If I was hoping that the throne speech would mark a new turning point for productivity, accountability or transparency in this province, I shouldn't have been and was sorely disappointed. It had the same hallmark chest-thumping and superficial rhetoric that has become the trademark of everything under this government and Premier. There were almost no new ideas or announcements in that throne speech: no creativity, no originality and, frankly, no effort.

There was no effort to acknowledge or address the fact that this government cannot get the basics right and is bringing the wrong kind of international attention to our province. As we speak, countries right now are issuing travel advisories—not to Canada, but specifically to Ontario. In New York state, they're warning each other that measles is just a car ride away. They're talking about us. And now, today, we're learning that the New York Times has revealed glaring incompetence, to put it charitably, after the Premier was bamboozled by a barely solvent foreign spa company that misrepresented itself, and is now using us to secure additional investments all around the world.

Our economy is under threat, and it needs to be firing on all cylinders. We can't afford to make mistakes like the Therme deal that cost Ontarians \$2.2 billion, in a time when Ontarians are already stretched thin and when people need reassurance that Ontario is a safe place for businesses to grow.

Imagine you are an international company. Imagine wanting and having to compete for business in Ontario, according to the Premier's custom-made, murky bidding process that is so flawed that it allowed him to be duped by clever wording and look-alike logos by a foreign spa company, because that's what happened. This is a mistake that cost Ontario \$2.2 billion—\$2.2 billion at a time that there are 2.5 million people without a family doctor, and the most that this Premier can promise, because who knows if he will even deliver, is \$1.8 billion for primary care.

He talks about economic prosperity, but he won't cut small business corporate tax rates in half. He won't introduce a middle-income tax cut. He won't reduce the HST on home heating or electricity.

1520

To add insult to injury, the Premier's priorities are entirely misplaced. Here is a list of a few things he's happy to spend more money on than primary care:

- \$2.2 billion for a foreign spa company, Therme. In their proposal, they talk about offering towel dances and movies at the pool. Can you believe that? Some \$2.2 billion for that, not for primary care;

- \$1.9 billion for booze in convenience stores;

- \$3 billion for one-time cheques that still haven't even been delivered yet. I still get complaints about that in my constituency office.

So when I think about the needs of our province's economy, there was nothing in the throne speech to give any confidence whatsoever.

Just as alarming, if not more alarming, is the fact that health care was almost entirely overlooked. It took nearly 40 minutes for health care to appear in the throne speech for the first time, and when it did, there was nothing new to offer. No acknowledgement of the crisis of measles that we face in the province right now, nothing to support public health—the same recycled announcements about health care that we're still waiting on the edges of our chairs to actually see materialize after seven years.

ER closures persist. Wait times are through the roof. Thousands of family doctors, both domestic and international, are currently on the sidelines.

Of course, we did hear about a half-hearted attempt to address the primary care crisis. The government has recently started to say that it intends to connect 300,000 people to a family doctor by year's end. Let's give them the benefit of the doubt and say that they'll actually do it. There are over 2.5 million people in Ontario who don't have a family doctor. If the goal, as the province has stated, is to eliminate that by 2029, then this government actually needs to connect 450,000 people by the end of the year. The Parliament is just forming, and this government is already admitting defeat, because they are moving at a rate that is 50% too slow.

If that makes you wonder why this sounds familiar, there is a reason for that. This reflects the government's failures and lack of ambition on housing. It reminds me of that government promise to build 1.5 million homes, and yet, year after year, month after month, this government falls farther and farther behind in its goal. The government has tried everything possible to save itself without doing anything. It has tried changing the goalposts by including long-term-care beds and college dormitories in the count. It has tried adjusting its short-term projections, saying, "We'll catch up later with the long-term ones." And it has tried burying its numbers in complex documents.

But lately, as it has become literally mathematically impossible to build those homes no matter how much you change those short-term projections, we saw a new strategy unveiled in the throne speech yesterday: Pretend that promise doesn't exist. Despite encampments, rampant homelessness, profound housing unaffordability, this government didn't dare utter the words "1.5 million homes" a single time. That's embarrassing.

And if you think, between that and the recent international shame arising from the new revelations about the Therme deal, it gets worse. Just yesterday, Premier Danielle Smith revealed that Alberta is building more homes than Ontario despite governing a province that is only one third the size of ours. Ouch. Housing starts are down 40% this year, and the speech from the throne tells us exactly why: There's no ambition, no new ideas and no effort.

Ontario faces unprecedented challenges: threats to our prosperity, to our industries, to our labour markets, even to our sovereignty. In the face of this, we can and we must unite. We are ready to build a Team Ontario approach that will be the foundation and vanguard of a Team Canada approach. We can say together, "Canada First, Never 51st." But that doesn't mean accepting mediocrity. It doesn't mean allowing bad deals, like the Therme one. It doesn't mean ignoring health care. It doesn't mean unleashing the Ring of Fire without consulting meaningfully with Indigenous people. It doesn't mean ignoring housing.

In fact, by getting the basics right, we can turbo-charge our tariff response and economy. For example, we face tariffs to our steel and timber industries. Does anyone know anything that requires a lot of steel and timber? Housing. By focusing on housing, we can limit our exposure to tariffs, address our housing crisis and increase our self-resilience. But for now, while this government fails our housing sector, it's failing our tariff response.

So as a result, I feel it is my loyal duty to acknowledge my disappointment in the announcements that came in yesterday's throne speech. But it's also my loyal responsibility and duty to say that we're still committed to working together.

Esteemed colleagues, let's pass some tax cuts. Let's get back on track to building 1.5 million homes. Let's resolve the measles outbreaks and get everyone a family doctor. If we can do that together, then we will build a better, stronger, healthier Ontario, and we will do it together.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Lorne Coe): Thank you very much for your presentation.

Members, we are now on the 20-minute rotation with Q&As. I acknowledge the member from Algoma-Manitoulin, please.

MPP Bill Rosenberg: Good afternoon, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

"Why?" That was the question my wife asked me when I decided to run for MPP of Algoma-Manitoulin. My simple answer was that I still have lots to offer. I want to make a difference for Algoma-Manitoulin. I want what is best for the north and leave behind something that my family and my constituents can be proud of. I am from the north and for north. Also, I got a phone call from Minister Fedeli suggesting I run.

And now, here I am, an elected MPP at Queen's Park. It's quite a feeling. It's hard to put it into words. Walking down these halls, reading the names of my predecessors etched into marble, I can honestly say that feeling is awe

and humility. Look around: Everything in this room is inspiring.

We're obligated to carry our work forward. The throne speech yesterday emphasized the importance of the fight against Trump's tariffs. Now we must push forward to eliminate the barriers between our provinces. All this will make Ontario and Canada united and stronger moving forward.

Since 1867, I was sworn in as the 1,981st member to be part of the 44th Parliament of Ontario in these hallowed walls—unbelievable. This is especially true since my background was logging and farming. As a young man, hard work followed me from sunrise to sunset. Nothing builds character and self-discipline like cutting trees and shovelling manure. My earliest memories of my grandfather's ride to the logging camps when I was six or seven paved the way for my logging career. When he bought my cousin and I those little red shovels to clean out the sawdust from under the sawmill, to have fun—they're all special memories now.

Mr. Speaker, 1981 has a special meaning for me. My second daughter was born February 18, 1981, at 6 a.m. There was no such thing as maternity leave or not working at my family logging business. I was off to work in less than an hour. Later that morning, my head not quite focused, I was hit by a tree. I broke three vertebrae in my shoulder. Lucky for me, the snow was four feet deep and somewhat cushioned my tree. That probably saved me.

1530

I remember my dad coming back into the bush. I imagine he was pretty scared, seeing his son under a tree, but the first thing he asked me was if I thought I could finish off the day. I suggested we should try to get the tree off first—probably wasted a good log cutting that tree off, which probably didn't make him very happy.

If I were a cat, I would probably have used up seven of my nine lives—a few accidents in the bush, making some bad decisions with 1,200-pound angry cows. For my grandpa, Charlie, and my father, Merl, there were very few reasons not to go to work. I was young, strong and bull-headed. I went back to work in six weeks.

Still, the worst was having my wife look after our two young daughters and one big baby that couldn't do much but watch Victor on the Young and the Restless.

The 44th Parliament—44 years ago, my daughter was born. I was busted up and bruised, and Reggie Jackson was hitting home runs for the Yankees. Even though we wore the same number 44, he received a little bit more recognition than I did. I'm looking to put all those numbers together so we can win the lottery. I can tell you, in those days, the furthest thing from my mind was political aspirations of any kind.

It's not forgotten how much it means to me, all the work and effort it took from my small but mighty campaign team. Thank you for all the opportunity and eventually the win. Algoma-Manitoulin is the connecting link from the south to the north.

Special thanks goes out to Robin, Duncan, Jackson, Lisa, Melanie, Cheryl, Brad—Robin even gave up a Super

Bowl ticket to stay on my campaign. I don't think I would have done that. That's dedication.

And especially to my wife, Jeannine: She was with me for 8,800 kilometres—you guys had another crier here not too long ago, so it's all good—through snow storms, closed roads, minus 36 and lack of sleep.

During the campaign, I got to meet a lot of friends, made a lot of new friends and met some interesting people. Thank you, everyone.

Robin has agreed to be my EA—and Jeannine has also agreed to stay on for a few more years. She's my wife. She has that option.

I would like to thank my predecessor at this time, who represented Algoma-Manitoulin well. His enthusiasm was unbelievable. Congratulations, and enjoy yourself wherever the road takes you.

Algoma-Manitoulin is not your average riding. It is 110,000 square kilometres. That's 10% of Ontario's land mass, a large area filled with lakes and rich in forestry, mining, agriculture and tourism. It comprises 38 small communities and 18 First Nations, where residents are proud and passionate about the land they call home.

From the early 1920s, the McFadden Lumber Co. in Blind River produced 89 million feet of pine in their first year—1928 or 1929. Elliot Lake was once known as the uranium capital of the world. Espanola was known for its pulp and paper; Thessalon, for sawmills since the late 1800s; Chapleau, the hub of the CPR railway and sawmills; Dubreuilville, Hornepayne, White River—all known for sawmills, and now major mining opportunities.

White River is also known for Winnie the Pooh. I don't know if any of you guys knew that.

Wawa is also known for logging and minerals, and the infamous Wawa goose.

The city of Sault Ste. Marie, well known as a major player in the steel industry, is surrounded by our riding, and they have close ties to us.

There is the beautiful island of Manitoulin, the swing bridge and the Chi-Cheemaun, a destination for many in the southern point of my riding. If you want the full experience, you can drive another nine hours to get to the northern point in Manitouwadge.

These are just a few examples of what Algoma-Manitoulin has to offer. In the last few years people looking to retire have made the decision to move north and retire in the peaceful beauty of northern Ontario.

Forty-five years ago, I got lucky and married my high-school sweetheart, Jeannine. She was a young French girl, determined, beautiful and passionate. It turns out when she got angry, she was a thrower. Anything and everything was coming at you, and that was the passion.

On the farm we tapped 1,200 trees every spring and made maple syrup. After three or four weeks of long days, there's the cleanup, not the glorious side of making syrup. Some of you might remember big-time wrestling. I don't know if anybody does. It was Bobo Brazil. He was a big guy and infamous for his Coco Butt, which is where you hit the guy with your head. One particular day we were carrying a syrup pan out and Jeannine said, "I can't do it."

I probably said something stupid like, “Don’t tell me what you can’t do.” And then—Coco Butt. The passion lived on.

Another time, I came home and asked Jeannine if we had money in the bank because I was going to make a large purchase. She anticipated that diamond ring that she always wanted. I bought a backhoe instead. I told her I was digging for that diamond ring—the perfect diamond ring. After 10 years, I sold my backhoe, and who knew you could put a backhoe on one woman’s finger? The moral of the story: Never lose your passion and don’t be afraid to correct mistakes you made.

I grew up in Dayton, a small farming community just outside of Thessalon. That’s where my wife and I worked hard and survived our disputes and passion. This is where we raised our two daughters. That is where my patience and listening skills come from. We have been blessed with three grandchildren.

