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(Hansard)**

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Lundi
20 octobre 2025

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Monday 20 October 2025

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 20 octobre 2025

The House met at 1015.

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

Prayers.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): You may be seated. Welcome back. I hope everyone had a lovely summer, a restful summer, lots of work done.

We're going to have a great session, aren't we? We're all going to get along, aren't we?

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Yes, we are.

Before we begin, I would like to draw your attention to the Public Service Pension Plan briefing note and newsletter that are placed on your desks today.

INDEPENDENT MEMBERS

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I would like to address the House regarding the participation of independent members. Since the last time we met, the number of independent members has increased from three to four. As a result, our practices must be adjusted.

Members may recall that each independent member is entitled to participate during question period and members' statements once every eight days. Therefore, going forward, I will recognize one independent member to ask a question and one independent member to make a members' statement every Tuesday and Wednesday. This will allow us to accommodate all four independent members into an eight-day rotation. Each independent member recognized during question period will continue to have the opportunity to ask one question and one supplementary.

I thank you for your attention to this matter.

OPPOSITION DAYS

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I would also like to take a few moments to address the House on the matter of opposition days. Members will be aware that when the House last met, a motion was adopted to revise the parliamentary calendar, resulting in a change to the fall meeting period this year.

Standing order 45(a) provides for five opposition day debates in each of the spring and fall meeting periods. Pursuant to standing order 45(c)(i), members must provide notice of an opposition day motion by the Wednesday of the week before it is to be debated so that it may appear on the orders and notices paper the following sessional day. As a result of the revision to the parliamentary calendar,

which was adopted on Thursday, June 5, 2025, it was impossible for members to provide the required notice for an opposition day to be held this week, the first week of the meeting period.

Given that the scheduling of opposition days is prohibited during the last eight sessional days of the meeting period and any extension thereof pursuant to standing order 45(b)(vi), and that opposition days are limited to one per meeting week pursuant to standing order 45(b)(i), it will only be possible for four opposition day debates to take place before the House adjourns for the winter.

When faced with a similar circumstance in the spring meeting period, the allocation of opposition days was determined on the basis of the membership of the caucuses relative to each other. This approach was in keeping with previous Speakers' decisions as well as standing order 45(b)(iii), so it is fair and reasonable to apply it again now. This formula provides that three opposition days will be allocated to the official opposition, and one opposition day to the third party.

I would like to thank the House for its attention.

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 name of the following person appointed to serve on the Board of Internal Economy has been communicated to me as Chair: Stephanie Bowman, MPP, is appointed by the caucus of the third party in the place of John Fraser, MPP. Welcome.

MEMBER FOR HASTINGS–LENNOX AND ADDINGTON

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I beg to inform the House that the accommodations granted to the member for Hastings–Lennox and Addington pursuant to standing order 2, as detailed in my statement to the House on May 26, 2025, are no longer required.

1020

TABLING OF SESSIONAL PAPERS

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I beg to inform the House that, during the adjournment, the following documents were tabled:

From the Office of the Auditor General of Ontario:

—a special report on the Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care Program;

- a special report on the Home Construction Regulatory Authority;

- a special report on Progress to Reduce Greenhouse Gas Emissions; and

- a special report on the Skills Development Fund Training Stream;

From the Office of the Financial Accountability Officer of Ontario:

- a report entitled Ontario Economic Monitor: October 2024 to March 2025;

- the 2024-25 annual report;

- a reported entitled Expenditure Monitor 2024-25: Q4;

- a report entitled Ontario Economic Monitor: January to June 2025; and

- a report entitled Economic and Budget Outlook: Summer 2025;

From the Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner of Ontario:

- the 2024 annual report and statistical report;

From the Office of the Integrity Commissioner of Ontario:

- the 2024-25 annual report; and

- a report concerning the Honourable Doug Ford, Premier of Ontario, the Honourable Andrea Khanjin, former Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks, the Honourable Todd McCarthy, Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks, and the Honourable Stephen Lecce, Minister of Energy and Mines;

From the Office of the Ombudsman of Ontario:

- the 2024-25 annual report.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

CHILDHOOD CANCER AWARENESS MONTH

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): It is now time for members' statements. I recognize the member for Perth-Wellington.

Mr. Matthew Rae: Thank you, Speaker. Welcome back, Speaker.

Speaker, I rise today to recognize Childhood Cancer Awareness Month, which took place last month and occurs every September in Ontario.

Across Canada, approximately 10,000 children are living with cancer today. Every single day, six more children receive this devastating diagnosis and, tragically, one in five of those children will never have the chance to grow old. I think of Maggie Jenkins, daughter of Dave and Maureen, whose life was cut short at the young age of 12 years old.

And for those who do survive, many face lifelong health challenges including heart disease, loss of bone density and even secondary cancers. Their courage reminds us that the battle does not end with remission.

Although Childhood Cancer Awareness Month has just passed, our work to raise awareness must continue. Every child's life matters, and every family's struggle deserves to be seen and supported.

Speaker, we wear a golden ribbon lapel pin, a symbol of remembrance and hope, as a reminder of the children that we have lost and those still fighting today. Let us all work together for a future where no child faces cancer.

UNEMPLOYMENT

Ms. Doly Begum: Speaker, 800,000 Ontarians are out of work. Just a few months ago, I stood here telling this government the struggles young people are facing in our province. At that time, Ontario's youth unemployment rate was 15.5%. After just four months of this government's inaction and failures, that has now gone up to almost 18%. The Premier's response to this crisis was to tell young people to go and "look harder" for a job.

Instead of finding solutions, he blames Ontarians who are struggling to make ends meet. Speaker, that is not leadership. Maybe the Premier should look harder at his own government's record: 800,000—800,000—people are currently out of work.

The Auditor General's report on the Skills Development Fund shows how badly this government is failing workers and wasting taxpayer dollars. The government handed out \$742 million to their hand-picked, low-ranked applicants, while high-ranked ones were unfairly denied. This is the same playbook as the greenbelt and Ontario Place—where insiders are getting ahead and Ontarians are falling behind.

We need to invest in workers. We need to invest in training centres, in building trades. Every single dollar—taxpayer dollar—should go to workers, not lobbyists or well-connected insiders.

Speaker, Ontarians are struggling. They deserve a government that will step up and fight for their future not one that will ignore their struggle and disrespect them or tell them to go and look harder.

HEALTH CARE

M^{me} Lucille Collard: On September 18, the new Ottawa Nurse Practitioner-Led Clinic officially opened its doors in Vanier. It is an historic milestone, and I want to express my heartfelt gratitude for this essential funding from the province, which enabled the creation of Ottawa's very first clinic of this kind. Because it is fully funded by the province, this clinic ensures universal access to primary care with no out-of-pocket costs for patients.

The clinic brings together health and social services under one roof, and it is designed to grow. But it needs continued and expanded support if we are to realize its full potential, like attaching even more of Ottawa's most underserved residents to primary care and eliminating the long wait-list for Health Care Connect.

Speaker, we know that nurse practitioners are key to addressing Ontario's health human resource crisis. With

more than 5,800 nurse practitioners across the province, we must better support and deploy this incredible workforce, especially in high-need neighbourhoods like my riding of Vanier.

To the province of Ontario, but to executive director Hoda Mankal for her incredible work; to the clinic's dedicated staff, board and partners: Thank you for making this vision a reality. It has changed the world in my riding.

COMMUNITY SAFETY

MPP Paul Vickers: It is such a privilege to rise in this Legislature as we start this fall sitting. I had a great summer in Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound connecting with my constituents. I had thousands of discussions, but one topic from this summer stands out to me and that is community safety.

In recent years, crime has risen in Bruce and Grey counties. This isn't just hearsay; our crime severity index has risen, and 63% of the offenders in the city of Owen Sound are repeat offenders. Residents have had enough.

But help is on the way. Through the Community Safety and Policing Grant, five projects to improve safety across Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound will be receiving provincial support. Whether it's through more front-line constables to support patrols in Hanover, supporting Owen Sound's community-oriented response unit and foot patrols or improving police technology in Grey Highlands and West Grey, I am proud to say that this government walks the talk on community safety.

I want to thank the honourable Solicitor General for recognizing this critical need in Bruce–Grey–Owen sound and thank the hard-working police officers that help keep Bruce and Grey counties safe.

FORESTRY INDUSTRY

Mr. Guy Bourgouin: After three weeks of uncertainty, the recent announcement from both the federal and provincial government to help keep Kap Paper open is welcome news for workers and families in our region. This joint commitment shows what can be achieved when government listens to northern voices. I want to thank the ministers involved for recognizing the urgency and stepping up with this support.

But Speaker, our work is not done. The long-term future of Kap Paper and all sawmills and paper mills across northern Ontario depends on innovation, modernization and strategic planning. We must invest in new technologies, green energy and sustainable practices to ensure these industries remain competitive and viable for the next generation.

What we're seeing in Kap Paper and, most recently, at Ear Falls signals a broader crisis: rising tariffs, idle mills and no coordinated plan to protect good forest jobs. Ontario needs a made-in-Ontario forestry strategy—one that promotes modernization, secures long-term power and co-generation agreements, and connects forestry to housing and economic growth.

We must also protect unionized jobs by working with labour to reskill and retain workers here in the north, rather than watching opportunities leave our communities.

Now is the time for government, industries and communities to build on this momentum and commit to a strong, innovative, sustainable forest sector. I will continue to stand up for Kap Paper and for a prosperous north Ontario that grows with the times while staying true to the roots.

SPECIAL OLYMPICS

Mr. Brian Saunderson: It is great to be back in the Legislature after a very busy time in my riding of Simcoe–Grey. With countless announcements, events and stakeholder meetings, there are many highlights, but one in particular stands out because of the raw and real inspiration and dedication that was on full display that night.

Earlier this month, I had the pleasure and privilege to attend the Collingwood and Area Special Olympics annual awards dinner at the Royal Canadian Legion. It was a fantastic evening, Speaker, and the athletes were beaming with joy, pride and community spirit, not only for their own accomplishments, but for those of their teammates.

1030

The Special Olympics has a long and proud history in Collingwood. In 1997, we partnered with the city of Toronto to host the first winter games held outside the United States. Today, the Collingwood and Area Special Olympics program is one of the biggest in the world. The athletes participate in 11 sports, ranging from basketball to softball to downhill skiing, and the athletes compete locally, provincially, nationally and internationally.

Some of our local athletes will be representing Canada at the 2025 Special Olympics World Games in Turin, Italy, this winter. I want to thank the countless coaches, parents and volunteers who supported these athletes this past season. Without you, the games simply could not take place.

I'll conclude by sharing the Special Olympics motto: "Let me win. But if I cannot win, let me be brave in the attempt." Speaker, the bravery, courage and comradery I saw in that room that night was truly incredible. Congratulations to all our athletes and to Special Olympians across our great province. You are an inspiration to us all.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Remember, it's 90 seconds for our member statements.