We were fortunate enough to acquire our building supply store that Jeannine and I worked in side by side for 28 years. During this time, we’d become active members of the community, belonging to different service clubs and volunteer groups.

In 2014, I entered municipal politics as deputy mayor of the town of Thessalon. With my work/life experience, I had plenty to offer and I knew I could make a difference. Surrounded by a competent staff and council, we made good things happen. I held this position until being elected as MPP on February 27.

What did I leave behind? Dressing up like Waldo in a Where’s Waldo? promotion to attract tourism. Being Santa Claus for kids and for the older kids at our Algoma Manor home for the aged. I had one of the older kids in her late eighties who wanted to smooch with Santa Claus one last time. I didn’t get any of the early smooches, but I got the last one. Delivering Meals on Wheels and making new friends—and Christmas lights. I would be ashamed if I only put up as many Christmas lights as Clark Griswold. Everyone would be welcome to come to my house and see what Christmas is all about. We made lots of great memories in 11 years in the town of Thessalon.

Moving forward, we together can make a difference in the upcoming years of the 44th Parliament. It is our responsibility to get it done. I think I’ve heard that phrase somewhere before.

A lot of northern communities are generational. They want the option for their kids to have a choice to be able to stay, have good jobs, education and housing that can support growth. Many of our communities have similar challenges, but all have rich histories that make them unique. We need to support and respect this.

I’m proud to follow in my grandfather’s and father’s footsteps. There are two sayings that they used that I have used my entire life. The first one was, “Don’t tell me what you can’t do. Show me what you can do.” That got me a Coco Butt one night when I said that to her. The second one is, “You don’t always have to be the loudest voice in the room, just the one that’s listened to and gets things done.” There were several other sayings that my father and

grandfather used to use, stronger adjectives, but that got your attention.

1540

In closing, I want to say that with the last few weeks of congratulatory handshakes and pats on the back, it’s easy to get a big head and feel a little bit more important than we should about ourselves. I think we could all use the following scenario: When I get a fuller sense of myself, I remember that in Thessalon—with a population of 1,400, and I know most of them—I was approached one day by a kindergarten teacher when I was mayor. She was explaining to her classroom that the town is run by the mayor, and this little five-year-old girl jumped up and she does, “No, it’s not. That’s just Bill.” So no matter where this journey takes me, I always want all you guys to know me as just Bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Questions or comments?

Ms. Laura Smith: I want to thank the member from Algoma-Manitoulin for providing us with such fantastic insight into a little bit of his life. You talked about giving back to the community. You talked about being Santa Claus. You talked about working at Meals on Wheels, and you have a serious background in volunteerism. I’m just wondering: As the year passes forward, are you going to be Santa Claus this Christmas in December?

MPP Bill Rosenberg: If I could, I’d be Santa Claus all day long.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): I recognize the member from Waterloo.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you, Speaker. I just want to say to the new member for Algoma-Manitoulin that that was a very classy and gracious inaugural speech, and I think that dry sense of humour will serve you well in this place. You certainly need a sense of humour when you work here.

I also want to say you clearly are very proud of your community. Algoma-Manitoulin is definitely one of the most beautiful places in the province of Ontario.

I appreciate the fact, also, that you have some background in forestry. The Trump administration has targeted this sector. Do you want to share a little bit about one of the concerns that you have around this targeting, and also the potential of the forestry sector in Ontario?

MPP Bill Rosenberg: I do have some background: That tree was laying on my back, and I was pounded into the ground.

But yes, I mean, we’ve seen several sawmills shut down. Remember, there’s an abundance of biomass. So I think we’re going to move forward and try to reopen some of these mills and use some of the fibre up, because as a logger, I know that trees are grown meant to be cut down and to produce lumber and biomass.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): The Chair recognizes the member from Kanata-Carleton.

Interjections: Orléans.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Oh. The member from Orléans.

Mr. Stephen Blais: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you for that wonderful introductory speech and giving us a chance to get to know you a little bit and know some of your background.

Just by way of background, my wife grew up in Wawa her entire life. Her parents lived there until we had kids and they made the trek down to Ottawa when the grandkids arrived. My father-in-law was a big mason and would regale me with stories about the ice fishing derby in Wawa. So I'm wondering if you have any I-caught-a-fish-this-big-type stories you might be able to share with us very quickly this afternoon.

MPP Bill Rosenberg: I have several pictures of fish I caught "this big." I participated in the Wawa Ice Fishing Derby several times. It's a great event. Chapleau has one too. Sometimes there's four feet of snow; sometimes it's minus 30. But fishermen always tell the truth. None of them are liars—it doesn't matter. All the fish we catch are big, and if you hold them out, they're even bigger.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Further?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: I want to thank the member from Algoma-Manitoulin for that heartfelt speech. It was a great speech; I thoroughly enjoyed listening to it.

He said that nothing builds character like shovelling manure. I was a lawyer for 24 years. I don't know too much about shovelling manure, but I do know about building character, so I'll ask him a question about building character.

I'll ask him what characteristics of people, or what characters in his life, have informed his sense of public service? Who does he remember? What character has inspired him? Maybe he would like to share something along that line.

MPP Bill Rosenberg: Growing up in that small community of Dayton, the clerk-treasurer was my neighbour. She was our clerk-treasurer and she looked after all that township. My father was the mayor. He was on council for several years. That's kind of how it started.

Then back to Mr. Fedeli. He's the instigator of this. He was one of them.

I've met so many people over the years, being in business, and a lot of them take pride in the communities. I think that's how you build character. I really do believe that we're here for the same reason: We stand up for our communities. So we all have character. Some of them have louder voices, but I think building character is done within yourself and your family and your community.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): The Chair recognizes the member from Nickel Belt.

Mme France Gélinas: Welcome to the member from Algoma-Manitoulin. I also really enjoyed your speech—44 years ago, about your daughter being born, and some of the jokes you have with your wife.

Like me, you have a huge northern riding. You have the beautiful area of Manitoulin Island, and then what's happening in Espanola right now with the mill reopening, all the way up north to Highway 17. Some of us know your

area better than others. Can you share with the House some of the beauty or some of what you like from the different communities that you have in Algoma-Manitoulin?

And if you go fishing, where did you get your biggest fish?

MPP Bill Rosenberg: I got the biggest fish right here. If you go through the district, if you just drive down the highway in the summertime, the abundance of lakes and the opportunity to see wildlife—you can go to Chapleau and see a moose or you can go up along 129 and you see the beauty of Lake Superior, even when it's the roughest. February is not the best time to go see Lake Superior. But it's wonderful.

I live on Lake Huron in Thessalon. It's just as nice in the wintertime in the middle of a snowstorm as it is in the summertime with the sun shining. Everybody is welcome. Come to northern Ontario. You've got to go past Parry Sound a few hours, but you get north. And the blackflies will be out in about a month.

1550

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Lorne Coe): The member for Beaches-East York, please.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: It's always great to have new members in the chamber and to really get to know each other through inaugural speeches and just find out all about your life, your family, your passion and why you're here. We know Algoma-Manitoulin is a beautiful area. My good friend has a camp up there—I know it's called a camp north of Parry Sound, not a cottage, even though I'm representing Toronto now—a camp on Silver Water in Manitoulin, which is stunning, which her grandpa built. The way we would take all our kids, we would ship them in a car, put them in a car, and then we would get to Tobermory and take a ferry across to the island. The ferry, as you mentioned, is the Chi-Cheemaun, which was built in my wonderful hometown of Collingwood. The shipyard was very important to us back in the day. So I'm wondering if you can talk about the importance of the Chi-Cheemaun and the fine craftsmanship of that boat being built in Collingwood.

MPP Bill Rosenberg: So many people take the Chi-Cheemaun to get to the island, and it's a major factor in the tourism of the island. The Chi-Cheemaun is not a new boat by any means, but it's standing the test of time, for sure. I don't know exactly how many thousands of visitors it brings every year, but it brings a lot to the economy of the island. And then they get across the island, get across the swing bridge, and then they head further north up into the communities. But yes, it's a really important part, and anybody that hasn't experienced it, it's worth taking the trip, for sure.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Lorne Coe): Thank you very much for that response.

Further debate?

MPP Robin Lennox: I would like to start by thanking the Hamilton Centre community for placing your trust in me as your representative at Queen's Park. I know that until now, my voice has been solely my own. But in this House, I know that my voice must carry the voices of the

106,000 Hamiltonians that I represent. I also know that this is not any one person's seat; this is Hamilton Centre's seat. It is an honour to get to stand for our community for these next four years.

I would also like to start by thanking all of those who supported our campaign. We had incredible staff and volunteers who kept our spirits up and our determination strong despite the snowstorms and the freezing days outdoor knocking. Thank you to every neighbour who opened the door to us and who kindly shared what your concerns were at this particular time. Thank you to all of the community organizations, unions and community leaders who stood with us and who continue to stand with us as we chart our way forward.

As a family physician, I hadn't really intended to follow a path into politics in this way. But as I learned early in my career, so much about the practice of medicine is inherently political. I can recall as a medical student sitting at the bedside of an elderly refugee claimant who had been denied surgery for a critical heart condition, because under the interim federal health program at the time, she lacked any health coverage. This woman had survived ethnic cleansing in her home country and yet here she was, leaving a well-resourced tertiary care hospital, still unwell and with a \$15,000 bill.

Later, as a family medicine resident at McMaster, I can think of countless patients who were working full-time and yet unable to afford their prescription medications. For one patient with type 2 diabetes, I recall that we would see each other every three months to discuss her diabetes control. I remember wondering how it made any sense at all that those doctors visits were covered, the lab work to assess her worsening blood sugar levels were covered, the investigations needed to test for diabetes complications were covered, and yet we did not pay for the one thing that could actually keep her well, her medication.

Too many people today share in the same struggle in the absence of real universal pharmacare. In the intervening years, I can think of countless other examples of injured workers denied their claims, of patients criminalized because of their substance use, of parents struggling to find supports for their children with special needs, of adult children burnt out trying to fill the caregiving gap for their elderly parents awaiting long-term care. I know of patients discharged from hospital directly to the street, and of patients left waiting in fear that their health may further deteriorate before they are able to access the specialty care that they need.

For me, the call to action was born out of the harms I saw my patients experiencing every day, most of which were the result of policies that decentred people in favour of private interests and ideology. As the 19th-century physician Rudolf Virchow once famously said, "Politics is nothing more than medicine at a larger scale." And so, I will endeavour to bring the same skills and principles that I acquired in my medical practice to this practice of politics:

—first, to listen, because as we're taught in medical school, 90% of the diagnosis is in the story. It has been my

experience that if we humbly listen and value the lived experiences of those among us, our community members will graciously share with us the solutions that will truly work for them;

—second, and perhaps most important in this work, to be evidence-based, challenging our own biases and ideologies in order to do right by those that we are meant to serve; and

—lastly, to be unwavering in our commitment to centre those we serve in every decision that we make, recognizing that this is our highest duty. It is in this spirit that it is my honour to join you all in this House.

In Hamilton, we are treaty people. We live, work and play on the traditional territories of the Erie, Neutral, Huron-Wendat, Haudenosaunee and Mississaugas nations. The land is covered with the Dish With One Spoon wampum covenant, and the covenant signifies that those who share the land shall eat from a common dish, sharing one spoon and each only taking what they need. In this spirit, nations of the covenant agreed not only on how they would relate to each other, but also on how they would uphold their relationship to the land.

When Dutch settlers arrived to this territory, they entered into the Two Row Wampum with the Haudenosaunee, which instructs us on settler-Indigenous relationships today and calls us to uphold our relationships to the land. But most importantly, it calls on us to recognize Indigenous ways of knowing and Indigenous land rights, which are still vastly underrecognized.

Indigenous knowledge holds so many lessons for us all. In Hamilton, we continue to grapple with poor air quality from industrial pollution, black soot in our lower city and increasing health risks from a climate crisis that poses an existential threat to us all. It is more important than ever that we meaningfully partner and learn from our Indigenous neighbours to collectively safeguard the land and the natural world that sustains us all. I am grateful to the many Indigenous leaders and organizations in Hamilton who have offered their wisdom and guidance to me, and I look forward to continuing to walk alongside you over these next few years.