CLIMATE CHANGE

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize the member for Toronto–Danforth.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Thank you, Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity.

As everyone in this chamber is well aware, the Auditor General reported recently this government is not going to be meeting its climate targets—not even close—and is not

going to actually be putting in place targets for further down the road.

This is extraordinarily consequential. People may be aware that, increasingly, scientists are realizing that the rate of global heating is accelerating, that we may well hit the 2-degree mark within the next decade. That has substantial consequences for everyone in this province and around the world. It will mean more wildfires. It will mean a drop in the standard of living. It will mean substantial increases in the costs for food.

All of these things are preventable, not just by this government, but by governments around the world. But this government has to play its part. Ontario has the extraordinary resources—human, physical—to make a difference around the world and it's not making that difference. Actually, I'm wrong, it is making a difference: It's going to make the world worse, because it's not meeting the targets that it itself set out.

Speaker, it's critical that this government draw back, look at the consequences of failure and take action to ensure that we meet those targets and, in fact, go further, meet the targets that would contain climate change in this world.

CIRCONSCRIPTION DE GLENGARRY— PRESCOTT—RUSSELL

RIDING OF GLENGARRY—PRESCOTT— RUSSELL

M. Stéphane Sarrazin: Merci, madame la Présidente. C'est un véritable plaisir d'être de retour à Queen's Park pour le début de la session d'automne. J'espère que tous mes collègues députés ont passé un été enrichissant à rencontrer les citoyens de leur circonscription. Pour ma part, ce fut un été rempli de rencontres inspirantes et d'échanges constructifs.

Over the past few months, I had the opportunity to meet with many members of our community, passionate entrepreneurs and representatives of local organizations across Glengarry—Prescott—Russell. Whether at fairs, community events, funding announcements or individual meetings, I have been impressed by the energy, commitment and dedication of everyone who helps bring our region to life.

En tout, j'ai participé à plus de 200 activités dans le cadre de mes différents rôles, dont plus de 175 dans ma circonscription et plus de 25 dans mes fonctions au sein du gouvernement. Ces rencontres et événements m'ont permis de mieux comprendre les besoins et les priorités de notre communauté et d'apporter ces voix à Queen's Park.

Je suis également fier de souligner que le gouvernement de l'Ontario a investi plus de 100 millions de dollars dans Glengarry—Prescott—Russell durant la dernière année pour soutenir nos municipalités, nos organismes et renforcer les services essentiels pour nos résidents. Ces investissements font une réelle différence dans la vie de nos gens de notre circonscription.

I would like to sincerely thank the residents, businesses, volunteers and all organizations of Glengarry—Prescott—

Russell for their warm welcome, commitment and collaboration. It is a privilege to represent such a dynamic and engaged community: I look forward to continuing to make their voice heard at Queen's Park throughout this session.

SMALL BUSINESS WEEK

Hon. Steve Clark: Speaker, it's Small Business Week, and that's a big deal in Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes: 99% of our businesses are small businesses. They're the heartbeat of our local economy. They make our communities vibrant.

I want to recognize two events that are taking place this week. Tomorrow, the Downtown Prescott BIA and the town of Prescott economic development office will host a Small Business Week celebration. I met several of those local businesses this summer when I joined Minister Nina Tangri and Mayor Gauri Shankar for a tour in downtown Prescott.

On Thursday, the united counties host the annual Bridges to Better Business event, recognizing the entrepreneur of the year, the immigrant entrepreneur and the inclusive employer.

Starter Company Plus will also be celebrated. This program, which is funded by our government, continues to launch a number of new ventures, and I recently met with 17 new participants for the next round.

Congratulations to everyone who is being honoured this week, and I want to thank everyone for organizing these special events on Small Business Week. As our government builds a more resilient and self-reliant economy, we need the entrepreneurial spirit of our small-business owners now more than ever.

Please join me in thanking the risk-takers in my riding who have worked tirelessly to grow their business, build our economy and make Leeds—Grenville the best place in Ontario to live.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): If I could have your attention, please. It is my great pleasure to welcome back former Speaker Ted Arnott and his wife, Lisa, to Queen's Park today. I would also like—

Applause.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): It gets better. I'd also like to extend my heartfelt congratulations to Ted on receiving the 2025 Parliamentarian Lifetime Achievement Award in recognition of his 35 years of dedicated public service. And this is a global award, folks.

Ted's steady leadership during his two terms as Speaker, his profound respect for this institution and his unwavering commitment to fostering unity and civility have left a lasting mark on Ontario's Legislature.

Ted and Lisa will be joining us for lunch in the dining room downstairs following question period, and all are welcome to join us and say congratulations.

I would also like—it's not as exciting. I would also like to welcome back to Queen's Park the Honourable John Yakabuski, MPP for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke.

In the Speaker's gallery, we have with us today our new cohort of the Ontario Legislature Internship Programme, better known as OLIP. I'm pleased to announce that this is our 50th cohort of interns.

OLIP is a non-partisan program which allows interns to gain practical experience in the daily workings of our Legislature. The interns are meeting with members this week to determine placements, but there is still time to submit an application. I would encourage all members to participate.

Welcome to Queen's Park. We are delighted to have you here.

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Welcome back, everyone. In particular, it's my honour to welcome the Ontario Medical Association members and staff to Queen's Park for their lobby day today. Welcome.

MPP Lisa Gretzky: I would like to welcome my good friend Mike Fisher, Shane Peters and John DeMarco from the Windsor-Essex region with Ontario Nature. I'd like to welcome them to the House today. I look forward to meeting with them this afternoon.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I would like to welcome everyone back. A big shout-out to everyone from the Ontario Medical Association who are here today, with a special shout-out to Dr. Sarah Gower from Guelph.

I would also like to welcome the folks from Ontario Nature, with a special shout-out to Tony Morris, conservation policy and campaigns director.

Mr. Adil Shamji: I would like to begin by welcoming members of my constituency office who are here this morning: Hamish Gilleland, Andrés Pazos and Rukaiya Diwan.

I also want to recognize the many members and staff of the Ontario Medical Association, notably the president, Dr. Zainab Abdurrahman; past president Dr. Dominik Nowak; CEO Kimberly Moran; and I see Dr. Jobin Varughese from the Ontario College of Family Physicians.

1040 Finally, a very warm welcome to our amazing 10 OLIP interns, who are watching us for the first day today.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I want to welcome Dr. Nowak, a distinguished member of the Nuclear Isotope Innovation Council of Ontario, and welcome him back to Queen's Park.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Good morning, Speaker, and welcome back to everybody. I'd like to take a moment to also extend a warm welcome to all of our friends at the Ontario Medical Association who are joining us here today at Queen's Park, but especially CEO Kimberly Moran and president Dr. Zainab Abdurrahman. I hope you have a very successful day and looking forward to meeting with you later this afternoon.

Mme Lucille Collard: I also want to welcome some members of the Ontario Medical Association, some from my riding. They're the first out of the gate; very proud of them to be here: Dr. Aly Abdulla, Dr. Alia Ali, Dr. Lee

Donohue, Dr. Jong Park and Dr. Jimin Liu. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I'd also like to welcome the members of the Ontario Medical Association, specifically Dr. Mohamed Alarakhia from Kitchener. Thank you for all of your good advocacy.

Hon. David Piccini: It's a pleasure to welcome Nicole and Erika from the College of Carpenters and Allied Trades and Local 27, to the Legislature today; and a pleasure to welcome Domenic, Jennifer, David, Kristov, Andrew, Joseph, Rashika, Neeta, Monica and Yaleen with the Down Syndrome Foundation—both incredible groups here today.

Hon. Andrea Khanjin: I'd like to introduce two constituents with me today: Andrew Walasek from the Ontario snowmobile federation—welcome—and Dana Stott, who's on her way here as well.

Mme France Gélinas: There are over 160 representatives from the Ontario Medical Association here, including Dr. Abdurrahman, who grew up in Sudbury—you may know her. She is now the president of the Ontario Medical Association.

I also want to say a huge thank you to Dr. Koka and Dr. Ghazimoghadam, also from Sudbury, who are here today.

And as you noticed, I'm wearing blue. Go, Blue Jays, go!

Mme Chandra Pasma: Merci, madame la Présidente. J'aimerais souhaiter la bienvenue à Mme Gabrielle Lemieux ainsi qu'à M. Émile Maheu de l'Association des enseignantes et enseignants franco-ontariens. Bienvenue.

MPP George Darouze: I'm pleased to welcome Dr. Alykhan Abdulla and his colleagues from my riding of Carleton. Dr. Abdulla is a respected family physician who has been dedicated to improving health care in Ontario for over 35 years. Together with his fellow physicians, he continues to contribute to advocating for patient care and strengthening our health system. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Ted Hsu: I'd like to welcome all the members of the local OMA from Kingston and the Islands, led by Dr. Ani Garg, and a special welcome to a childhood friend who works for the OMA and is also from Kingston, Stephanie de Haan.

Hon. Sam Oosterhoff: I'd like to welcome to the Legislature today an excellent constituent, Dr. Azim Kasmani, the medical officer of health for the Niagara region. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I'd like to welcome the senior leadership team, faculty, staff, students from McMaster University, who are here today hosting a reception later this evening. In particular, I want to recognize the provost, Maureen Macdonald; Lili Litwin, VP of advancement; David Estok, adviser to the president; and Alex Lawson, special adviser to the president.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): This morning in the members' gallery, we are joined by Stacie Tabb, an alto vocalist from the riding of Toronto–Danforth, who will perform O Canada and God Save the King. Please

stand and join her in the singing of our national and royal anthems.

Singing of the national anthem / Chant de l'hymne national.

Singing of the royal anthem / Chant de l'hymne royal.

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

And like children back for the first day of school, we have to address the elephant in the room. We need one win—one more win, right? So what are we going to do?

On three, two, one: Go, Jays, go! There—out of the way.

WEARING OF T-SHIRT

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize the member for Scarborough Southwest on a point of order.

Ms. Doly Begum: Speaker, I seek unanimous consent to wear a Blue Jays T-shirt and cheer on the Jays as they take on game seven tonight.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The member for Scarborough Southwest would like to wear a Blue Jays T-shirt. Do we have unanimous consent? Absolutely.

MEMBER FOR WATERLOO

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize the Leader of the Opposition on a point of order.

Ms. Marit Stiles: I want to take a moment to congratulate my colleague and friend the member of Waterloo, who recently made history as the first Canadian to be elected chair of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians.

I want to add that the CWP represents over 3,000 women parliamentarians from across more than 180 member Parliaments. It works to support gender balance in Parliaments and promote gender equality all across the Commonwealth.

Thank you to everyone who voted for MPP Fife to take on this new and exciting role. We know you're going to do great things during your term and make Canada proud.
Applause.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Congratulations.

QUESTION PERIOD

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Ms. Marit Stiles: Good morning, Speaker, and welcome back, everyone.

All through the summer, I've been travelling across our beautiful province listening to people and what they have to say, and I've got to tell you, I'm really worried. People out there are worried too. They're very frustrated. We've got 800,000 Ontarians out of work. We are in the middle of a jobs disaster. Meanwhile, hundreds of millions of dollars that were meant to be training people for new opportunities have been going into the pockets of Conservative friends and insiders.

My question to the Premier is, will it take a million Ontarians out of work for the Premier to stop the stunts and take some real action?

Hon. Doug Ford: I want to welcome everyone back to the Legislature here. It's great to be here.

Actually, just to address the Leader of the Opposition's question: We're under attack. We're under attack by President Trump, and he's coming after us. But we just got elected—a third majority government to protect the people, and that's exactly what we're doing.

We're making our province more resilient, more self-reliant. We're on-shoring products from all over the world that weren't made here before that are being manufactured here. Since our government has taken office, we've created 1,070,000 new jobs—for the last three months, 20,000 new manufacturing jobs—but that's not good enough. We have to keep moving forward; we have to keep fighting against President Trump and we need to hit back. I said that to the Prime Minister: We need to hit back. There's one person hitting back. It's not the Leader of the Opposition, or the opposition; it's our party, right here, that is hitting back against President Trump.

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The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Supplementary?

Ms. Marit Stiles: It is true, Speaker, that people were counting on this Premier to fight for jobs, but he's too busy playing Batman in parking lots while people are losing their jobs every single day.

Let's go back to what the Auditor General told us just a few weeks ago. She said that the process of distributing the Skills Development Fund was—and I'm going to quote her here—"not fair, transparent or accountable." Where have we heard that before? It's the greenbelt scandal all over again.

Scale Hospitality, connected to—guess who?—the Premier's long-time right-hand man, Amin Massoudi, got \$6 million. The Premier's own campaign manager, Kory Teneycke, received over \$100 million for the projects.

Can the Premier tell us exactly how much public money went to friends of the government instead of supporting workers during this jobs disaster?

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

Hon. David Piccini: Thank you, Speaker. I'm proud to be in a government where every single dollar goes to train workers. We know it's a contract, Speaker. In the wake of the pandemic, when we needed to stand up for workers who are working in hospitality, who are working at restaurants, that party said "no." This party said, "We're going to invest in workers for better training, for better jobs with bigger paycheques."

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Order.

Hon. David Piccini: When we're facing threats from south of the border, we know that there's only one party that's going to stand up for those workers, Speaker. We have a choice to make—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Order.

Hon. David Piccini: We know that party doesn't want to support first responders, police officers. They don't want to support construction workers, because when construction workers are working on the 418, when they're working on the Bradford Bypass—Highway 413—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Order.

Hon. David Piccini: When they're working on public transit, they're getting a paycheque and going to work. We're never going to apologize for making those investments in those workers. They oppose each and every one of those investments.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize the Leader of the Opposition.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Speaker, if this money was going to workers, that would be great. But you know what? The problem here is it didn't. It is going to projects that specifically benefited the Premier's friends and insiders over and over again. Those Vegas massages with the greenbelt lobbyists? They didn't build a single home, did they? And this mess is not going to get a single person in this province a job, but it's making the Premier's buddies pretty darn rich. We are two years into an RCMP criminal investigation and this Premier's MO has not changed at all.

To the Premier: Is this business as usual again for his government?

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

Hon. David Piccini: You know what keeps me up at night? It's when one in three men and women in the construction sector are retiring over the next decade. We've got to make sure we have a talent pipeline of youth entering the skilled trades, Speaker.

Under the previous government, supported by the NDP, we saw a historic drop in the number of youth registering for apprenticeships—a historic drop. Do you know what that meant? That meant that the men and women who are building Ontario Line, Highway 413, Bradford Bypass, were not getting that talent pipeline in. This Premier said, “We're going to invest.” We're going to invest in union training halls, Speaker. We're going to invest in college partnerships to the tune of over \$300 million through the Skills Development Fund. And what has that resulted in, Speaker? A doubling of women registering for apprenticeships and a historic increase in youth between the ages of 15 and 24 registering for an apprenticeship. They've got a career for life, and we're not going to apologize for that.

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Ms. Marit Stiles: Career for life, eh? Where is that?

Speaker, my next question is to the Minister of Labour, because—let's be very clear here—one in four youth right now in the province of Ontario do not have a job or any prospect of a job under this government. Some 800,000 Ontarians without work, and that number is growing every single day. We are seeing new layoffs weekly, and it is just getting much worse for young people.

But while the Minister of Labour talks like that over there, he seems to have other priorities on his mind, so my question to the Minister of Labour is this: How was Paris?

Hon. David Piccini: This is about sides. It's about whether you will support workers by creating opportunities for jobs. When we're facing tariff threats south of the border, it's this Premier that has lowered taxes to create a competitive environment for manufacturers to come back in this province. Workers abandoned the party opposite because they know that their future depends on things like Highway 413. Their future depends on subways. Their future depends on a competitive environment to attract manufacturers so that we can create a world-class economy.

When the pandemic hit, we had a stockpile of expired PPE. That's the record of the previous Liberal government. Under this Premier we're making that stuff right here in Ontario, creating good jobs for Ontarians. We're not going to apologize for that.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Supplementary?

Ms. Marit Stiles: Some 800,000 Ontarians out of work: This government is a jobs disaster. Something doesn't smell right here. The minister admitted on live radio that he was hand-picking low-score applications to receive funding over better applications, better proposals. Next thing we know, he's either out there sipping champagne in Paris or enjoying rinkside seats with lobbyists who have business before his ministry.

Can the minister explain how sipping champagne in front of the Champs-Élysées is helping anybody here in Ontario find a real job?

Hon. David Piccini: As I said, this is really about sides and which side you're on when it comes to Ontario workers. Those workers know this government has their backs and is on their side.

I think that the Leader of the Opposition—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Order.

Hon. David Piccini: I think, Speaker, she should consult members of her own party. I've got a great letter from MPP Burch, who is asking that we fund an SDF program. We don't need anyone to tell us to invest in first responders, to support firefighter training—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Order.

Hon. David Piccini: —on-the-job training that's going to support our heroes, men and women in uniform who run into danger while everyone else runs from it.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Order.

Hon. David Piccini: She should speak to MPP Burch. He supports the Skills Development Fund—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I apologize to the minister. It's day 1. Order in the House, please, or I will start warning people.

I will let the minister finish his response.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Order. The member for Hamilton West–Ancaster–Dundas will come to order.

Hon. David Piccini: Any opportunity to support our first responders—they don't support them. They want to cut funding for cops. They want to cut funding for firefighters. That's why those first responders know we'll invest in their training. We'll support them. We'll always have their backs.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: Well, I know what side of which ocean we were next to, anyway, so what side of it. But I'll tell you what: New Democrats will always be on the side of working people. Every single day, every picket line, we'll be there.

Let's be clear about what happened here. You have this great big fund that is supposed to connect people with training for good jobs. Applicants for the fund were ranked using very objective criteria, and all was well until the minister and his staff got their hands on those proposals. And all of a sudden, the proposals that were at the very bottom got to the top. What was the common denominator? Lobbyists—lobbyists with connections to this government, to this Premier and to this minister.

We're seeing the minister now hanging out in Paris and at Leafs games with those very same lobbyists. So I want to ask the minister to come clean about his connections to lobbyists that have business before his ministry—or are we going to have to keep digging it up ourselves?

Hon. David Piccini: I'm proud to stand up here and talk about the hundred thousand people, thanks to the Skills Development Fund, that have now entered the job market, thanks to this important initiative. That's just within 60 days of the fund, Speaker.

I think of stories like Jennifer, in a NORCAT Common Core mining program in the north. She was unemployed. Thanks to the Skills Development Fund, she's now working at Musselwhite mine.

But we know that Jennifer wouldn't have a job if left to the members opposite. They don't support mining. They don't support our Ring of Fire. They don't support the infrastructure projects that are going to get people there.

1100

The member opposite likes to talk about workers, Speaker. Workers and organized labour abandoned her party in droves in the last election, because they know that when it comes to securing and protecting their future, they can count on this Premier and this government to make the right investments.

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Mr. John Fraser: Good morning, Speaker. My question is for the Premier.

Premier, I missed you. It's so good to see you. I missed all of you. This is just like the first day of school, right? It feels like it. We always say it's the first day of school, and

that's what it feels like—one heck of a summer break; I can see that the Premier's tan is still going pretty well.

But in honour of the first day of school, let's have a pop quiz. Is everybody into a pop quiz?

Interjections.

Mr. John Fraser: Okay. Here we go. One chance: Can the Premier explain to all of us exactly what a conflict of interest is?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize the government House leader.

Hon. Steve Clark: Thanks, Speaker—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Sit down. Stop the clock.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Order.

MPP Jamie West: Just a reminder to get your spring fling tickets.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The member for Sudbury will come to order.

I recognize the government House leader.

Hon. Steve Clark: Thanks, Speaker. Through you to the potential new leader of the Liberal Party: Our members did have a good summer. They worked hard in their ridings. They went to local events. They met with stakeholders. They worked hard.

I have to tell you: We are so excited to be members of Premier Ford's team that is going to stand up to Donald Trump, that is going to ensure that workers are protected. They're going to ensure that our economy moves forward, that we have the best public services in Ontario.

We're going to continue to put forward pieces of legislation and other initiatives from our government. So if the member opposite wants to make jokes and have a pop quiz, we're ready for every question you have to put before the government, and we're going to deliver for the people of Ontario.

Mr. John Fraser: Well, I don't think we got an answer, so I'll let you know what a conflict of interest is, Speaker, through the Premier. It's when you—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The Minister of Citizenship and Multiculturalism will come to order.

Mr. John Fraser: Speaker, it's when your interest or someone else's interest ahead of the people whose interest you're supposed to protect.

Premier, the Minister of Labour intervened to award a \$7.5-million contract from the Skills Development Fund to a company whose lobbyist is his close personal friend Michael Rudderham. Now, the minister openly admitted to this on radio; openly admitted to a conflict of interest using his influence. So, Speaker, to the Premier: Will he ask the Minister of Labour to step aside?

Hon. David Piccini: Speaker, we don't need anyone on this side of the House to tell us to support our first responders, to support their training, to support their mental health, to make sure they're equipped with the tools and the skill sets they need to run into danger while everyone else runs from it.

Let's look at a project, Speaker, in the city of Mississauga: their first responders project to support firefighters, supported by then Mayor Bonnie Crombie. She personally reached out. She supported the project. She lauded the Premier when we made the announcement. We're going to make those investments, because those first responders know that the alternative is to cut their funding, to deny funding, to defund the police. That's the alternative on the other side of the House.