Hamilton also has a very long history of being a labour town, and as an industrial centre at the turn of the century, Hamilton's labour movement turned out 1,500 workers who marched in 1872 calling for the nine-hour workday. That movement continued to grow, and by 1946, 12,000 Hamilton workers were on the picket line for the Steel Company of Canada and Westinghouse, standing up for their collective bargaining rights.

The spirit of the labour movement has only grown over the years and continues to be the bedrock of the Hamilton community. Time and again, our unions and our workers show up, and together they remind us of the strength that we find in unity, in collective action and in standing shoulder to shoulder with our community. Our Hamilton labour movement is a reminder of the ongoing work needed to protect our workers, and as we face the threat of economic uncertainty and tariffs, we must stand with our steelworkers, protect Ontario jobs and ensure that our

workers receive the support that they need to weather the storm.

1600

But despite our working-class strength, Hamilton faces many challenges. Hamilton Centre is one of the lowest-income ridings across Ontario. We also have some of the greatest disparities in income and health status within our riding. From an incredible local collaboration between journalists and academics, we saw in the Hamilton Spectator's "Code Red" series that between two postal codes in Hamilton Centre that are only one kilometre apart, there is a 23-year difference in life expectancy. In one postal code, the life expectancy is a mere 64 years. This dramatic gap is explained by huge variations in income, housing status, education, industrial pollution and inequities in services in Hamilton's lower city.

We also have some of the highest rates of child poverty across the province, with one in 10 children living below the poverty line. We see soaring rates of food insecurity and our emergency food banks unable to meet demand. And just this past year, I had a patient I saw in hospital who quite literally collapsed from malnutrition in the line for emergency food services. We have to be able to do so much better than that.

We also see rising rental costs, above-guideline rent increases and people working 60 hours a week and yet barely able to pay their rent. We see many Hamilton residents on Ontario Works and ODSP unable to make ends meet while living in legislated poverty. We must urgently work to raise social assistance rates and end price gouging on essentials such as groceries. We must put in place real rent control and tenants' rights legislation so that people working full time—or more—don't also have to worry about losing their home.

And while we're at it, we must work towards housing for all, recognizing housing as the human right that it is, and ensuring that every person in Ontario has access to safe and affordable housing. This starts by recognizing first and foremost the humanity of our neighbours who are living outdoors and unhoused.

When I think of resilience, I think of the many people I have cared for who are living outside in our parks, on our sidewalks or hidden on our Hamilton escarpment. Many of us will never need to know the strength that our unhoused neighbours require to survive each and every day, and many of us will never understand their kindness, their generosity and the care that they have for their community.

How we treat those who have found themselves unhoused is a direct reflection of who we are as a community, of what we stand for, of who we value and of how we would seek to lead. We can do so much more than just move people along. We can help people move into safe, permanent and affordable housing.

Our communities have the expertise, the passion and the commitment to meaningfully address the homelessness crisis. Our housing workers, outreach teams and service providers are already on the ground every day, doing as much as they can with the resources that they

have. As a province, we need to step up and do the same. We must strive to be a province that boldly seeks to end homelessness—not just visible homelessness.

Hamilton also continues to lose far too many loved ones and community members to the overdose crisis, driven by an increasingly toxic drug supply and increasingly ineffective drug policy. As a physician, I can remember each and every patient that I have lost to overdose. As Mother's Day draws near, I remember the patient who I lost one Mother's Day just a few years ago, who devastatingly never got the opportunity to reunite with her child. And I remember with painful clarity the calls I have received from loving, dedicated parents telling me that their children are gone, some before they even had the opportunity to graduate high school.

Losing a patient is always devastating. But the weight of grief is made heavier by the knowledge that overdose deaths are wholly preventable. And when we're talking about losing hundreds of our community members each year, often before the age of 40, we have a moral duty to use every tool at our disposal to save lives and to save families from unimaginable loss and grief.

Just two weeks ago, the doors closed on the only community-serving supervised consumption site in Hamilton. This was a place where people who use drugs were able to feel safe, welcomed and cared for; where they were able to access wound care, harm reduction services, and referrals to other treatments when needed.

I know there are many misconceptions about supervised consumption sites, but as someone who has worked in the sites; who has spoken to people accessing the sites; and who has sat on the floor with people, resuscitating people from overdose, I can tell you that what you have heard is largely untrue.

As I said, just two weeks ago our only community-serving site closed, and just last week, I received an alert from public health. The alert was notifying all community health providers of a spike in ambulance calls for opioid poisonings between March 31 and April 6, far exceeding the usual monthly average. Sometimes it takes years to see the effect a policy can have on a community, but in this case, within days, we have already had to confront the increased risk our community now faces.

Here in this Parliament, we have an opportunity to correct ourselves; to move in the direction of evidence, compassion, and community care; to prioritize the safety of all of our community members; and most importantly, to act to save lives during a public health emergency that continues to cost Ontarians far too many loved ones every day. I hope we will all rise to that challenge together.

We also know that the foundation of a strong economy and a healthy society is a strong health care system. Door to door, on the phones and in the streets, we hear the exact same call to action from our constituents. They are pleading with us to reinvest in our universal public health care system. Some would suggest that our health care system is broken, and would use that as a narrative, as a means of pushing forward the agenda for privatization.

But we know that this is not the truth, nor is it the way forward.

Our public health system has been strained, yes—bruised, perhaps—but it is far from broken. Across Ontario, our health care providers, our doctors, our nurses and our allied health members are among the best in the world. They drive forward innovation in practice, critical health research, and bring compassionate patient-centred care to each and every person who walks in the door 24 hours a day. We have exceptional family doctors working to their fullest scope, providing care from the cradle to the grave and stretching themselves in every direction to try to bridge the gaps left by our system.

We must show up for our family doctors by recognizing them as the foundation of a strong community health system, by compensating them fairly and by ensuring that they have the support they need to continue serving their communities. We must also recognize that our nurses are essential workers; that they hold up our palliative care system, our community nursing, our hospitals, our hospices and every other space that nurses provide care to their patients. Essential workers deserve fair pay and sustainable working conditions, and this is something that we should all be working to deliver for them.

When it comes to our hospitals, there is no place that I would feel safer taking a family member than Hamilton Health Sciences or St. Joseph's hospital. Years of underfunding has strained our hospitals' capacity, absolutely, and yet our health care teams continue to show up for patients every day with relentless commitment, energy and skill. We must match their dedication with the funding needed to ensure that no patient anywhere across Ontario needs to be cared for in a hallway. We know the solutions and we know the investment that is needed. We must double down on our public health care system and we must do so with the urgency that our health care crisis demands.

And so, as we enter into this 44th Parliament, I want to express my appreciation to all in this room who are standing in service to your communities. I commit to working with you in a spirit of collaboration and in service of a brighter future for all of Ontario. Together, we must be relentless in our pursuit of more just and equitable systems that will uplift all Ontarians. We must recognize our interdependence. We must take care of our neighbours. If we do so, our communities will be stronger and healthier for it.

1610

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Lorne Coe): Questions, please.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I want to start by saying how enormously proud I am that you have joined our team and that you are from Hamilton. I want to tell you, that speech was incredible. You captured the struggles that Hamilton has but you captured the pride and the resilience that it means to be a Hamiltonian, so thank you so much for that.

I would also like to say that what you bring here—first-hand knowledge of the struggles—is so invaluable, not just to us here in the official opposition, but to this entire

House. I certainly hope that people will be listening, that they will take advantage of what you have brought here. It truly is a gift to all of us as legislators to hear first-hand the impact that the cuts and the impact of some of these short-sighted policy decisions are making, not just in Hamilton but across Ontario.

With that, I am going to give you an opportunity to add anything that you want to about the pride that you feel coming from Hamilton, and the pride you feel not just in our health care system but in Hamiltonians in general.

MPP Robin Lennox: I feel incredible pride to be from Hamilton. Hamilton is truly the city that made my life. It's where I came to school; it's where I started my career; it's where I had my first home; it's where I've decided to raise my family.

It's an incredible community. It's a fairly-sized city but it feels like a small town and everyone in our community shows up for each other. It's a beautiful place to live. Like me, there are many people who move to Hamilton and stay for the rest of their lives because it's an incredible place to grow, and I'm incredibly proud to be from Hamilton.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Lorne Coe): Questions?

M^{me} Lucille Collard: I want to congratulate you on your election. You're obviously very passionate.

My question to you is: You've talked a little about the issues and maybe not so much about what motivated you to take that big step of putting your name forward. I think it's a big thing. You're a physician; I'm sure you have a passionate job. Being a politician—I hope you'll find it passionate as well—is challenging for sure.

But what made you say yes and how many times were you asked before you finally said yes to put your name forward?

MPP Robin Lennox: Thank you for the question.

I actually didn't have to be asked. I would say I felt compelled because, for me, I love my job. I think being a physician is the best job in the world. But at a certain point, when you're sitting with someone and you're having to confront the same barriers day after day and you're realizing that the true thing that's keeping them unhealthy is all of these systems and structural issues, you just want to work further and further upstream so that you can do that same work but just on a different level.

And so, that's truly what compelled me, feeling truly like it was all hands on deck. I think everyone needs to use their skills and their abilities where they can. I think, at this particular moment in time, this is where I felt that I needed to use my skills.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Lorne Coe): Scarborough—Guildwood, please.

MPP Andrea Hazell: Welcome to your House, and thank you for that wonderful inaugural speech. I can hear your passion belting out in your career.

I want to tour your riding for one day, so where should I be going first? And what's the culture in your riding? What does that look like?

MPP Robin Lennox: You could have an incredible day in Hamilton. My idea of a wonderful day in Hamilton would be walking along one of our busier streets, like

Locke Street or James Street or Ottawa Street, to stop in at one of our small cafes, grabbing a coffee and then finding your way to one of Hamilton's trails. Many people don't think about this—when they think about Hamilton, they think about our industrial side—but we are also known as the city of waterfalls. We have an abundance of nature around us—hiking and things to see.

So I would say a day well spent would be a day to take to the outdoors, to enjoy some of Hamilton's local art scene—and if you happen to be there during Art Crawl, that's always a fantastic Friday of the month.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Lorne Coe): The member for Waterloo.

Ms. Catherine Fife: We're very fortunate to have the member from Hamilton Centre here in this House. It's good to have a doctor in the House, in the official opposition. Some of our strongest MPPs are grounded in community, and they're very strong listeners, and the member referenced this.

One of the most powerful things, though, that I think you referenced is when policies that are developed in this very place de-centre people. I wanted to give you an opportunity to reference how that impacts your community, both on health care, education. You referenced homelessness. We are going to be moving into a very unstable time in this province, and Hamilton Centre will be vulnerable. Let's talk about how we're going to protect all people here in the province of Ontario.

MPP Robin Lennox: My opinion is that people should be at the centre of every decision that we make. Ultimately, we are not elected here to serve private interests. We are elected here to serve the people and the constituents in our riding.

For me, and in Hamilton Centre, most acutely, absolutely, the issues are access to housing; visible, outdoor, unsafe homelessness; access to health care; people really struggling to make ends meet.

I hope that when we think about policies and we propose policies or vote on policies, we are actually thinking about whether this is going to improve the day-to-day realities for people on the ground, and particularly for those for whom policy has actually not been designed to serve for far too long.

I would hope that we all hold ourselves accountable to those who voted for us and to those who perhaps voted differently but are still as deserving of our service. That is what I would hope we can do.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Lorne Coe): Questions?

M^{me} France Gélinas: I, too, want to congratulate the member from Hamilton Centre for her inaugural speech—really, really touching; really moving; but also a deep, deep understanding of how politicians can make people, families, community healthier. I thank you for this.

I know that you talked quite a bit about the social determinants of health. I also know that Hamilton has some programs specific to Hamilton, some of them through Hamilton Community Health Centre. Can you talk to us about some of the social determinants of health programs that exist in Hamilton that change things for the

better, that we could copy from Hamilton to the rest of Ontario?

MPP Robin Lennox: There are so many good examples of community-centred programming. One would be our Shelter Health Network in Hamilton. The Shelter Health Network was formed many years ago with the idea that rather than requiring people who particularly have barriers accessing health care to find us as health care providers, we will go to the places and spaces in which people live and spend their time. The Shelter Health Network works exactly like that model. They will bring physicians and nurses to all of the local shelters, to encampments, to any space in which there is someone who is in need of health care.

1620

So I think that is one particularly great example; another would be an organization that's very dear to me called the Hamilton Social Medicine Response Team. I will speak about one of my mentors, Dr. Timothy O'Shea, who is an infectious disease physician who started the organization on his bike, accessing anyone who could not make it into the hospital or into a clinic to see him. That organization has now grown to include peer workers, multidisciplinary care and continues to serve Hamilton's most marginalized communities.

Those are just two, but I will go on.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Lorne Coe): Further debate?

Ms. Lee Fairclough: I'm honoured to stand today to make my inaugural speech as the newly elected member for Etobicoke–Lakeshore, the community that I have called home for over 24 years.

Speaker, I will take a moment to recognize our new Speaker, who has just made history being elected as the first woman Speaker of the Ontario Legislature. I just needed to formally acknowledge and thank her for stepping forward, and I know that she will bring a sense of fairness and focus to our important work in front of us, as we serve the people of Ontario.

I want to first start by saying thank you to the constituents of Etobicoke–Lakeshore for putting their trust in me to represent them here at Queen's Park. I feel privileged to serve in this capacity, with all that we're facing in the world and locally. I am deeply committed to your service and to building strength and resilience in our community.

I would like to recognize and thank Christine Hogarth, the previous member for Etobicoke–Lakeshore, who served our community in this Legislature from 2018 to 2025.

I would also like to thank Peter Milczyn, who served for Etobicoke–Lakeshore from 2014 to 2018. Peter is here today. Peter has provided invaluable advice to me and support from the day I decided to seek public office. So, thank you, Peter.

Etobicoke–Lakeshore is also home to the Honourable Jean Augustine, a trailblazer and an iconic leader in our community, our province and our country. Madam Augustine was the first Black Canadian woman member

of Parliament and minister in Canada. She continues to lead by example with her community-building work and has just celebrated, very proudly, her 87th birthday. I hope we all have the same energy and spirit for community commitment at that age. I am one of thousands of people who have benefited from her mentorship and leadership, and I appreciate her generosity and her guidance.

I want to also thank my family, who are here today, for their support.

My mother, Valerie, and father, Neville Fairclough, immigrated to Canada from England in 1967 to start a new life. My mom worked as a high-school teacher, an art and English teacher, and my father is an engineer—a career in Ontario Hydro, where he eventually led the construction of Darlington nuclear plant.

Our home was one that was filled with music, art, a very busy workshop and lots of time in the outdoors. They instilled in me and my sister Janet and my brother Jason a sense that anything was possible with hard work, taking time to learn and, really, if you feel strongly about changing something, to just stand up and make it happen. And I just feel that I cannot express enough thanks for their unwavering support and encouragement throughout my life, and it is certainly part of the reason that I'm here today.

I also want to say thank you to my husband of 25 years this July, Beno Tompa, and our two teenaged boys, Justin and Oliver, for their love and support. Anyone who has worked in public life knows that it becomes a family affair, and I thank them for their support as I pursue this new adventure and change in our lives after so many years working in health care. It has been quite a change for us.

Finally, I want to pay tribute to my mother-in-law, who we lost this year, an incredible woman who we miss terribly, Zelia Tompa. She always believed in me. I know she would have been overjoyed to be here with us, and I'm grateful that her son Zoltan is also here in the Legislature today.

The winter campaign was a tough one; a few of you have talked about that today. But despite those harsh conditions, hundreds of people supported me. I'm particularly appreciative to the local leaders, many of them who are here today in the stands up here, in the galleries. I can't thank you enough for your commitment to helping us make this happen.

I also want to thank our provincial leader, Bonnie Crombie, for placing her trust in me. It was a true team effort that led to this day.

Etobicoke–Lakeshore is a very special place. If you haven't been, you need to come. It's one of the most populous ridings in Ontario at close to 130,000 people and is rapidly growing. A 35-minute subway ride west of here, its boundary stretches from the Humber River on the east and Mimico Creek and the 427 on the west; the northern boundary follows the train tracks along Dundas and Bloor, and then the southern boundary is Lake Ontario.

The name Etobicoke originates with the Mississauga First Nation, who called Etobicoke Creek and the area around it “Adobigok,” meaning “where the alders grow.”

It is the traditional territory of many nations, including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishinaabe, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat people.

You'll find housing of every kind, including older historic neighbourhoods with well-established detached homes, co-ops and affordable housing options to a very rapid growth in condos that are along the lakeshore.

At the Legislature, since I have been here, I have discovered a map of a portion of our riding that dates back to 1935 to 1937. The lakefront at the time included a summer camp and a long pier, now known as Palace Pier, and where today we see the iconic bridge that stretches over the Humber River. It also shows the neighbourhood at Stephen and Berry, where my parents first lived in an apartment when they first came here in 1967. What has remained constant, though, through those decades is our strong sense of community and care for one another.

Etobicoke–Lakeshore is also community of communities: Mimico, New Toronto, Humber Bay Shores, Long Branch, Alderwood, Islington Village, Sunnylea, Mabelle and the Kingsway, all with their own history and character. In my first few weeks as MPP, I have been out in the community, meeting with the residents' associations, service organizations and others to understand how I can best advocate for them at Queen's Park.

Our community is rich with deeply passionate residents who volunteer their time for the benefit of all. At a recent meeting with the Long Branch Neighbourhood Association, I learned more about their work to preserve their diverse community and to grow and protect our urban forest and tree canopy in the riding.

Mimico residents are tireless advocates for public transit and affordable housing. Leah Houston, the executive director of Mabelle Arts, is also here with us today. Leah's leadership led to the opening of the Belle in the park in the centre of Mabelle. It is a physical beacon of what is possible when connecting a community, as it provides a hub for activities, arts, gardens, a local food bank and capacity building towards improving living conditions for local residents.

There are over 8,000 small and large businesses in our community supported by active BIAs in all neighbourhoods. We host large manufacturing businesses, including those that are producing car parts, several large studios for the film industry, and thousands of small businesses, including the one where I got this jacket, which is Canadian-made and a Canadian-owned business.

1630

You can enjoy a coffee at a café, shopping and dining at what feels like multiple main streets around the riding and Humber College has a large campus on the lakeshore with thousands of students. We have 28 junior schools and five high schools in our riding, so the population growth has exceeded the capacity we need, and many of the schools are overcrowded or people are required to travel outside of our community.

Our communities are connected by hiking trails along Mimico Creek and the Humber, and bike paths that support commuters or families setting out for a ride

together. One of my favourite things to do is to launch my own canoe to paddle the historic Humber River down to Lake Ontario. In the fall you can watch the run of the salmon up the river past the old mill.

I grew up in small town of Southampton, Ontario, in Saugeen Shores on Lake Huron, and I moved to the big city as a teenager. Raising my family in Etobicoke–Lakeshore has provided our family with access to the joys of the outdoors right here in Toronto, similar to what I experienced as a child.

Etobicoke–Lakeshore is a diverse community. We are home to the second-largest population of Tibetan Canadians and home to the Tibetan Canadian Cultural Centre, which draws visitors from across North America. We are also home to many Ukrainian Canadians and the Ukrainian National Federation. Given the war in Ukraine, families in our community are hosting families seeking temporary refuge. I recently hosted St. Josaphat Catholic School at Queen's Park, and this junior school has always included Ukrainian curriculum, but it has grown from a hundred children to 400 in the last few years.

The community has also built incredible health care services, including the Dorothy Ley Hospice, which provides excellent palliative and end-of-life care; the Queensway location of Trillium Health Partners, which is expanding; several long-term care homes and community service providers. The Stonegate and LAMP Community Health Centres serve an important role providing primary care and other services address the broader determinants of health including links to housing.

We have many family physicians and primary care clinics, though we do have 22,000 that are currently without a family doctor. The Daily Bread Food Bank is in our riding and distributes food to food banks across the GTA, and unfortunately we're seeing the need to access food banks rise, as rent continues to increase and with fewer affordable options available.

Yesterday we heard the speech from the throne describing the government's agenda. As a member of the Liberal caucus, we are committed to advocate for economic resilience. It is time to come together as a nation and as Canadians to develop new trade relationships within Canada across provincial boundaries. Protecting Ontario, though, also means ensuring that our most valuable resource, our people, have the support and resources they need to thrive and contribute to our economy. We know that the health and economic well-being of our families is tied to essential health care, strong education for our young people, and programs that support people to thrive, and it can't be an afterthought. Our provincial government has primary responsibility for health care.

Health care and education represent well more than 50% of the budget the government is responsible for managing. It requires vision, innovation, and attention to make progress. We know that access to public health care is a strong determinant of economic prosperity. We must work together in this Legislature to bring about solutions to address the broader social determinants of health, which also includes housing.

I recently learned that 73% of south Etobicoke clients of food banks have a post-secondary degree or diploma. Rents have surged by 54% in the last decade, more than three times the provincial guideline of 16.5%, and for every affordable unit in Toronto, 14 are lost. We must make life more affordable and get to work to establishing a policy framework for affordable housing for renters and for those who aspire to home ownership.

As a member of the Legislature, I have come to Queen's Park to make a meaningful contribution to finding solutions. I have spent the first 27 years of my career working in health care. This started on the front lines providing radiation treatment just down the road here to patients with cancer at Princess Margaret hospital and the UHN. It was there that I learned what matters most to patients and families at what is often the most challenging point of their lives.

At that time, there were exciting breakthroughs in cancer care, and we ended the stigma that had previously existed. I became more curious about our publicly funded health care system, and I completed a master's in health policy management and evaluation at what is now the Dalla Lana School of Public Health at the University of Toronto. Since then, I have worked in management and executive roles in various parts of our health system, including in hospitals, and worked across sectors in long-term care, primary care and home care.

During the pandemic, I served as the president of St. Mary's General Hospital in Kitchener, which includes a large respiratory and regional cardiac program. We cared for many that were very ill in our ICU and ED, and worked on the ground in long-term-care homes and congregate settings as COVID left its devastating mark. I led the regional response for hospitals in Waterloo-Wellington with my colleagues in public health and primary care through one of the most challenging times in our health system and that our society has experienced. I also had the privilege of working with community leaders on that response, including the member for Waterloo and the member for Kitchener–Conestoga.

Most recently, I've been working in mental health and addictions care, serving as the senior vice-president of clinical care at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health. I am honoured that the CEO, Sarah Downey, has joined us today, and I am grateful for the opportunity to have worked with her and the caring team at CAMH these last few years.

We are all familiar with the rising tide of need for mental health care and addictions care. One in four people will experience mental illness, and one in two of those will do so by the age of 40. I expect everyone in this room likely knows somebody who is in need or is receiving care.

Through some of the outstanding discovery and research at CAMH, we've learned the importance of getting upstream to address care earlier to stop the progression of mental illness, and I see many parallels between cancer care 20 years ago and mental illness and addictions today. We need evidence-based care, we need creativity, and we also need a sense of accountability and

transparency to the public about the progress that we're making in our health system.

As one example, here in this city and province, we studied the treatment of drug-resistant depression with rTMS. It is now standard therapy around the world, yet it is still not being implemented at scale here in Ontario. We need to increase the pace of change. Innovation doesn't require privatization or paying more with taxpayer money through OHIP for the same service in private clinics.

I look forward to working in this Legislature, in my caucus and across the aisle. I believe that solutions for problems come from bringing diverse perspectives together, really listening to one another, understanding evidence available to guide us and taking action, ensuring that change happens in real ways that reach the people that we all serve.

I came to appreciate the work of teams in my years in competitive sports as a competitive swimmer and eventually representing Canada as a member of the Canadian women's rugby team in the 1998 World Cup in Amsterdam. Sports teaches us a lot about resilience, commitment, common goals and supporting each other through the highs and lows and the wins and the losses. Lessons from sport have guided my own approach to working with teams and working in leadership throughout my career.