While I'm at it, I've got another letter in support of the Skills Development Fund from one of his own members, Speaker, advocating for a Skills Development Fund that was submitted late from his own member of that party. I'd love to chat a bit more about that.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Back to the leader of the third party.

Mr. John Fraser: So what the Premier should be saying to the minister is, "You're fired." You would be familiar with that, Premier. If the Premier doesn't say that, here's what this means, because the minister is clearly in a conflict of interest. He's admitted it. He's used his influence to further his friends—to his friends' benefit. And if you don't think that's wrong, that means you think it's okay, that all this is good, that everything that's happened in the Skills Development Fund is okay, if you don't fire this minister.

So my question to the Premier is, are you going to fire your Minister of Labour?

Hon. David Piccini: Speaker, every day we get up to create meaningful opportunities for our next generation. Under that member's party, when they had the opportunity, when they held the balance of power, we saw a historic drop in the number of registered apprentices and youth who were seeking meaningful careers in the skilled trades.

But it's no surprise. They didn't build schools in communities like mine; they closed them. When it comes to what side rural Ontarians know they're on, they support this government because we're making investments in new schools. We're making investments in hospitals. Those buildings aren't going to build themselves. We need a next generation.

We've seen an historic increase in the number of women. I want to laud the carpenters who are here today in this House. Local 27 has played an important role in that, just to name one, Speaker. We'll continue to make those investments to create meaningful opportunities.

Our record is clear: a 40% increase in women; an historic increase in the number of youth between 15 and 24. We'll keep working hard, Speaker. We're not going to pay attention to the members opposite.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Just a reminder to ask your questions through the Speaker.

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Mr. John Fraser: My question is back to the Premier. The Auditor General has uncovered that more than half the money in the Skills Development Fund went to lower-scoring projects, which were more than half of the

projects. Hundreds of millions of dollars were awarded to companies who were either friends, donors or lobbyists that were connected to the government. It's the same names: Teneycke, Massoudi, Fidani-Diker, Diamond.

We know the Premier thinks this is all okay because he's not going to fire his Minister of Labour. It's all good, right, Premier?

Speaker, does the Premier believe that the government is his own personal piggy bank to reward insiders and well-connected lobbyists?

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

Hon. David Piccini: Speaker, we're proud to have a robust public registry. It's public for everyone to see, and nobody in Ontario believes, nobody believes, Speaker—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Order.

Hon. David Piccini: We have the most accessible Premier and the most accessible government in Ontario's history. You doubt it? Just text the man. Just call the man. He'll get back to you, Speaker.

Again, we don't need anyone to tell us to invest in first responders or to create opportunities for men and women in the skilled trades who were abandoned under the previous government. That's why organized labour has left them, Speaker. They know whose side they're on.

They are on our side because we're supporting meaningful investment in historic infrastructure projects—\$200 billion in infrastructure—because behind each and every dollar there is a job, an opportunity for someone, for a young boy or a girl out there in Ontario who wants to be part of a better tomorrow, building hospitals, building schools, building highways, roads and critical infrastructure.

They could have done it on public transit; they didn't. Under the Ontario Line, we will get the job done, Speaker.

Mr. John Fraser: Someone needs to remind the Premier that he's not at Deco Labels anymore. The "hubba-chubba, wink-wink; you scratch my back, I'll scratch yours" doesn't work for the 700,000 Ontarians who are looking for work, who are just worried about paying the rent, who are just concerned that they're not going to be able to put food on the table for their kids.

I was in Windsor last week. One in 10 people are unemployed, the highest unemployment rate in the country.

So, Speaker, when will the Premier stop treating this government like a piggy bank to reward insiders and donors and friends?

Hon. David Piccini: Speaker, when it comes to this economy that's under threat from south of the border, workers know who will have their backs. We're facing all of these threats, and that's the best this member can bring to the House.

He was in Windsor; so was I last week, Speaker. He spoke for two minutes at Building Trades. It was summarily dismissed by those members, who back our Skills Development Fund, who back this government, who are making historic investments in infrastructure.

He had the opportunity to build highways, Speaker; he didn't. He had the opportunity to build schools; they closed them in rural Ontario in ridings like mine. That's why we're making investments in critical infrastructure. We're breaking down barriers into the skilled trades. We've seen an historic number of women—in fact, that member should have mentioned the provincial building trades. They have a program to get women into the trades, supported by this government through the Skills Development Fund.

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

Mr. John Fraser: So, \$27 million to bars and restaurants and nightclubs in downtown Toronto, money to law firms, money to veterinary clinics, money to dental brokerages, all with deep connections to either the Premier or one of his ministers. The rot runs deep in this government. It's the same rot we saw in the greenbelt. And, funny enough, minister X—sorry, I mean Mr. X—is in the news with the Minister of Labour for another day.

I was in Thunder Bay. I was in Hamilton. I was in Brampton. I was in Brantford, and if I lived there right now and I was looking for work, I would be angry at this government, and I'd be right to be angry.

For the last time: When will the Premier stop treating government like a piggy bank for his friends and insiders?

Hon. David Piccini: Speaker, there you have it—the view on hospitality workers. It's no wonder Unite Here, the local hospitality workers' union, supports this Premier, because he doesn't care whether you're working in a restaurant or working in an office tower in downtown Toronto. All workers matter to this Premier. There has been no Premier who supports workers—so when he denigrates hospitality workers, he denigrates people like Unite Here, the incredible men and women who work hard to support newcomers in landing careers.

I went to one of their graduation ceremonies and I saw young men and women now working at the Sheridan. They were unemployed before. Thanks to our Skills Development Fund, they've entered the ranks of the employment sector, contributing to our economy, Speaker.

There has been no government that has stood shoulder to shoulder with workers. It's based on relationships. We work hard to support them. We listen to them, we show up, and we're always going to have the backs of Ontario's workers.

EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS

MPP Jamie West: My question is for the Premier. There's been a lot of bravado today about protecting workers, so I'm looking forward to this.

The Star recently reported nearly \$200 million in wage theft. Those are wages that were reported to be stolen and proven to be stolen from Ontario's workers. Of that, only \$102.4 million was sent for collections. That's basically half. And the Conservative government has only recovered less than a quarter of that \$102 million.

My question is, why is the Premier allowing employers to get away with stealing money from workers?

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

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Madam Speaker, it's good to see you. It's good to see everyone back in the House and all of the people who have come here today, so thank you. And go, Blue Jays! I'm right on top of that as well.

First off, listening to all this, I just want to highlight that there has been no greater defender of Canada, no greater defender of Ontario, than Premier Doug Ford. That includes the workers of this great province. Only one government is standing up for workers, Madam Speaker. We're standing up against Trump tariffs and helping create life-changing jobs, well-paying jobs in Ontario.

Let me be crystal clear: We have zero tolerance for wage theft, and under this government, we have established the strongest workplace protections in the country. Compliance is a legal obligation, and we are protecting workers. We have the highest fines in the country, and we won't relent going after the bad actors.

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

MPP Jamie West: Zero tolerance, yet \$200 million was stolen from workers. They got one eighth of that back—one eighth. Do you know how it happened? It's not an accident, Speaker.

In 2018, the Conservative Minister of Labour instructed staff not to initiate any proactive inspections on this. According to their own data, these proactive inspections prevent wage theft, and they're far more effective at getting wage theft back than worker complaints. But they don't have workers' backs, Speaker. Workplace inspections today are 77% lower than they were seven years ago.

So Ontario has had \$200 million stolen from Ontario's workers. When is the Premier going to start tackling employers in the parking lots?

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: The member opposite would know clearly that we have doubled the fines from \$50,000 to \$100,000—the highest in the country—because we have the workers' backs.

Let me highlight. Unlike the previous government, supported by the NDP, what we've done is we've invested in the economy. We've cut taxes. We're building infrastructure. And we still have received two credit rating upgrades, Madam Speaker—eight clean audit opinions in a row, something they weren't able to do. We have the lowest debt-to-GDP in a decade. Most importantly, we have an economy that has grown from \$860 million when we took over to an economy of over \$1.2 trillion because, Madam Speaker, we are laser-focused on standing up for the workers in this great province and standing up for the economy.

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Mr. Stephen Blais: My question is for the Premier. Madam Speaker, Ontario workers are losing their jobs—Stellantis in Brampton, the Interfor sawmill in Ear Falls

and too many others—all while this government rewards insiders instead of helping the skills training programs that scored the highest.

The Auditor General found that over half the skills development money went to low-scoring, politically connected applicants hand-picked by the minister's office—no fairness, no transparency, no accountability. The minister calls it networking, but to everyone else, it looks like favour-trading.

Madam Speaker, how long will the Premier defend a system that rewards political friends while leaving Ontario workers behind?

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

Hon. David Piccini: Let's look at what the Auditor General actually said. She said the systems, processes and controls around KPIs—performance indicators—were very strong because we measure outcomes, like outcomes for a lower-scoring project in Mississauga supported by then Mayor Bonnie Crombie that was selected because we prioritize first responders, Speaker.

Fire training: I have personally visited, through the Office of the Fire Marshal and the Ontario Professional Fire Fighters Association, mobile training that is being brought into rural communities like mine all over Ontario to equip our firefighters with better training.

Speaker, when crime is on the rise across Ontario and our constituents want to know who is going to get tough on it—they support a revolving door of justice. They want bail, not jail, for violent offenders. On this side of the House, we are always going to support our first responders and make sure they have the training to ensure they can do the important work that they do every day.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Back to the member for Orléans.

Mr. Stephen Blais: Well, Madam Speaker, while Ontario workers were losing their jobs and wondering how they were going to pay the bills, the labour minister was sitting against the glass at a Leafs game with an executive to whose company he would later give millions in government cash. While workers get layoffs, insiders get access. Later, that minister attended a lobbyist's wedding in Paris during Fashion Week. It's nice to have friends with benefits.

We've seen this before with the greenbelt, with Therme, with those MZOs handed out to friends and donors—different files, same playbook. It isn't a coincidence; it's a pattern. Access pays, connections count and workers lose out.

Madam Speaker, how long will the Premier defend a minister who keeps proving that it's who you know, not how hard you work, that matters most?

Hon. David Piccini: Speaker, let's talk about one of the workers because I haven't heard a name of a single worker out of any of the mouths of the members opposite. Let's talk about Noah. Noah, through Support Ontario Youth, an important program supported through our Skills Development Fund, has now joined the ranks of shipbuilding in Ontario.

At a time when we're under threat with global uncertainty, this Premier has stood up to protect Canada, to defend Canada. It is this Premier that's ensured we are making the right investments to support shipbuilding, that wants a part of the National Shipbuilding Strategy because it's going to create jobs and meaningful career opportunities for youth all across Ontario, like Noah, who, thanks to the Skills Development Fund, now has a job, a career for life.

MINING INDUSTRY

MPP Bill Rosenberg: My question is for the Minister of Energy and Mines. Ontario's energy and mining workers power this province. From Sudbury to Red Lake, they're the backbone of our economy and the foundation of our clean energy future.