In this Legislature, I commit to bringing the same approach to working with all of you. We have important work to do for the people of Ontario at such a critical time with this economic threat. We need to create opportunity, we need to support people to thrive, and I value and respect the perspectives you will bring to the table representing your constituents, and you can also count on me to bring my years of experience in creating positive change and to represent my own community of Etobicoke–Lakeshore.

1640

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Lorne Coe): Questions, please?

I have the member from Spadina–Fort York. When you're ready.

Mr. Chris Glover: I want to thank the member from Etobicoke–Lakeshore for your passionate description of Etobicoke. I lived in Etobicoke for a number of years. I served as a trustee, and I see one of my former colleagues up there: Pamela Gough. I just want to acknowledge her.

One of the things that we've talked about is the hospital system, and you have experience as a hospital administrator. At the beginning of this session, if you had control of the agenda, what would you do to fix our hospitals in Ontario?

Ms. Lee Fairclough: Thank you very much for the question. You know, I would agree with the speaker before me that we have a lot of talent in this province. We have talent in our care teams. We have talent in our ability to discover. We have talent to be able to innovate in our hospital system.

We know that the need for care is only increasing, and we need to be creative in how we can solve that.

It is time that we actually address hallway health care in the way that we need to. It's time that we actually get family doctors and primary care providers and team-based care in place everywhere in this province. These are the solutions that we need to be pursuing, and we can do it. I have every confidence in my colleagues in the health system that that is possible. But we need a will, and we need the leadership of government to make sure that's going to happen—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Lorne Coe): Thank you for that response.

I have the member from Kitchener Centre.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: Congratulations so much, MPP. I am so excited to be able to work with you and work across party lines. We're starting on a great foot. You set the stage for a good collaboration, and I look forward to getting to know you better.

You talked about savouring nature and health care. Can you put those two together: how our natural spaces and health care can work together and how we need to save nature?

Ms. Lee Fairclough: Thank you very much for the question. Yes, you know, I do think that nature is an important part of helping us to stay healthy. Again, people need to stay active to stay healthy, but I also think it helps you to heal.

When I think about the planning we've been doing at CAMH the last several years around the new spaces that we're opening for people, we're very mindful about making sure there is access to outdoor space, making sure that the spaces where people are spending their time within the hospital are helping them to heal as well.

I do see a really important connection to making sure that we protect our outdoor spaces, that we encourage people to explore them and to use them, and then, of course, this translates right into the healing environments that we need to create in our hospitals and other settings.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Lorne Coe): I have the member from Don Valley East.

Mr. Adil Shamji: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As many of us know, health is the largest ministry in our province. It is the largest line item on our provincial budget, and yet there are very few people that have health care experience. It's one of the reasons we're so proud to welcome you to our Legislature.

Coming from the health care community, what is a message that you think the health care community wants our Legislature to hear moving forward?

Ms. Lee Fairclough: Thank you for the question. I think that our health care community wants to hear that they should move ahead and innovate in our system in the ways that we need to. They want to hear that we're going to fund the services that are going to be needed. They want to hear that we will never apply bills again that will hamper our ability to pay them fairly for years and years and years, especially through the worst crisis that we've been through. They want to hear that we have confidence. I think that, for patients and families, they want to hear that

they are going to be engaged in the ways that we can continually improve our health system. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Lorne Coe): Thank you for that response.

I have the member from Waterloo.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I want to congratulate the member from Etobicoke–Lakeshore—of course, she had referenced we'd worked together before at St. Mary's hospital. But good, strong candidates have good people around them, and it's a pleasure to be introduced to some of the good people in her life. But also, my good friend Gail Anderson worked on your campaign, and she called me during the election and said, "We've got an amazing candidate." I said, "I know her from St. Mary's hospital."

I believe that you are well positioned to assist on the health care file, and if there was ever a file that needs some help, I would say health care is one of the stronger ones. And I want to say that, going forward, hospitals are going to need to procure research and innovation from our entrepreneurs, from our businesses. I wanted to give you a chance to talk about how important that is to improve health outcomes but also to strengthen the economy.

Ms. Lee Fairclough: Thank you very much for that question. There's no question, in my time in Kitchener, I probably saw innovation in one of its best forms through all of the work that happens in that region.

We are world-recognized for the research we do in this province at many of our academic hospitals and universities. There are so many innovations that could be bringing increased benefit for patients, their outcomes, as well as, as you have mentioned, supporting our economy. We just need to be sure that there is a will and a way to help them to succeed. I think that our plans, as we move ahead to address this economic uncertainty, should embrace and include how we can do that best for those innovative companies and businesses that are developing—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Lorne Coe): Thank you very much for that response.

Questions?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: I would like to welcome the MPP from Etobicoke–Lakeshore to our assembly. How wonderful it is to have members of your family in the assembly here today. It's a great thing. Congratulations again.

I think the member has been a little bit humble today because she didn't tell us about her previous profession prior to being elected, which was a member of the women's national rugby union team from 1995—

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Yes, she did. You were talking—

Mr. Anthony Leardi: I'm sorry. But I want to know from the member who was elected, what lessons and skills do you think you're going to be able to bring here to the Legislature as a former rugby player?

Ms. Lee Fairclough: Thank you very much for the question. I think there's lots to learn from rugby. One of the best things about it is, as I've said, it's a true team sport. You also have to be tough in those moments. My colleagues are saying, "It's 'elbows up' time." We can

always throw a tackle in there if we need to as we start to deal with these issues of the tariffs.

Then, lastly, I played second row, I played number eight, and when you play in the pack, you come together to apply force to win the ball and you do line-outs, which means sometimes you have to jump really high to catch a highball and secure it for your team. I think that's what we need to think about doing all the time in here. When we think there might be a policy that could benefit Ontario, we've got to reach for it, and we've got to make it happen.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Lorne Coe): Thank you for that response.

I have the member from Beaches–East York.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: I am so excited that you are here in this beautiful chamber to advocate for the wonderful people of Etobicoke–Lakeshore. I learned something new, that you grew up in Southampton. I spent my summers there at my nana's cottage—her home with two cottages beside. I feel maybe our paths crossed at one point.

You're into sports. You're very wise on health care. I know you believe in active transportation, being outside with access to nature—but different modes of transportation, because we know that everyone has the right to use whatever mode of transportation they want to get to and from home, and everyone's family wants them to return home safely. If you can just elaborate on that, on multi-modal use, how healthy it is for people to use things such as cars, to use things such as transit, their legs and, of course, beautiful bicycles.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Lorne Coe): Thank you for the question.

You have a minute and two seconds for your response.

Ms. Lee Fairclough: Thank you very much for the question. I did outline a little just how well people enjoy the ability to use all these different modes of transportation in Etobicoke–Lakeshore.

1650

I will say, as I knocked on doors throughout the election period, I heard from people that they want that ability to be able to commute to work in multiple ways, on transit and on their bikes. Again, I think that as world-class cities, we should always be thinking about how we're enabling people to commute in the ways that they need to.

And then, lastly, I will just say, I invite anybody to come to Etobicoke–Lakeshore and enjoy some of those beautiful trails, and even have a canoe down the river in the city if you want.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Lorne Coe): Further debate?

Mr. Joseph Racinsky: I would like to take this opportunity today to deliver my inaugural address to the House, as this is my first time rising to speak in this incredible place. Even as I say these words, I'm overwhelmed by the tremendous responsibility and privilege it is to be in this place and represent the incredible people of Wellington–Halton Hills as their MPP.

I greatly appreciate the efforts of my colleagues, members of the opposition and Legislature staff for helping me to settle into this important role. Thank you to

my constituency staff Karen, Sandi and Ashton for assisting me in this important work of effective representation.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank those that have placed their trust in me to be their voice and to champion their values and ideals. I would also like to say to all of those in Wellington–Halton Hills that might have voted for another party that I will always listen, and not only listen but do my best to understand where they are coming from, no matter your politics, your race, your religion or any other way of dividing mankind. I am your representative, and I take that responsibility seriously.

I would also like to recognize and thank my predecessor, the incredible Ted Arnott. Following his legacy and the legacy of strong Progressive Conservative members of this place, Jack Johnson and John Root, can at times be daunting. I'm thankful that I'm able to stand on their shoulders as we continue to move forward.

I want to thank Ted for his mentorship over these past few months and years. I will always strive to continue in his footsteps, always acting with integrity, working hard all of the time and not just some of the time, and working for the people of Wellington–Halton Hills, not myself. Ted did this for 35 years in this place and while I'm here, I will do the same. So again, thank you, Ted, for your life of sacrificial service to the people of Wellington–Halton Hills and the people of Ontario.

Before I say too much else, I want to recognize and thank my incredible, strong, amazing wife, Mikayla. We got engaged two months after I became a ward 2 councillor in the town of Halton Hills, and after just a year and a half of marriage, she has stood beside me as I worked through a difficult election campaign and took on this role of public service. So thank you, Mikayla, for allowing me to serve in this place and being my number one supporter and defender. I love you so much.

I would also like to thank my extended family. Thank you to my six grandparents and grandparents-in-law that are still with us for your wisdom and encouragement on election day. My wife's grandmother sent us a note quoting the Book of Psalms which says, "This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it." What a lovely and encouraging reminder on what my colleagues know is certainly a very stressful day.

To my parents and in-laws, thank you for believing in me. My in-laws—my election sign was the first one that they ever put on their lawn, so I appreciate that. We owe so much of who we are to you, and I believe it's important not to take that for granted.

I'm fortunate to have been raised in a godly, loving home. My mother came to Canada as a refugee from the violence that was besetting Northern Ireland in the 1970s and 1980s. My grandfather was a member of the Ulster Defence Regiment. Her family was sponsored by a local farmer in Halton Hills, and her family began attending the farmer's church in Georgetown. It was at this church that my parents met, and it was at this same church that I met my wife.

My father's story is a similar one but a little further back. The Racinsky family came to Canada in 1929 from the country that was at that time known as Czechoslovakia. They came here due to the ominous rise to power of the National Socialist Party in Germany. They first settled in the Swan River Valley in Manitoba.

In the 1950s, my grandfather decided to seek his fortune in the great province of promise, Ontario. He worked many different jobs here in the city but finally settled at Stelco and worked his way up through the company.

In 1968, the family tired of city living and moved out to Halton Hills. This is where my father was born and the place my family has called home ever since.

To my father, Tim, you have always been an inspiration to me, someone I have looked up to and wished to emulate. You are the wisest man I know and my number one adviser. Thank you for helping me through difficult situations and at the same time not trying to force your opinion onto me. I love you and mom so much.

This is my history, and it shapes the values I personally hold dear: personal responsibility; freedom of speech and worship; loyalty to the monarch of Canada; and family values, to name a few.

That being said, that is not the primary reason I got into politics. In case you hadn't heard, I have taken the title as the youngest member of this place, and that's a testament to our democracy. We should never take our democracy for granted, and I hope my presence and journey will be an encouragement to other young people that would seek to have an impact for good in their community.

Democracy is rare in the world, and it is certainly rare in history. It was voters that gave each and every member here their seat, millions of people participating to choose their representatives. It really is remarkable to consider.

My journey into politics started only seven short years ago. I never could have imagined that I would one day be given the privilege to represent my neighbours in Wellington–Halton Hills in this esteemed place. These past few years have been an incredible journey, and my heart is full of thanks to the people who have given me their trust.

In 2022, I made the decision to run in my home community of Halton Hills. For five months, all I did was knock on doors throughout the rural areas of Halton Hills and the hamlets. I did that because I wanted to be an effective representative to the residents of ward 2, and the only way I could do that was to listen to their concerns directly.

I also found it was critical to connect with those that might not otherwise have reached out to their municipal candidate. My promise to the people of ward 2 was that I would be an active representative that listened to their concerns. At the end of that campaign, I was honoured to be elected, and ward 2 had the largest voter turnout within Halton Hills in that election.

I'm truly thankful to have had the experience as a local councillor. As a councillor, you have a direct line with people you represent, and you are truly on the front lines for people. I personally believe that role is an incredible

foundation to be a more effective member in this place, and I am sure that my colleagues with a similar background would agree. I was very encouraged, after championing lower taxes and personal freedoms while on town council, to receive such strong support from my constituents in ward 2 in order to come to this place.

I also want to wish my successor on council, Matt Kindbom, all the best as he represents the good people of ward 2. I believe the town has given him my old cell phone with the same number, so I know he has already been receiving many calls from constituents needing his assistance.

Wellington–Halton Hills is an amazing place, with its natural beauty from the rivers, farmers' fields, and hills to its historic communities with an independent sense of local pride.

My riding is made up of five municipalities: Centre Wellington, Halton Hills, Puslinch, Erin and Guelph/Eramosa. But when you ask someone where they live in my riding, the list includes Fergus, Elora, Acton, Georgetown, Glen Williams, Stewarttown, Norval, Salem, Limehouse, Orton, Belwood, Ariss, Aberfoyle, Morriston, Rockwood, Eden Mills, Hillsburgh and so many more. Each of these communities has citizen groups that are dedicated to supporting their own unique needs and the needs of their neighbours. It is this special sense of community and small-town living that makes Wellington–Halton Hills, in my opinion, the best place to live.

We have a strong manufacturing sector—it is the largest employer in my riding—with companies such as Mold-Masters, Jefferson Elora Corp., Superior Glove, Polycorp Ltd. and Nexans Canada, to name a few.

1700

Agriculture is the bedrock of the communities, and it continues to thrive and, in some areas, adapt. Agri-tourism is a growing sector in my riding and there is also a strong food manufacturing sector represented by companies such as Kraft and Terra Cotta Cookies. With the recent addition of Conestoga Cold Storage to Halton Hills, my riding is becoming a major food distribution centre as well. In the conversations I have had with each of the mayors in my riding, each and every one of them is eager to see more jobs and investment coming into their areas.

Wellington–Halton Hills is filled with incredible people that are known for looking out for their neighbours, not standing on the sidelines waiting for someone else to do the work, but rolling up their sleeves to help one another. For my first event after being sworn in, I had the opportunity to attend Curl for a Cause in Fergus, where over \$65,000 was raised for one of the two hospices that are currently in the process of being constructed in my riding. This is just one example of the dozens of events I was able to participate in in the last few weeks that showcase the giving and supportive spirit that people in my riding have.

Speaking of volunteers, I would like to recognize some of the key people who took the time to assist me on the recent campaign. First, Bill Nelson: Bill told me after the campaign concluded that this year marks the 50th

anniversary since he began campaigning for the PC party in the Wellington area. Thank you, Bill, for your decades of service.

I would like to thank Glenna Smith. I have known Glenna for many years, working with Ted in the riding. Her love for policy and her smiling face have been great encouragements for me, especially these last few months. There are too many to mention but I will run through a few names: Mackenzie Britton, Gord and Grace Thompson, Stephen Jones, D'Arcy Keene, Ian Wylie, Lucas Everett and so many more. I think I spent the entire first week after the election writing thank-you notes. They knocked on thousands of doors in freezing temperatures and are all absolute champions. I am very thankful for their support.

Finally, one more thank you to Evan Holt. Evan is one of the hardest workers I know. I have known him for seven years now, so for context that means he met me when I was 16. He is a great man who loves his wife and young daughter, and I am thankful to call him my friend. Thank you, Evan. You know what you always do. You're incredible.

Speaker, I would like to turn now, with the time I have remaining, to the speech from the throne. Folks from my riding have been very clear: They expect this government to stand up for them, protect them and remind anyone who might be wondering that Canada is not for sale. In fact, back in 2017, Halton Hills was recognized as Canada's most patriotic town for flying over 57,000 Canadian flags. Today, you cannot go far without seeing the maple leaf proudly flying.

In the speech from the throne, we heard an ambitious and bold plan to unleash our economy and build much needed infrastructure. People are concerned. People are worried. Young people are looking forward to an uncertain future. The status quo is clearly not working for the people of Wellington–Halton Hills.

I was happy to hear in the speech that our government will end internal trade barriers. One week before the election was called, I was at an event put on by the Halton Hills Chamber of Commerce, and Mr. Arnott was in attendance. One of the questions he received was regarding internal trade barriers between the provinces and what this province would do to reduce that costly red tape. Mr. Arnott correctly observed that he thought the issue of internal trade would be an election issue. I am very happy to see our government following through on that commitment and taking immediate action today on this important area.

Another point I would like to highlight, Mr. Speaker, is our government's ambitious plan regarding transit in this province. GO 2.0 is welcome news to residents in my riding who need the flexibility of reliable transit services along the Kitchener line. This has been an important point of advocacy for many years, and it is so encouraging to see the progress on this important file.

As I reflect on the events of yesterday, I am struck by its significance in the current situation we as a nation find ourselves in today. In this province, we have a proud history; a history that is marked by, and indeed founded

upon, a desire to be independent and distinct from the United States of America. Concern over annexation by the United States was one of the primary reasons for Confederation in 1867. I would like to thank the member of Essex for elaborating on that important history earlier today.

Over the past decades, our relationship has grown, and hopefully we are able to once again demonstrate the benefits of free trade between our nations. But in the interim, we can no longer depend on the United States. It is time to build a stronger, independent and self-reliant economy so that Canada and Ontario can stand alone on the incredible resources we possess and the best, most talented workforce in the world.

As I mentioned earlier, I have met with the five mayors in my riding and the three local chambers of commerce. All of them are eager to showcase what their communities have to offer. Building on this government's record of attracting nearly \$70 billion of investment to this province, I am confident that we can build a bright future for the people of Wellington–Halton Hills, standing on the shoulders of men like Sir John A. Macdonald that built this country we are privileged to call home.

Speaker, in case you hadn't noticed, I'm a bit of a lover of history. Like Sir John A. Macdonald, this government has committed to build seaports, railroads and pipelines. Without these important nation-building projects, it is clear that our growth as a province will stall and we will continue to be reliant on the US. This is an important moment for our province. The action, or lack of action, will have significant impacts on our future.

I am thankful that the message we heard from the Lieutenant Governor yesterday was one of action for the sake of future generations.

As I conclude, I would like to again encourage the young people of Ontario: Don't be afraid to get involved. Our democracy needs you and if you are willing to work hard, you can make a difference. I look forward to representing the incredible people of Wellington–Halton Hills. Soli Deo Gloria.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Lorne Coe): Questions? I have the member from Perth–Wellington, please.

Mr. Matthew Rae: Thank you to my colleague for his great maiden speech. We have the pleasure of representing Wellington county together, and I know he will do a great job filling the big shoes that the former Speaker, Ted Arnott, has left as well, and Jack Johnson and many others—great Conservative leaders in our community that we have the privilege to represent.

My question to the member opposite is: I know he went on at length about some of the great Conservative philosophies and backgrounds, Sir John A. that he mentioned—I was wondering if he could share with us who is his favourite Conservative politician in history that he aspires to and looks up to.

Mr. Joseph Racinsky: It's a fantastic question, and I would have to go with John G. Diefenbaker; he was a Baptist like me. So that's my pick. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Lorne Coe): Thank you for that response.

I have the member from London North Centre, please.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I would like to thank the member from Wellington–Halton Hills for sharing his background and for sharing his faith as well as his journey. I believe that this place is an opportunity for us to come together around values and principles such as compassion and justice, mercy and righteousness, love and forgiveness.

Recently a friend of mine, Bishop Terry Dance, sent to me a Lenten video from Bishop Ruth from St. Stephen's Episcopal Church in South Carolina. In that Lenten video, it was incredibly brilliant the things that the bishop had to say. I was thinking about our role here as legislators as I watched that video. My question to the member is, in thinking about the Scriptures and in thinking about the decisions that you will make in this place, how will your faith shine through when it comes to the treatment of those who are poor as well as those who are oppressed?

Mr. Joseph Racinsky: Thank you for the question. I thank the member—his points and values he listed are very true. There needs to be compassion, social compassion, and I think it's important, at the same time, to keep politics, government, and religion separate and have that distinction between the church and the state. But those values of compassion, righteousness that he mentioned certainly are very important to me and, I know, to the government as well.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Lorne Coe): Questions? The member from Essex, please.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: I welcome the member to this assembly and congratulate him on his election. As he pointed out, he is the youngest member of this chamber at 23 years old, and as I look across this chamber, I see the eldest member of this chamber, the Minister for Seniors and Accessibility, who is proudly serving as a minister in the provincial cabinet. The juxtaposition across the floor is beautiful to behold. I want to ask the member here, when he reaches the age of the Minister for Seniors and he looks back on his 55-year career in this chamber, what does he want to be able to say about his career, his 55-year-old career, and what he's accomplished?

1710

Mr. Joseph Racinsky: Thank you for the question. We'll take it four years at a time.

Looking back, I want to continue what I did on council of being an active representative, someone who listens to the residents and acts in their best interests to get results for the people of Wellington–Halton Hills. That's what I'm hoping to do in this place, and I'm confident this government will deliver for them.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Lorne Coe): Questions?

Ms. Laura Smith: I want to extend my heartfelt thanks for the member from Wellington–Halton Hills for providing kind of a really true look at his life experiences. Although he's only 23, I do have to applaud him for the level of community spirit that he has acquired already in his young life.

I am going to circle back to the conversation that he had about his parents. He said that his sign was the first sign that actually went on the front lawn of their home. I'm wondering—you talked briefly about it, but what was the turning moment for you when this was the life that you wanted to start?

Mr. Joseph Racinsky: If you ask, my family would like to laugh, because when I first got involved in politics seven years ago, I said that I would never run. I just want to be involved; I don't want to run. And they say, "Oh, here you are running." So it has been quite the journey. I surprised myself over the last little while. But I think it comes down to, again, this democracy, seizing the opportunities to make an impact for good for our communities. That's why I hope I'm an inspiration to the other young people throughout this province, for future generations. Again, if you're willing to put up your hand, get involved—members of this place know too few people are willing to do so, to get involved and make that impact. That's why I hope more people are able to do that as well.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Lorne Coe): Questions?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I want to offer my congratulations to the youngest member of the Legislative Assembly, the member for Wellington–Halton Hills, on his inaugural address. It was really valuable to hear him sharing his experiences, and the formative influences that made him who he is and what brought him to this place.

Any returning members will know his predecessor, who was definitely one of the most respected and trusted members of the Legislative Assembly. I wonder if the member could share: Did he have a conversation with Ted Arnott, and what kind of advice did Mr. Arnott give him as he was elected and moving into this new role as MPP?

Mr. Joseph Racinsky: Yes, I have very much valued Mr. Arnott's mentorship, not only over the past few months but over the last few years as well as I worked with him in the local riding. Mr. Arnott's advice was to always act with integrity and to work hard all the time, not just some of the time, and to work for the people of Wellington–Halton Hills all of the time, not just some of the time. I'm taking that from an interview he did with the CBC. But he reiterated that to me multiple times. They are certainly big shoes to fill, but I appreciate his help in doing so, even as we move forward in this role.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Lorne Coe): Questions, please.

Mr. Ted Hsu: The member for Wellington–Halton Hills and I share the experience of, upon entering the Legislature, both having replaced a long-serving Speaker. I benefited very much from the influence of the Honourable Peter Milliken, who was a long-serving Speaker in the House of Commons, and came to have a deep appreciation for the institution of Parliament.

I don't want to put the member for Wellington–Halton Hills on the spot, but I am wondering, having observed what has happened here in the last couple of days or having spoken with Ted Arnott, whether he has some thoughts about how this place works and, from a new person's point of view, how we could work better.

Mr. Joseph Racinsky: I do want to take this opportunity to congratulate the member from Flamborough–Glanbrook on her election as Speaker. I think she will do an incredible job. It was a historic moment, and I am sure she will fulfill the role in an exemplary manner.

In our conversations, she has already outlined some incredible things that she will be doing to raise the level of debate in this place. For the moment, I am happy to observe, take it in and listen, and that's what I am focused on for the time being. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Lorne Coe): Further debate?