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Yet while our workers build the technologies of tomorrow, we're seeing troubling signs from the south. Donald Trump's attacks on Ontario's industries remind us that self-reliance matters. We can't wait on Washington or Wall Street to secure our critical minerals. We need to keep acting, taking actions to be faster, smarter, stronger here at home.

Speaker, can the minister please tell this House how our government is protecting our energy and critical mineral sector and why acting now matters more than ever?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I want to thank the member from Algoma-Manitoulin for his steadfast leadership for the north.

I want to affirm to the House that when we came to power we inherited a dubious record of being the second-slowest mining permitting regime in the OECD. And because the Premier had a vision and had a commitment to the people of Ontario, we will move with speed to unleash our economic potential.

I'm proud, Madam Speaker, that after initiating a bill this spring, just days ago, members of our Progressive Conservative team stood at the centre of global mining, at the TSX, to announce that "one project, one process," a 50% reduction in the baseline of permitting in this province, is now the law of the land. And we cannot understate what this means to transforming our province into a leading jurisdiction for investment and jobs.

Madam Speaker, we're giving certainty to investors. We're giving confidence to workers that our Premier is going to double down on Canadian energy workers, resource workers, every single day. And more than ever, Madam Speaker, as we move from second slowest to among the fastest, we're going to help safeguard our economy from risks from the US.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Back to the member for Algoma-Manitoulin.

MPP Bill Rosenberg: Thank you to the minister for the strong leadership. Speaker, Ontario's mining sector isn't just about jobs. It's about national security, economic strength and independence. We're watching global economic instability grow by the day. From illegal copper

tariffs to supply chain disruptions, it's clear Ontario must take control of its own future.

For too long, northern communities saw projects delayed or driven away by red tape and neglect under the previous Liberal government. Our workers have the skill and determination to build the batteries, semi-conductors and clean energy the world needs, but only if our government continues to act boldly.

Speaker, can the minister explain how “one project, one process” will get critical minerals out of the ground faster and ensure we are protecting Ontario's economic sovereignty?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I appreciate the member's question. I don't think it's hyperbolic to suggest that Canada's self-reliance really depends on our ability to get our exports out of the ground. Madam Speaker, in this province, it took too long: 15 years on average to get a mine approved, when in Western Australia or the European Union you can do it in half the time.

Our Premier is playing a challenge function to the government to ensure that we move faster, quicker, smarter to get things done, and to ensure we achieve jobs and results for the people of Ontario, especially since the last time our members were in this House, President Trump imposed new tariffs on copper. Now, more than ever, we have to move with speed, and I'm proud that this 24-month KPI, this new benchmark, is even quicker than the European Union, delivering investment certainty and jobs for the people of Ontario.

FORESTRY INDUSTRY

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: ᑦᑦᑦ, Speaker. ᑦᑦᑦᑦᑦᑦ

Last week, Interfor shut down the Ear Falls sawmill indefinitely. This is, obviously, devastating for the people of Ear Falls, where 160 people were employed by the sawmill and represented by Unifor Local 324.

To the Premier: What is your government going to do to the help the 160 families dealing with this loss at the Ear Falls sawmill?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize the Associate Minister of Forestry and Forest Products.

Hon. Kevin Holland: Speaker, our government is disappointed with the news coming from Ear Falls. Immediately following the announcement of the shutdown of the mill, the Premier and I reached out to company officials and Mayor Kahoot offering support for the workers and the community.

Speaker, Ontario's forest workers are impacted by the weak markets and unfair US tariffs and duties. Our government is taking actions to support the people of Ear Falls and the forestry jobs that keep northern Ontario moving, but we need Ottawa to work with us to deliver real solutions by addressing the issues causing turmoil in our forestry sector and engaging in real negotiations with the US President.

Ontario's forest sector continues to face challenges from weak lumber markets and unfair US softwood lumber duties and tariffs now exceeding 45% for Ontario

producers. This is creating serious pressure on the housing communities across the north.

Ontario's forestry workers and communities have powered the province for generations. Our government will keep fighting unfair trade practices, supporting northern jobs and defending the long-term future of the Ontario—

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

MPP Lise Vaugeois: Thank you very much, Speaker.

To the Premier: Ontario needs an industrial strategy to modernize and strengthen its forest sector, but this government doesn't have one. Forestry is integrated. When one part collapses the whole industry is at risk. We knew sawmills were in trouble when the pulp mill in Terrace Bay shut down.

We have the best lumber and best pulp in the world produced by skilled workers. Their jobs must be saved. Terrace Bay has been waiting for two years. Will the government finally step up and invest directly to modernize the mill in Terrace Bay?

Hon. Kevin Holland: People's livelihoods are at stake and Ontarians expect us to focus on solutions, not arguments. That's why I've been travelling across the province meeting with millworkers, local leaders and Indigenous partners to hear directly from them and ensure our actions match what's happening on the ground.

Ontario has invested over \$150 million to modernize mills, lower costs and help operations stay competitive during challenging market conditions. Through programs like the Forest Sector Investment and Innovation Program and the forest biomass program, we're helping companies upgrade equipment, expand markets and find new uses for mill byproducts turning unused wood into economic opportunity.

Ontario continues to work directly with Indigenous partners to expand participation and strengthen local economies, and when mills face challenges, we step up, providing targeted financial support to stabilize operations and protect northern communities.

Our government is focused on delivering results, defending Ontario's forest sector and making sure the people and communities who rely on it have a strong and stable future.

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: You know, the Minister of Labour has been getting a lot of attention recently, and it's very well deserved. It started when the Auditor General released her scathing report on the Skills Development Fund.

Here's what she said: “The Minister's Office Chose to Fund Poor-, Low- and Medium-Ranked Applications 54% of the Time Instead of High-Ranked Applications.” She found “the selection process was not fair, transparent or accountable.”

But, Speaker, let's not leave the Minister of Labour standing alone. Let's not forget that the Minister of

Finance approved the budget, that the President of the Treasury Board signed the cheques, and they all report to the Premier.

My question to the Premier: When will he take accountability for this scandal in his government and dig out the rot?

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

Hon. David Piccini: I wish I had that member's attention when I invited a number of members opposite, of that party, to join me to visit Windmill Microlending. That is one of the SDF recipients—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Order.

Hon. David Piccini: I'm going to quote the Auditor General: "The system processes controls around KPIs were quite strong." That's one of the groups supported through SDF that has such strong outcomes.

Let me tell you how. I met a bunch of newcomers who, through the microlending loans, have helped credential on systems for international credentialing through the regulatory bodies that we've gotten tough on to ensure we're getting newcomers into jobs that they were trained to do to drive GDP, Speaker.

I invited members opposite. Not one showed up. But you know what? There are constituents in their riding who did know—the power of SDF to change lives—and we're going to continue doing it.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Back to the member for Don Valley West.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: I do know Windmill Microlending. I have met with them. I know they do great work. But that's not actually what we're talking about today.

The Auditor General told us that this PC government used billions in taxpayer money unfairly, without transparency, and with no accountability.

This government set the criteria for the SDF applications. Ministry staff evaluated them and yet, 670 highly ranked organizations got no money because the government used preferential treatment so they could dole out money to their friends and those who used their lobbyist friends. Of course, we shouldn't be surprised. It's a pattern with this government. After all, they tried to make their friends \$8.3 billion richer with the greenbelt.

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And yet, the Premier calls the SDF one of their best programs ever. It's hard to believe.

So my question back to the Premier: When will he reverse his position, admit this is one of the worst programs ever and dig out the rot?

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

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: It's been one of the best programs ever for almost a million workers in this great province, Madam Speaker.

And while we're at it, why don't we talk about their record when they were in government? Did the Liberal government increase taxes or lower taxes?

Interjection: Increased them.

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: They increased taxes. Madam Speaker, what has this Premier done?

Hon. Charmaine A. Williams: Lower them.

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Lowered taxes—thank you. There's \$11.9 billion in the budget for businesses. That's \$12 billion in the pockets of businesses and workers so they can invest in the economy—\$12.9 billion for the consumers and the people and families of this great province. And do you know what that does when you put money back into people's pockets, back into the businesses across this great province? You drive a \$1.2-trillion economy. That's what you do.

AGRI-FOOD INDUSTRY

Mr. Joseph Racinsky: Thank you, Speaker. It's great to see you. It's great to be back in the Legislature.

Ontario's farmers feed our province and our country. They work hard every single day to keep our shelves stocked and our communities strong.

But we're facing serious global economic challenges. The threat of tariffs from President Trump continues to create uncertainty. Input costs are rising, and our farmers are feeling the pressure.

Speaker, it's not just about economics—it's about food security, rural jobs and protecting our way of life. Ontario must be ready. We must stand up for our farmers, for our agri-food businesses and for rural families.

Can the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness explain what our government is doing to protect Ontario's agriculture sector from these economic threats and ensure a strong, secure food supply for the future?

Hon. Trevor Jones: Thank you to the exceptional member from Wellington–Halton Hills for that question. Our government was re-elected on an historic third majority mandate to do two things: protect Ontario and secure our food supply.

Just two weeks ago, I was alongside that member at the nationally renowned Elora research station to announce \$41 million in strategic funding to support just that: our farmers, our food and food security.

ARIO is more than just a network of 14 nationally renowned research stations and farms across every growing region in Ontario. It's the very best minds in farming, agribusiness and infrastructure for farming.

Fifteen million dollars of that \$41 million will build the new Ontario Feed Innovation Centre in Elora, and \$26 million goes towards supporting those capital projects. We'll continue to make those strategic investments to protect and feed Ontario.

Mr. Joseph Racinsky: Thank you to the minister for that response. It was great to host you at Elora for that exciting announcement.

Ontario farmers don't just feed our province. They feed North America. Our crops, our dairy and our livestock are shipped across the border every single day. But with new trade pressures and unpredictable decisions coming from

Washington, Ontario must continue to stand up for our farmers and for tariff-free trade.

It's clear that our agriculture sector depends on strong partnerships and open markets. These relationships are built on trust and co-operation. They are rooted in a shared commitment to feeding our people, protecting our communities and keeping our economy strong.

Can the minister please explain how our government is working to protect Ontario's farmers and ensure that our province remains a trusted leader in North American food and agriculture?

Hon. Trevor Jones: Just last night, I returned home from Mexico to chair the Tri-National Agricultural Accord, representing Canada and Ontario. I met with leaders from all across Mexico, all across the United States and Canada to do an important thing: to advance trade and to prioritize our relationship as a global leader in food production and our place in the world as a safe, trusted leader of food and agriculture systems.

Just prior to that, I met the Secretary of Agriculture from Pennsylvania, Russ Redding, at Canada's Outdoor Farm Show. We walked the farm show and talked to real people, families, farmers, agribusiness leaders. These conversations are advancing our place, setting the stage for CUSMA to make sure we keep our place as a global leader for trusted food, and a global leader for the very best farmers in the world.

UNEMPLOYMENT

MPP Lisa Gretzky: My question is to the Premier. Windsor has the highest unemployment rate in Canada, near 11%, with youth unemployment approaching 18%. We are seeing significant job losses in manufacturing and related sectors, as well as job cuts to education, health care and social services sectors.

Families are struggling to make ends meet, and food bank use is at an all-time high and continues to climb. Some 800,000 people across the province are unemployed, with the largest concentration in Windsor.

It is clear that the Premier is not protecting Ontario workers as he promised. Will the Premier tell us what he is going to do differently to honour his word and actually protect workers and jobs in my community?

Hon. Doug Ford: Well, let's talk about the jobs and the \$46 billion that came to Ontario, because we created the environment and the conditions to have companies come here and invest. Last year alone, over 409 companies came here and invested \$39.8 billion—\$40 billion—and created 25,000 jobs right in your area.

We're going to continue being one of the most prosperous areas anywhere in the world, and that's why we're focusing on key areas, not just manufacturing. We have more manufacturing jobs than Florida and New York state combined. We have 825,000 manufacturing jobs here, but guess what we're doing? We're focusing on other areas, too—in-demand jobs.

The Ring of Fire, which will bring \$22 billion and 75,000 jobs: Guess what? You're dead against it. Your

party voted against the Ring of Fire. You don't believe in mining. You don't believe in nuclear. You wanted to shut down the Pickering nuclear facility. We're going to build new nuclear small modular reactors, large—

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

Ms. Jennifer K. French: In Oshawa, unemployment is high and morale is low. Oshawa built General Motors, but our automotive future feels really uncertain. People are very worried about the future of their jobs in the auto industry. Workers in Oshawa need this government to do everything possible to protect their jobs. We need deals and we need strings attached. Photo ops don't save or create jobs.

The Premier has had three and a half months away from Queen's Park and from accountability. In that time, what has the Premier done to guarantee auto jobs in Oshawa and guarantee they will be secure and that GM can't just hit the road?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize the Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade.

Hon. Victor Fedeli: President Trump's tariffs certainly are causing a lot of uncertainty for businesses, for workers and supply chains on both sides of the border. We have addressed this very clearly in all of the programs that we've put forward:

—\$30 billion worth of firepower to help our industries;

—the \$1 billion Protect Ontario Financing Program;

—\$1.3 billion in the new expansion to the Ontario Made Manufacturing Investment Tax Credit;

—there are companies lined up for our \$50 million in the Ontario Trade Together Fund; and

—\$40 million in the tariff-impacted communities.

Speaker, we are doing everything possible to help the workers in Ontario: our auto workers, our life science workers, our tech workers. We continue to invest in the province of Ontario and the workers in Ontario.

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

MPP Tyler Watt: Madam Speaker, it's good to be back. Ontarians have been waiting five long months for answers and accountability, so let's get to work.

My question is for the Premier. I remember on the night of the 2018 election, the Premier, in his victory speech, said, "The party with the taxpayers' money is over. It's done." Actions speak louder than words, and let's look at that. The Auditor General found that \$2.5 billion from the Skills Development Fund was "not fair, transparent, or accountable."

One example is we learned that the labour minister attended a lavish Paris wedding for a lobbyist whose client received over \$8.5 million from that fund.

Nobody is questioning the purpose of this program; we're questioning the execution and clear conflict of interest.

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So, Madam Speaker, when will the Premier come clean about who got the money, how they got it and why his

minister is partying with lobbyists instead of helping Ontario workers?

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

Hon. David Piccini: Speaker, I appreciate any opportunity to stand up here and talk about the work we're doing to support workers. The Auditor General in her report talked a lot about outcomes and how this fund is focused on outcomes. When she referenced KPIs, she said the system's processes and controls were quite strong around these KPIs, and that's what we're going to continue to do.

This fund is changing lives. I don't know how members opposite, on the one hand, can say this is one of the worst funds ever, and then that very member asking the question writes to me to support a program in his own riding that was submitted late.

Speaker, we're going to continue working hard to support workers like the construction workers in Ottawa who support this government because we're making historic investments in new hospitals and new public transit, just to name a few.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Supplementary.

MPP Tyler Watt: That answer doesn't cut it, and I'll tell you why. Hundreds of college training programs across this province have been cancelled due to the cuts and underfunding of post-secondary education by this government. For example, a resident in my riding told me a story about her son who was supposed to attend George Brown College this year. He got an apartment and found out last minute that his program has been cancelled, so now he's in Ottawa, paying rent for an apartment in Toronto and not getting an education.

Madam Speaker, this government's rationale for the Skills Development Fund was to fill the gaps to train workers and help build up Ontario, especially in lieu of all those cuts to college and post-secondary across Ontario. This means that the people who are eager and ready to educate themselves, to build up this province, can't get the skills they need to do so because they're too busy handing out millions of dollars to people connected to them and friends.

So again, Madam Speaker, when will this government stop rewarding friends and start rewarding merit?

Hon. David Piccini: Again, very troubling to call that fund what they called it yet ask for the support from that fund, Speaker.

This is classic Liberal discovery math. The cut for international student revenue by the federal government, a decision by the federal government, that member says is on this government. It just doesn't make any sense. What the member failed to tell you, Speaker, is that over \$300 million through the Skills Development Fund, which is partnering with college and university partnerships, is supporting folks like the Electrical Contractors Association of Ontario, helping people get into project management to manage projects that they didn't invest in, but we are. The Ottawa Hospital, Highway 413, the Bradford Bypass: These are all construction projects that we need

construction project managers for that we're working through the SDF with colleges and universities to deliver on, Speaker.

ROAD SAFETY

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: My question is for the Minister of Transportation. Speaker, families across Ontario are doing their best to make ends meet. The old Liberal carbon-tax cash grab made gas, groceries and housing all cost more. Now on top of that, they're being hit with unfair speed camera tickets. These cameras were supposed to make our streets safer. Instead, they have turned into cash machines for municipalities.

We have seen the reports. One camera in Brampton issued over 32,000 tickets in just three weeks. Madam Speaker, that's not safety; that's a money grab. Ontarians want safer space, not surprise fines.

Can the minister tell this House what our government is doing to stop these cash-grab cameras and stand up for drivers and families across Ontario?

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

Mr. Hardeep Singh Grewal: Thank you very much, Speaker, and thank you to the great, hard-working member from Brampton West for that important question.

The days of cash-grab cameras are numbered. We've seen what's happening in Brampton and Toronto: thousands of tickets just from a handful of cameras. That's not slowing people down; it's hitting them in their wallets.

Our government is focused on real solutions to reduce speeding and keep streets safe, not on sending tickets weeks after the fact—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The member for Ajax will come to order.

Mr. Hardeep Singh Grewal: We've asked municipalities to pull these cameras, and if they don't comply, our government is ready to take action. Since day one, our government's been focused on keeping costs down for families and businesses. We've scrapped tolls, frozen driver's licence fees, eliminated licence plate stickers. We've cut the gas tax while the Liberals want to support the carbon tax. We fought against the carbon tax, Speaker.

Now we're standing up for drivers again: no more surprise tickets, no more revenue schemes, no more cash grabs, and we're going to make sure that we put safety first under this Premier's leadership.

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: Thank you to the parliamentary assistant for that answer. Parents in my community want drivers to slow down when passing a school. A hidden speed camera doesn't stop speeding when it happens. All it does is send a ticket weeks later in the mail. In some cases, drivers were even ticketed before they entered the reduced speed zone.

When municipalities see the number of tickets go up, you would think that they would use that money to make roads safer, but instead too many are just collecting the cash. Parents don't want revenue tools; they want real safety.

Can the parliamentary assistant explain what steps our government is taking to reduce speeding and protect our children in school zones?

Mr. Hardeep Singh Grewal: Thank you again to the member from Brampton West.

Under the leadership of our Premier, we've taken real action to reduce speeding and improve road safety. We want all of our children to be safe. They shouldn't have to worry about a flying car passing by their child's school.

That's why our government is proposing new measures that will prevent speeding when it happens. This includes supporting municipalities with traffic-calming measures such as speed bumps and warning signs.

It's clear cameras are not reducing speeding, but they are raising cash for municipalities, and the cash isn't being reinvested in speed-calming measures. We've heard the member from Brampton West talk about thousands and thousands—30,000—speeding tickets issued off one camera in Brampton, over 75,000 tickets off of one camera in Toronto.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Order.

Mr. Hardeep Singh Grewal: We're going to make sure that the money is invested where it should go, and that's protecting our children, protecting our youth and installing these traffic-calming measures. That's what we're going to do.

YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT

Ms. Jessica Bell: My question is to the Premier. Youth unemployment is at 22.2%, the highest in a generation, but instead of offering solutions, this Premier told young people to work harder.

At our NDP youth jobs round table, we heard the truth: Too many young people are chasing too few jobs. One worker told me, "I've sent out hundreds of applications and can't even get an interview." This isn't a work ethic problem; it is a jobs problem.

My question is for the Premier: When is this Premier going to stop blaming youth and start building real career opportunities for them?

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

Hon. David Piccini: We've heard from the Premier: over a million net new jobs created under this Premier's leadership, who stands up for Canada, who stands against a President who's launched a war on our key critical sectors.

But he doesn't stop there. He looks at bringing in manufacturing through creating a low-tax environment. He looks at creating meaningful pathways into the trades. Why? Because for the first time ever, we're building hospitals. We're building highways. We're actually building public transit.

We launched our Level Up! skilled trades career fairs, exposing youth to meaningful opportunities in the skilled trades. More youth today than at any point in modern history have signed up for an apprenticeship for a

rewarding career. With one in three skilled tradespeople retiring in the next decade, now more than ever we need to make those investments. That's exactly what we're doing.

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

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. According to the Labour Force Survey, between 2019 and 2025, Ontario unemployment rates among teens aged 15 to 19 climbed from 14.9% to 22.2%. This means nearly one in four teenagers in Ontario's labour force is now unemployed. Speaker, these are recession employment numbers.

This is very serious; we need a Premier to take this seriously. Youth are desperately trying to find jobs, but they are losing hope. Where's the plan to incentivize youth hiring? Why haven't you expanded work-integrated learning?

To the Premier: Where is the damn plan to protect these workers in Ontario?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I will ask the member to withdraw.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Withdraw.

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

Hon. David Piccini: Like I said, this Premier is laser-focused on creating those meaningful pathways for youth. We recognize that we're not immune from global uncertainty. Our country is not immune from that, but when it comes to standing up for our country, it's this Premier. Youth know that when it comes to getting from A to Z, they need to get on public transit. It's this Premier making those investments.

When it comes to jobs in AI and tech, it's this Premier creating a competitive climate in which to bring those manufacturers, those companies here. We have a life sciences sector boom, Speaker, thanks to investments from this Premier.