MPP Lise Vaugeois: Thank you, Speaker. Welcome back to you as well.

I would like to take a moment to thank the people of Thunder Bay–Superior North for returning me as their representative to Queen's Park. I am here to serve the people of the 13 municipalities and 11 First Nations that make up my riding. It is a riding spread out over 93,000 square kilometres. It is a challenge to get to every community, but it's also a great pleasure. So I want to thank you for putting your faith in me and assure you that I take the responsibility of being your representative very, very seriously.

Ever since universal health care was brought to Canada through the work of Tommy Douglas and the CCF, now known as the NDP, the corporate world started to develop an ideology, claiming the "efficiency" of the market—or "leanness," in today's jargon—relentlessly disparaging public service workers and educators, and promoting a new religion based on the miracle of markets, all with the long-range goal of turning every public service into another opportunity to make profits. This is the ideology writ large of everything this government has done in the last seven years, and it is the same ideology laid out in the speech from the throne.

It is an ideology that has resulted in one million people needing to use food banks and countless people living outside, unable to find an affordable place to live. This is an ideology that strives to convince people that the massive transfer of public assets into private, for-profit hands is good public policy, in spite of what is in front of our eyes: the decline of access to health care, the calculated erosion of public and post-secondary education, the refusal to impose real rent control, and the resulting rates of poverty in Ontario not seen since the Great Depression.

And yet we are supposed to believe that more of the same transfer of public assets and the weakening of regulations and democratic control will somehow bring different results. But hey, there's nothing like a crisis to have a rationale to put through what I consider a radical anti-worker agenda.

Now, instead of erasing everything that people have worked so hard to win for families and workers in this province, we could actually be increasing funding to education, to post-secondary institutions that are, by the way, collapsing as we speak. Confederation College in Thunder Bay, for example, has been forced to cut 11 programs. But I hear it's even worse at other colleges.

In Thunder Bay, the loss of the culinary program is particularly tragic. This is a program that has been serving Indigenous students and has been really important to local restaurants, who have been integrating the work of these students into their operations. It's something that shouldn't be happening, but the underfunding has been endemic over 30 years, at least.

Speaking of First Nations, I did speak this morning about the government's colonial project to push through mining on First Nations territories without free, prior and informed consent. The thing is, without building genuine relationships and having open conversations, there will never be trust, and the whole strategy will rely on bullying. There is talk of requiring consultation, a limited engagement to tick the necessary box, but the government's poor record on consultation speaks for itself.

1720

It is, in fact, responsible mining companies that have taken the time to build relationships and work together with First Nations communities that have been very, very successful. Two mining projects come immediately to mind: the Musselwhite mine, 480 kilometres north of Thunder Bay, and the agreement between Generation Mining and Biigtigong Nishnaabeg First Nation. They took the time to create those agreements, and they got the support of the entire community to accept them.

I think we all agree that mining is important, but if we want to succeed, we need to remember that consultation is not the same as consent and that nothing good will come of ignoring the need for free, prior and informed consent. But you don't have to just take it from me. I received a press release a couple of hours ago from Matawa Chiefs Council—their office is in Thunder Bay—calling for formal discussions before the proposed Ontario legislation on the new land designation of a region of strategic importance takes place. They wrote: "Ontario's decision to unilaterally impose legislation to designate the territory of Matawa member First Nations without government-to-government level discussions and agreement is unacceptable. The proposed legislation will have significant potential impact to current and future negotiations of First Nation agreements with government, the mining industry and business partnerships."

We have models of how to do this right, but I fear that the government is taking exactly the opposite approach.

I do have to point out that Neskantaga has had a boil-water advisory for 30 years, and now their nursing station is unusable because of flooding. It looks a lot like punishment.

I also have concerns about the unacknowledged risks that come with a "remove all barriers" approach to inter-provincial trade. Will worker health and safety standards be reduced or eliminated? Will food safety regulations disappear because they are red tape? What happens to collective agreements when labour mobility is the priority and companies can undercut each other by hiring people from provinces with weaker agreements? The result will ultimately mean lower wages and fewer benefits for everyone.

I actually got the answer to my questions about whether this would lower health and safety standards. Schedule 5, part (a), Ontario Free Trade and Mobility Act, 2025, states: "A good from a reciprocating jurisdiction shall be treated as if it met the corresponding Ontario standards and approvals." In other words, it has not met those standards, but we are going to pretend that it has, and we don't actually care about what the standards are.

Secondly, "A person or an entity who has an authorization from a reciprocating jurisdiction to provide a service shall be entitled to the equivalent authorization in Ontario." Again, it doesn't have to be at the same standard. There's no question about, are the same safety standards there, the same qualifications—we're just going to assume that, and I find that quite disturbing. In other words, whatever hard-fought-for gains have been made to protect the health and safety of workers are getting tossed.

This Conservative plan places no obligations on corporations or investors. This will result in a race to the bottom that will be great for the biggest corporate players but will push wages and benefits to the lowest common denominator. Unfortunately, as often as not, removing red tape is actually code for abdicating government responsibility to set and maintain standards to protect the people of Ontario.

Whatever you may think, the people of Ontario have not given you a mandate to undermine health, safety or environmental protections, or to undermine wages and benefits by undermining collective bargaining, but this is exactly what we are seeing.

On the subject of workers and working conditions, the government led off this session—it's actually April 7—by selling out workers who have helped to build this province, by taking another \$2 billion on top of the \$2 billion already given away as a pre-election goody from funds intended to support workers injured or made ill on the job. And, of course, there was another \$2 billion-plus that was taken away from workers just before the 2022 election. So that's actually \$6 billion that has been taken out of funds to support injured workers or workers made ill or poisoned on the job.

The Premier claims that these measures will help give workers and businesses the support they need in the face of growing economic uncertainty. But how does taking \$4 billion of money collected for injured and ill workers protect any working person? In fact, it's a very clear message that if you become permanently disabled as a result of your work, expect to be abandoned and expect to struggle financially for the rest of your life.

I know that most people don't understand the history and purpose of the WSIB, but the standardized fees paid into the WSIB are a fully predictable cost of doing business, and when the government decides to give away WSIB funds intended for injured workers, the government is also pushing the costs onto the public in the form of sub-poverty Ontario disability support payments. This is a trick to make the public pay for what was never meant to be a public expense.

The government has actually boasted about reducing payroll taxes, but they have done this by robbing money from funds set aside to support workers. These are workers who have helped to build this province and who have had the misfortune of being injured or made ill while working, while making their contributions to this province.

Let's look at how there might come to be a surplus at the WSIB. For starters, 92% of all claims for a mental health disability are denied. More than 80% of claims denied by the WSIB adjudicators are overturned on appeal, either in part or in full. That tells you that they probably shouldn't have been turned down in the first place—certainly not in those numbers. It also means that people, some of whom are extremely ill or don't have strong language skills or don't even know that they have the right to appeal, wind up with nothing. Worst of all, 45% of workers with a severe, lifelong disability hover at just under or just above the poverty line—45%. That's a lot of people thrown under the bus.

So I say to all you young women and men and all you parents excited about your children entering the workforce, don't expect that help will be there if you need it. And don't make the mistake of thinking that bad things only happen to other people.

My friend Janet grew up on a working farm heated by wood, caring for animals, hauling and piling wood, haymaking and doing demanding physical labour. She was strong and had an active lifestyle, but when she was 27, she broke her back moving a heavy dolly with handles that were too high. She was forced back to work too soon, and 15 months later, while doing a simple task of reaching over her shoulders, all of a sudden, she could barely move and was in excruciating pain. The problem: a level 2 fusion of her vertebrae, apparent 15 months after the accident had taken place. Janet recovered reasonably well from that injury, but 10 years later, she was jumped at work and knocked out. Since then, she cannot walk without severe pain, and she has been diagnosed with PTSD, largely as a result of the endless denials by the WSIB.

Did Janet ask for these life-altering injuries to happen? Of course not. But the point is that no one is immune. Life-altering accidents can happen to anyone, and when they are the result of workplace incidents or exposures, the WSIB is supposed to be there to provide real support for as long as the injury lasts.

There is no excuse for the policy of denial that is built into the WSIB, but instead of creating a barrier against hopelessness, especially in this time of economic uncertainty, this government keeps taking more and more resources away.

Let's be clear: There is no surplus of WSIB funds, just a policy of denial. The WSIB giveaway is taking away a resource from all workers—whether working in construction, a hospital or an office—because this is a protection that workers have been promised and are routinely denied.

Before I close, I want to challenge the government to make good on its promises to support public services, support workers by procuring services and products made in Ontario by Ontario workers.

1730

Unfortunately, we keep coming across examples of the Ford government doing exactly the opposite. For example, Skilled Trades Ontario has awarded the contract for Red Seal certification testing to a single-source American bid, a company called Prometric. Did anybody know that? Nope.

ServiceOntario of course, as we know, is now providing profits to Staples, an American-owned business. DriveTest and highway maintenance have long been privatized, and the contracts are held by multinationals based in England and the US. Now, there are many examples of failures of those two corporations, but apart from that, the profits that they make leave the country. I don't see how that is of benefit to the people of this province who are actually paying for those profits to leave the country.

Then, we have set the new social service manager contracts. This is the privatization of social services, in case—again, I'm not sure how many people realize this is happening. They will be extracting profits from job-finding services for people with disabilities. At least two of these contracts are held by multinational corporations based in Australia and the United States. Like, why? Why are you doing this? Why are you sending those profits outside of the province?

There's the Therme contract for Ontario Place, owned by an Austrian company, and, of course, most egregious of all, there was the \$9-billion contract given to Hitachi to build Ontario transit cars in the United States. We learned about this BOBI thing this morning, something about promoting manufacturing companies to come and set up in Ontario. I want to know why the existing manufacturing facility, Alstom in Thunder Bay, was overlooked when the Ontario Line was given to Hitachi.

Now, I see that there is a Buy Ontario, Buy Canadian Day act. So perhaps this is the one day a year there's a commitment to support Ontario workers and manufacturers; otherwise, I'm not sure why we have to declare a special day. I truly hope that this is not the case, that there is a genuine commitment to support Ontario workers with good wages, good union wages, good benefits and to make sure that manufacturing is taking place in Ontario in facilities that we already have. We know that the facility in Thunder Bay is having to lay off workers right now as we speak. They need a longer contract. There was one. There was a fantastic contract. But it's being made in the United States with, by the way, \$9 billion of Ontario taxpayer money.

So I see a persistent pattern, past and present, where Ontario assets, including health care, are being sold off to private interests.

I truly want to believe that this government will be working for the benefit of all people and not just their usual beneficiaries. However, with the Premier's assertion that he is actually not interested in any cross-party collaboration—we did hear a little bit this morning that we should come if we've got ideas, but there's no actual table where there's an openness to be exchanging ideas, exchan-

ging concerns, bringing, for example, the real, lived-experience stories that we heard today from the new member from Hamilton Centre. We need those opportunities to work together.

I know that I came this time desperately hoping that it would be different in here, that there would be an openness to collaboration, that we would be genuinely looking at how to support people in this province and not just the same old, same old in a new outfit but essentially the same thing.

We are at a time of experiencing unprecedented challenges. People are scared and with good reason. Unfortunately, when people are scared, sometimes they wind up attacking each other instead of recognizing that we need to be working together. But they can also see that we're actually not always all in the same boat. Some people are in the bottom working on the boilers, getting hot and very dirty, and some people are on the top sipping champagne, and there are a few people in between doing the other jobs. We're on the same boat but we're certainly not in the same position.

There are people who are really, really struggling and getting rid of—it's a game, this idea of red tape. "Red tape" is this umbrella term and it's bad. Whatever it is, it's bad. But we actually have to look at what those regulations are. What's the significance of those regulations? What was their purpose? How are they protecting the people of Ontario? If they're not, sure, we don't need it, but you can't just put it all in one basket and say, "Oh, red tape—must be bad. Must be bad."