We're going to continue working hard to create those opportunities. We welcome ideas to get youth into meaningful employment. That's why we launched the Level Up! career fair, Speaker, and I've seen some of those members opposite attend it. These are the things we've got to do to show youth there are pathways—there are pathways today that lead into jobs—and we're never going to stop working hard for those youth.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Seeing there are no deferred votes, this House stands in recess until 1 p.m.

The House recessed from 1150 to 1300.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL POLICY

Mr. Brian Riddell: I beg leave to present a report from the Standing Committee on Social Policy on the estimates selected by the standing committee for consideration.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Meghan Stenson): Mr. Riddell from the Standing Committee on Social Policy presents the committee's report as follows:

Pursuant to standing order 63, your committee has selected the 2025-26 estimates of the following ministries for consideration: Ministry of Health; Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility; Ministry of Education; Ministry of Long-Term Care; Ministry of Colleges, Universities, Research Excellence and Security; Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services.

Report presented.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON HERITAGE, INFRASTRUCTURE AND CULTURAL POLICY

Mr. Aris Babikian: I beg leave to present a report from the Standing Committee on Heritage, Infrastructure and Cultural Policy and move its adoption.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Meghan Stenson): Your committee begs to report the following bill as amended:

Bill 9, An Act to amend the City of Toronto Act, 2006 and the Municipal Act, 2001 in relation to codes of conduct / Projet de loi 9, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2006 sur la cité de Toronto et la Loi de 2001 sur les municipalités en ce qui concerne les codes de déontologie.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Shall the report be received and adopted?

Twelve members having stood in their places, we will now have a 30-minute report-stage debate on the motion for the adoption of the report on the bill as amended, pursuant to standing order 38(b). In this debate, each recognized party is allotted eight minutes and the independent members are allotted a total of six minutes.

I recognize the member for Orléans.

Mr. Stephen Blais: Over the summer, committee packed up and hit the road. They went to London, Niagara Falls, Barrie, Ottawa and Thunder Bay, listening to residents, integrity commissioners, municipal staff and survivors of harassment. They came in good faith. They told their stories. Some relived trauma they had spent years trying to put behind them. They believed their government was listening. But after all that testimony, after all of that travel, after all of that taxpayer money, one thing became crystal clear: The government never intended to change a single word of Bill 9. The hearings weren't about consultation. They were a cross-province photo op, a waste of time, a waste of money and, frankly, a waste of hope.

Bill 9 pretends to fix municipal accountability. It talks about serious cases and stronger codes of conduct, but the fine print tells a different story. Cabinet "may" prescribe a code of conduct—not "shall" prescribe or "will" prescribe; it "may" prescribe. There's no real guarantee of a single standard. It's optional. It's window dressing.

And the so-called ultimate penalty, the removal of a councillor or a mayor from office: That decision is left to the very same council colleagues—the friends, the allies

and the political partners—of the person being accused. And not just a vote—not a majority, not even a two-thirds super majority. It requires unanimous consent. Every single colleague—nobody can be absent. One friend, one political buddy, one member of the old boys' club, can block accountability. Under Bill 9, if you can find a single friend, you can keep your seat, no matter what you've done.

Let's be honest about what that means. Many of us here have served in municipal politics over the years. It can be a tight circle—small towns, close relationships, favours owed. When the worst behaviour happens, too often it's inside that same circle. And Bill 9 hands the keys of discipline to the same insiders who already protect each other. That's not a code of conduct. That's a code of silence. Bill 9 protects the good old boys' club, not the people who work for them.

We heard loud and clear from witnesses. Integrity commissioners told us this unanimous vote is almost an impossible threshold. A partner with one of the biggest law firms in municipal affairs in Ontario, Aird and Berlis, called it fatally flawed. Democracy Watch called it a kangaroo court. Survivors called it a betrayal. Even the integrity commissioner of Toronto warned that the structure will water down stronger local regimes and block justice for victims.

Imagine working in an office where your abuser keeps their job because their best friend down the hall refuses to vote them out. That's what Bill 9 creates. That's not accountability. That's impunity.

Ontario didn't need another summer road show to learn this lesson. We already had the solution on the table. It was called Bill 5, the Stopping Harassment and Abuse by Local Leaders Act. That bill would have made every councillor subject to workplace violence and harassment policies, just like everyone else. Then, if an integrity commissioner found serious misconduct, it could be referred to a judge, and a judge would make a decision. An independent court could vacate the seat and bar the person from running again. That's real accountability. That's an independent, transparent, survivor-centred process. But the government voted it down. Then they copied parts of it into Bill 9, but they removed the parts that actually mattered, the parts that gave it teeth. They took the body of Bill 5 and stripped out its soul.

Let's talk about this summer tour a little bit. Five cities, dozens of witnesses, thousands of kilometres travelled, tens of thousands of taxpayers' dollars spent—not a single change recommended by the members of the government who sit on the committee; not a single amendment accepted to fix the bill's biggest problems. This government must think that they're perfect.

Everywhere committee went, people asked the same question afterwards: "Why are we here if they've already made up their minds?" The media called it out. The Pointer called it, again, "a kangaroo court." TVO said it was a waste of everyone's time; I believe there was an op-ed in the Ottawa Citizen to the same effect. They're right.

If you're not going to listen to people, then why don't you just stay in Toronto? You don't need a summer road

show to believe that you're perfect. Don't drag survivors and staff across the province to relive their trauma for a bill that you won't change.

Interjections.

Mr. Stephen Blais: Madam Speaker, they can heckle over there; they can call it what they want. But you can't call it accountability when the accused gets to stack the jury.

The cost of doing nothing to address this kind of harassment and abuse isn't, and shouldn't be, measured in committee travel expenses—although for a government that's so proud of its pretty bad financial record, one would think they would try to avoid wasting taxpayer dollars. The cost of doing nothing is measured in the staff who quit, the expertise and the passion our cities and towns lose out on, the residents who lose faith, and the survivors who decide it's safer to stay silent. When those people look at Bill 9, they see a system still run by insiders, still governed by silence, and still stacked against accountability. They see a government protecting the good old boys' club, not the community.

Bill 9 leaves the fox guarding the henhouse. It says to every councillor and mayor, "Don't worry. As long as your buddies have your back, you're safe." It tells every staffer who has been bullied or harassed, "We believe you, but only if your abusers or friends agree." And it tells taxpayers that their government is more interested in protecting insiders than protecting integrity. That's not accountability.

The people who came to those hearings deserved a government with the courage to stand up to the club, to not bow down to it. They deserved a law that says no one, no matter how well connected, is above the rules. Accountability should not depend on who you drink coffee with or go for a beer with.

The government had a chance to fix this bill, to replace politics with principle, to replace friendship with fairness, to replace the backroom with the courtroom, and they blew it.

Madam Speaker, real accountability doesn't come from unanimous votes or summer road shows. It comes from courage, and, unfortunately, this government hasn't shown any.

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The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Furter debate?

Mr. Jeff Burch: It's a pleasure to have an opportunity to rise and speak to this.

I appreciate my colleague from Orléans. We've both put forward legislation since 2021, when we first started discussing this issue. They were both voted down.

I think the government, on their third try, came forward with legislation that most people in the province recognize as completely inadequate.

Last session, we had all kinds of bills that were time-allocated and rammed through the Legislature. This was actually one where the government decided, "We're going to have committee hearings across the province." And I welcomed that because there were flaws in the bill that needed to be fixed. So they spent thousands of dollars, as

my colleague mentioned, travelling the province, seeking input on the bill, and ended up changing nothing. The government ignored advice from experts and stakeholders and voted down our key amendment, one that we and most stakeholders all agreed on: that a non-political process to remove municipal councillors by judicial review is needed. Asking city council for a unanimous vote to remove a colleague guilty of egregious acts will not work. The process needs to be fair, it needs to be objective, and it needs to be evidence-based. Why pay for community consultation if you don't listen to anyone?

All kinds of questions came up, not just the question of removal of a councillor. Will requiring a unanimous council vote following two inquiries by two integrity commissioners finding serious misconduct set the bar for removal too high? Almost everyone agreed that, yes, it will.

Why is the decision on removal being left to council and not to a judge, as AMO and others have recommended? If politicians, not a judge, are deciding whether to remove another politician, is there not a risk of politicizing the process, or at least creating the appearance of politicization? As someone who served two terms on a city council—as many of my colleagues have municipal experience, we all know that it's a politically charged environment, and expecting a unanimous vote of a city council and all members having to be present is not a reasonable bar when you're trying to protect people in the municipal arena from egregious acts of sexual harassment and assault. It's just not reasonable.

In 2021, the NDP—myself—was briefed on a bill that included a provision allowing a judge to remove a councillor found guilty of serious misconduct. Why did the government scrap that bill and abandon the principle of judicial review and then come forward with a bill that was completely inadequate, then hold committee hearings across the province, and then ignore the advice from everyone?

Former Ontario Integrity Commissioner David Wake recommended that Ontario establish a central database of all completed inquiries. There's no such provision in this bill. Will it be created via regulation? We just don't know. That's something that came up in our conversations while we were travelling the committee.

David Wake also recommended that the Ontario government help smaller municipalities manage costs, something smaller municipalities asked for. There is no such provision in this bill.

Does the government intend to provide additional financial support to help smaller municipalities manage the cost of hiring an integrity commissioner?

These and many other questions were not answered, despite being brought up by many municipal stakeholders throughout those presentations.

Just in case the government decides to time-allocate this debate and not provide us time to speak about the input that we received in committee, I want to make sure that certain things are on the record.

We heard from the president of the Association of Municipal Managers, Clerks and Treasurers of Ontario, Ms. Danielle Manton. She said they understand “the need for a high threshold when removing an elected member of council from office, but we do think that the government could consider a voting threshold of two thirds of council, as AMO has also proposed.”

So there you have AMO, representing 440 municipalities across Ontario, and the organization representing the municipal clerks and managers across Ontario making a suggestion based on what all of their members have told them, completely ignored by the government.

They went on to say, “To actually have an integrity commissioner matter go through two independent accountability officers, only to then put the onus on that council, who is also meant to collaborate and be united in some of their decision-making where possible—it’s very difficult for a council to show up and have to have a unanimous vote on something that is actually affecting one of their own members. So I do think that looking at a threshold of two thirds of council would be something that we would recommend.”

That’s a recommendation that the government could have accepted.

Kathryn Desrosiers, a municipal councillor in the town of Alymer, said, “The prospects of being removed through a subjective or politicized process, without due process, could discourage women, young people, and equity-deserving groups from stepping forward to serve. Rather than strengthening democracy, this could inadvertently narrow it.”

Michael Di Lullo: “I’m here on behalf of the Ontario Municipal Administrators Association....

“You must remove politics from the most serious decisions. Bill 9 currently proposes that removal from office be subject to a vote of council. That’s not good enough. It risks retraumatizing victims and turning serious misconduct into a popularity contest. We believe removal should be a legal decision, not a political one”—something that everyone agrees to, something that the opposition parties agree to and were willing to support in committee.

The Association of Ontario Road Supervisors: “Previous versions of this legislation propose a judicial review process, which added a layer of independence and safety. That safeguard is missing from Bill 9.”

On and on and on, we have delegation after delegation suggesting that the government take a look at the suggestions of opposition parties, of AMO, of municipal managers across Ontario to come forward with a fair, evidence-based process that will protect folks at the municipal level from serious and egregious acts of misconduct. But the government has ignored this over and over and over again.

So we would join our colleagues on this side of the House asking for the government—it’s not too late. They can make changes. They can take a look at this. They can listen to the advice of all of the groups, all of the stakeholders, like the Women of Ontario Say No, who depended on this government and on this committee to

come up with a bill that actually protected women and other persons in the municipal arena from these egregious acts of misconduct. The government has failed on this. We, as the opposition, are asking them.

It’s not too late. Listen to what we’ve said. Listen to what the stakeholders have said and make the changes that are necessary to protect folks at the municipal level.

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

Mr. Matthew Rae: Welcome back, everyone. It’s great—

Interjection.

Mr. Matthew Rae: My colleague from Beaches–East York is already heckling me, Speaker. I haven’t even started.

It’s great to be back in the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, this very historic building. It’s great that the members of the third party wanted to hear little old Matt Rae, speak today. I guess they missed my voice at committee.

I know some members were at committee this summer, and I know it has been talked about at length about how the committee travelled. As my colleague mentioned, it went to Ottawa, Thunder Bay, Whitby, Niagara and London.

Obviously, with all committees, colleagues, as we all know in this place, you can still submit—even if you’re not able to; we all have very busy lives—feedback to a committee through the committee process, whether it’s written form or to the Clerk directly.

It’s an important process of our democratic system—having committees and travelling those committees. We travelled extensively.

It was a little disheartening hearing the member from Orléans saying that committee is a waste of time. I know I don’t view committees in that aspect.

Committees are meeting today, doing important work.

Government estimates are coming up. I know our ministers are looking very much forward to sharing the good news that our government is doing, making those investments in communities across Ontario, not just downtown Toronto, ensuring that we’re investing in Thunder Bay, Niagara, London—Ottawa, even. A new deal in Ottawa—unfortunately, the members of the third party voted against that new deal.

Interjection.

Mr. Matthew Rae: It’s shameful, I know.

1320

I was very shocked to hear the members opposite say that committee was a waste of time. I know we heard extensively from AMO, the northern municipalities, rural Ontario, as well. There was a lot of great feedback through that process on this piece of legislation we are debating here today.

Interjections.

Mr. Matthew Rae: Speaker, they’re still trying to drown out this really reasoned debate on a Monday afternoon in October, ensuring that we’re here debating legislation, as the people of Ontario elected us to do—on this legislation we’re talking about today. I’m assuming

we're all going to agree that it should be reported back. For the vast majority of things, we report back to this House with very little fanfare. It is part of the process and procedure in this place.

Really, today, we're talking about the Municipal Accountability Act. We heard through that committee, and even before, that many groups had brought forward ideas on how to improve accountability and, really, safety and codes of conduct in the municipal workforce. We have 444 municipalities across Ontario, and this, unfortunately, is a challenge in many of them.

Our government has been listening. I know Minister Flack, myself, and many others of my colleagues and members of the opposition, both parties—even the independents, I believe, attended AMO and heard from our municipal partners about some things we can do to improve accountability and the codes of conduct for our municipal staff and our municipal colleagues, ensuring we have good governance in Ontario.

Good governance is part of our country's foundation, colleagues. It's part of what our country was founded to do. They saw what was happening south of the border—similar to what's happening now, I would argue—and didn't want any part of that. They wanted good governance over 150 years ago now, colleagues.

This is a continuation of that, working with our municipal partners to ensure that they work in a safe environment. It has been talked about at committee and before this bill was brought forward, for many years now. But what was talked about was how it was councillor and councillor—I also heard, in my own role as parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, about how it's also staff to staff and staff and councillor as well.

So it's ensuring that we're encompassing all people who work in our municipal side of things, whether it's the staff or councillors, ensuring that we're there to support them and the important work they do.

We have an ambitious plan to build Ontario—\$200 billion in infrastructure spending over the next 10 years. That includes hospitals, roads, bridges all across Ontario. As I mentioned, our government ministers will be doing estimates at committee, talking about some of those good investments across Ontario, ensuring that we're continuing to invest in those communities.

I know we're entering a municipal election next year, and we're going to ensure that we continue to work with our municipal colleagues and that they are supported, whether it's the historic amounts of—

Interjections.

Mr. Matthew Rae: I know.

They just keep interrupting.

I need to pause. I'm going to take a drink.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Order.

Mr. Matthew Rae: It is a municipal election next year—and yes, there will be a municipal election next year. Bonnie Crombie may be running for the mayor of Mississauga again—I'm not sure, but to be seen.

I was going on my line of thought there around the additional OMPF funding we're providing to our rural and northern municipalities, which is very important to them.

This piece of bill was another example of us working with our colleagues, listening to that feedback; ensuring we're establishing a standard code of conduct for all municipalities—for every mayor, councillor, and member of a local board is held to the same ethical standards; creating a consistent and province-wide framework for integrity commissioners, something we heard former commissioner David Wake recommend to our government. What we have heard from our municipal colleagues is very important.

I know the minister and the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing continued to do that important work, even over the summer, and introduced mandatory training for elected officials, building upon that training that is already offered to our municipal colleagues, but ensuring that those individuals who may be deciding to potentially throw their hat in the ring for mayor of Toronto or mayor of any other city is—

Interjection.

Mr. Matthew Rae: Maybe the member from Beaches—East York is going to run for mayor.

Interjection: I'd vote for her.

Mr. Matthew Rae: I'd vote for the member from Beaches—East York to be mayor, and I know who her councillor is.

Ensuring the mandatory training for elected officials—outside of the larger urban centres, this is a part-time role. Many of my colleagues on the municipal side served in those rural or northern municipalities. They have other responsibilities and other jobs, professional lives. Not everyone is a policy nerd like myself and understands Robert's Rules of Order or anything else—so it's ensuring they understand those aspects.

The bill that we are debating today—and really, I'm always happy to talk about municipal codes of conduct and those important aspects with our colleagues of all parties—is creating the conditions and good framework for good municipal governance, something I think all of us can agree on and something we can all agree to strive for. I know the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing will continue to strive to do that, to ensure that we are working with our municipal colleagues, all 444 of them, and ensure that we're there to support them—as we have for the past seven-plus years. And we'll continue to do so.

With that, Speaker, I'd like to conclude my remarks this afternoon.

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

Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady: A few weeks ago, I wrote a newspaper column describing how governments deliberately create or exaggerate a situation or a problem so they can implement a predetermined solution taxpayers might not otherwise accept. The conclusion to that column was “Today, the school board trustee, and tomorrow, the municipal councillor. It's a slippery slope toward the demise of democracy, and as taxpayers, we will not know what we had until it is gone.” That's how I view Bill 9.

Yes, Bill 9 will enable the creation of a new standardized code of conduct, mandatory code of conduct training for members of council and local boards, as well as an integrity commissioner inquiry process that would be consistent across Ontario.

As we've heard this afternoon, it all sounds great until you realize the key pillar of the legislation creates a mechanism to remove council members from office if they're found to have committed "egregious" acts. What is the definition of "egregious"? That's where things get a little scary in a democracy, and this should be highly concerning to all of us.

Imagine a vindictive government that doesn't like the way things are unfolding in a municipality and decides that they're going to get rid of some of the people around the table.

Looking at local politics in my riding as of late, the sentiment amongst my constituents is that local politics is being manipulated by a higher force.

Despite hearing from many elected officials and key stakeholders, this government refuses to make changes or amendments where the final decision to remove an elected official would be up to a judge. Municipal councillors should not vote on whether to eliminate a colleague from council, given that they're not judges and their colleague was elected by taxpayers—only the taxpayer should decide at the ballot box in the next election. That's how democracy works.

According to Grimsby councillor Veronica Charrois, language contained within Bill 9 is dangerously vague and open to subjective interpretation. "Without precise definitions, this clause could be exploited in politically divided councils," Charrois told the Standing Committee on Heritage, Infrastructure and Cultural Policy during hearings on Bill 9. "For example, in my case, a high volume of minor or politically motivated complaints could be misconstrued as constituting harm." That's true.

I appreciated Charrois's final words on the issue at committee: "Bill 9 should aim to enhance ethical conduct in municipal government, not to empower political factions to remove dissenting voices. I fully support the principles of accountability and integrity, but these must be balanced with fairness, due process and safeguards against political weaponization."

Over the past several weeks, I've been contacted by several municipal mayors and councillors who are fed up with the broken system. Many have expressed that they are financially drained from attempting to defend themselves and are now paralyzed by fear as they sit around the council table waiting for the next complaint.

Bill 9 will not fix the kangaroo court in place currently, because this bill is fatally flawed.

I'd like to add that municipal elected officials also are not protected or backed by a professional regulatory body, the way a lawyer, doctor or police officer might be. You can see how this becomes a problem when an elected official might make an error simply because they did not know and were not trained appropriately.

We need to reform the broken and unethical practices of municipalities. However, Bill 9 continues to politicize the integrity process rather than depoliticize it. I cannot help but wonder if this tinkering is this government's deliberate creation of a crisis to usher in more centralized power and decision-making. If this government really wanted to fix the problems, it would do better in listening and not just use committee processes as window dressing.

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

The Standing Committee on Heritage, Infrastructure and Cultural Policy reported the following bill, as amended: Bill 9, An Act to amend the City of Toronto Act, 2006 and the Municipal Act, 2001 in relation to codes of conduct.

Mr. Babikian has moved the adoption of the report. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

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

All those opposed to the motion will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This is a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1330 to 1335.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Members, please take your seats.

Mr. Babikian has moved the adoption of the committee's report on Bill 9, An Act to amend the City of Toronto Act, 2006 and the Municipal Act, 2001 in relation to codes of conduct, as amended.

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

Ayes

Allsopp, Tyler	Hamid, Zee	Racinsky, Joseph
Babikian, Aris	Hardeman, Ernie	Rae, Matthew
Bailey, Robert	Harris, Mike	Riddell, Brian
Bresee, Ric	Holland, Kevin	Rosenberg, Bill
Calandra, Paul	Jones, Trevor	Sabawy, Sheref
Cho, Raymond Sung Joon	Jordan, John	Sandhu, Amarjot
Ciriello, Monica	Kanapathi, Logan	Sarkaria, Prabmeet Singh
Clark, Steve	Kerzner, Michael S