But that is the way things are described in this government. That's the way they're described in the speech from the throne. That's just empty rhetoric. It's meaningless but it's sort of this game to sell it to the people of the province as if, "This is the meaning of red tape, and we all know red tape is bad, bad, bad." Where is the intelligent conversation? Where is the debate and the thoughtful consideration of what is best for the people of Ontario?

I think I will leave my comments there. I unfortunately have to remain skeptical, but I still have a piece of me that really, really wants to collaborate.

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

Mr. Matthew Rae: Thank you to my colleague for their speech—I think on the speech from the throne, but she was talking about the bill we tabled today, so I'm a little confused. I know it's the first day back. Everyone is getting acclimatized to the procedures of the House.

I found it very interesting when they were talking about the great bill our Minister of Economic Development tabled today, talking about reducing and removing trade barriers that have been a part of this country for over 150 years. We are finally taking action because of the existential threat from south of the border, and President Trump has finally, finally brought us all together. It was great to see Premier Houston and Premier Holt, people from two different parties, coming together under the leadership of Premier Ford to remove trade barriers in this

country. My view is: A Canadian is a Canadian is a Canadian, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Lorne Coe): I need to hear a question, please.

Mr. Matthew Rae: Are the members opposite suggesting that they are not going to support that bill or throne speech?

MPP Lise Vaugeois: I think that the points that I've been trying to make are that there are sweeping statements made in the throne speech that do not invite intelligent debate or careful examination of the specifics of what those trade barriers are.

Be specific, get away from the ideological stuff that is kind of a constant from that side of the House, and let's look at the effect and the impacts on people's lives first.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Lorne Coe): Questions?

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I would like to thank my colleague from Thunder Bay–Superior North for her discussion of the Alstom plant.

I think about procurements that this government is recently discussing, and I think about the Canadian content provisions at Alstom, who are responsible for creating the Ontario Line subway cars. I believe that the provision had been that 25% Canadian content would be built with Alstom, and if I recall correctly, that Premier Ford lowered that already paltry one quarter. He lowered that 25% to 10%.

I wonder if the member could comment about that or if the member would like to comment about the LRV contract, the streetcar contract that has come to an end and the hundreds of Alstom workers who are going to be laid off from Unifor 1075.

MPP Lise Vaugeois: Thank you very much for the question.

We know that in 2022, Premier Ford reduced the requirement for Canadian content from 25% to 10%. Why? Why did he do that? I think it was in order to give the contract to Hitachi so that they could build in the United States.

The workers at Alstom and the management at Alstom have certainly not forgotten that betrayal. The United States, before any of this stuff happened with tariffs, required at least 75% American content in builds for public transportation, and yet we have a paltry 10%. I'd like to see that change. If the government is genuine about Ontario procurement, use the facilities that we already have. Keep those skilled trades workers working. That's where they want to be. They're trying to raise their families there, and they are looking at massive layoffs again.

1740

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Lorne Coe): Questions?

Ms. Laura Smith: I listened to the member from Thunder Bay–Superior North quite attentively. She talked about coming together during these times, especially now more than ever.

I was listening to the beginning. You talked about vulnerable individuals—women specifically, Indigenous, First Nation. One of the things that the government has

done is provide funding for a program called Ontario-STANDS, which really provides women and marginalized individuals a help up and a pivot into different vocations. I know there's been an incredible increase in funding, an \$18.7-million top-up, and that's on top of the \$1.4 billion over the next four years.

I'm wondering if she had an opportunity to talk to her community, her constituents about this incredible program that really helps those vulnerable individuals.

MPP Lise Vaugeois: I have not heard about this program, but that may be indicative of the fact that there are not people using the program in my riding. I hope there are. I hope that I will learn more about it.

But what I can tell you is that the students who are attending Confederation College are shattered at the closing of their programs. This is affecting people who had already registered, who had made the time commitment, sorted things out with their families so that they could attend college full-time. Those programs are disappearing—are gone, in fact—because of the calculated underfunding of post-secondary education by this government.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Lorne Coe): Questions, please.

M^{me} France Gélinas: I'm very proud of my colleague from Thunder Bay–Superior North for her comments on the speech from the throne today.

When she started her comments, she talked about the importance to have prior conversations with First Nations when mining is considered. I represent the riding of Nickel Belt, where there is a lot of mining. The last mine to open was at Côté Lake. It's on Mattagami First Nation's territory, and I can tell you that they did the work. They had prior consultations with the First Nations, and it worked. The chief of Mattagami First Nation was there at the opening—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Lorne Coe): I need a question, please. Thank you.

M^{me} France Gélinas: —of the mine.

How important is it to have free, prior consultations with First Nations if you want mining to be successful?

MPP Lise Vaugeois: Thank you to the member from Nickel Belt for that question. It's a very important one. Without free, prior, informed consent, there's war. There is endless conflict.

But I can tell you that in Biigtigong Nishnaabeg, where Generation Mining did the work, I attended a very beautiful ceremony between the chief of Biigtigong Nishnaabeg and one of the upper representatives of Generation Mining. The commitment was there. Better than that, the entire community was presented with the project as it was being developed, and the entire community voted in favour. Part of those agreements have protected the environment. They have protected places for traditional harvesting, and they have these—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Lorne Coe): Thank you for that response.

Questions, please.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: I listened to the presentation from the member, and I noticed that she said that she

wanted to keep skilled tradespeople working. I'm sure all of us in this chamber, all 124 of us, definitely want to keep skilled tradespeople working.

Today the Premier met with the Premier of Nova Scotia, and they signed a memorandum of understanding for interprovincial mobility for skilled tradespeople. That memorandum of understanding between Ontario and Nova Scotia is going to keep skilled tradespeople working.

So my question to the member is this: Does she support the memorandum of understanding between Ontario and Nova Scotia which will keep skilled tradespeople working?

MPP Lise Vaugeois: Well, first, I would like to read it, so I won't give you a commitment without reading it. However, the concern that has been raised is that if you've got an excellent collective agreement, say, in Ontario, but someone is coming from another province where they don't have that kind of protection, then they can come here and work for less, and that will undermine those collective agreements. So there has to be thinking through of those implications to make sure that we're actually going to the highest possible standard and not the lowest.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Lorne Coe): I have the member from Perth–Wellington.

Mr. Matthew Rae: My very brief question to the member opposite: Would the member opposite change their tune if Wab Kinew signed an MOU with the Premier of Ontario, which I'm sure he will one day?

MPP Lise Vaugeois: As I say, I read things first, before I say, "Oh, this is fantastic." Now, hopefully it will be fantastic, but I want to see the fine print. Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Lorne Coe): I have the member from Kingston and the Islands. Our questions have concluded. Go ahead.

Mr. Ted Hsu: I move adjournment of debate.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Lorne Coe): The member from Kingston and the Islands has moved adjournment of the debate. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I declare the motion carried.

Debate adjourned.

APPOINTMENT OF HOUSE OFFICERS

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Lorne Coe): I have the deputy House leader.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: On a point of order, Speaker, I seek unanimous consent to move a motion without notice regarding the appointment of presiding officers.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Lorne Coe): The deputy House leader is seeking unanimous consent of the House to move a motion without notice regarding the appointment of presiding officers. Agreed? Agreed.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: I move that Effie Triantafilopoulos, member for the electoral district of Oakville North–Burlington, be appointed Deputy Speaker and Chair of the Committee of the Whole House; and

That Jennifer French, member for the electoral district of Oshawa, be appointed First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House; and

That Ric Bresee, member for the electoral district of Hastings–Lennox and Addington be appointed Second Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House; and

That Andrea Hazell, member for the electoral district of Scarborough–Guildwood, be appointed Third Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Lorne Coe): The deputy House leader has moved that Effie Triantafilopoulos, member for the electoral district of Oakville North–Burlington, be appointed Deputy Speaker and Chair of the Committee of the Whole House; and

That Jennifer French, member for the electoral district of Oshawa, be appointed First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House; and

That Ric Bresee, member for the electoral district of Hastings–Lennox and Addington be appointed Second Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House; and

That Andrea Hazell, member for the electoral district of Scarborough–Guildwood, be appointed Third Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I declare the motion carried.

Motion agreed to.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Lorne Coe): Orders of the day?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: Speaker, no further business.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Lorne Coe): There being no further business, the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 9 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1749.

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Clerk / Greffier: Trevor Day

Deputy Clerk / Sous-Greffière: Valerie Quioc Lim

Clerks-at-the-Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Julia Douglas, Meghan Stenson,

Christopher Tyrell, Wai Lam (William) Wong

Sergeant-at-Arms / Sergent d'armes: Tim McGough

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|---|---|---|
| Fedeli, Hon. / L'hon. Victor (PC) | Nipissing | Chair of Cabinet / Président du Conseil des ministres Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade / Ministre du Développement économique, de la Création d'emplois et du Commerce |
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| Gates, Wayne (NDP) | Niagara Falls | |
| Gélinas, France (NDP) | Nickel Belt | |
| Gilmour, Alexa (NDP) | Parkdale—High Park | |
| Glover, Chris (NDP) | Spadina—Fort York | |
| Gretzky, Lisa (NDP) | Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest | |
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| Gualtieri, Silvia (PC) | Mississauga East—Cooksville / Mississauga-Est—Cooksville | |
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| Jones, Hon. / L'hon. Trevor (PC) | Chatham-Kent—Leamington | Minister of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness / Ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et de l'Agroentreprise |
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| Kanapathi, Logan (PC) | Markham—Thornhill | |
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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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| Pierre, Natalie (PC) | Burlington | |
| Pinsonneault, Steve (PC) | Lambton—Kent—Middlesex | |
| Pirie, Hon. / L'hon. George (PC) | Timmins | Minister of Northern Economic Development and Growth / Ministre du Développement et de la croissance économique du Nord |
| Quinn, Hon. / L'hon. Nolan (PC) | Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry | Minister of Colleges, Universities, Research Excellence and Security / Ministre des Collèges et Universités, de l'Excellence en recherche et de la Sécurité |
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| Rae, Matthew (PC) | Perth—Wellington | |
| Rakocevic, Tom (NDP) | Humber River—Black Creek | |
| Rickford, Hon. / L'hon. Greg (PC) | Kenora—Rainy River | Minister of Indigenous Affairs and First Nations Economic Reconciliation / Ministre des Affaires autochtones et de la Réconciliation économique avec les Premières Nations Minister Responsible for Ring of Fire Economic and Community Partnerships / Ministre responsable des Partenariats économiques et communautaires pour le développement du Cercle de feu |
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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 | |
| Saunderson, Brian (PC) | Simcoe—Grey | |
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| Scott, Chris (PC) | Sault Ste. Marie | |
| Scott, Laurie (PC) | Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock | |
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| Shaw, Sandy (NDP) | Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas / Hamilton-Ouest—Ancaster—Dundas | |
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| Smith, David (PC) | Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre | |
| Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Graydon (PC) | Parry Sound—Muskoka | Associate Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / Ministre associé des Affaires municipales et du Logement |
| Smith, Laura (PC) | Thornhill | |
| Smyth, Stephanie (LIB) | Toronto—St. Paul's | |
| Stevens, Jennifer (Jennie) (NDP) | St. Catharines | |
| Stiles, Marit (NDP) | Davenport | Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau Parti démocratique de l'Ontario |
| Surma, Hon. / L'hon. Kinga (PC) | Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre | Minister of Infrastructure / Ministre de l'Infrastructure |
| Tabuns, Peter (NDP) | Toronto—Danforth | |
| Tangri, Hon. / L'hon. Nina (PC) | Mississauga—Streetsville | Associate Minister of Small Business / Ministre associée des Petites Entreprises |

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|--|--|---|
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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 |
| Triantafilopoulos, Effie J. (PC) | Oakville North—Burlington / Oakville-Nord—Burlington | Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Présidente du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative |
| | | Deputy Speaker / Vice-présidente |
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| Vanthof, John (NDP) | Timiskaming—Cochrane | Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle |
| Vaugeois, Lise (NDP) | Thunder Bay—Superior North / Thunder Bay—Supérieur-Nord | |
| Vickers, Paul (PC) | Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound | |
| 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 |
| Wong-Tam, Kristyn (NDP) | Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre | |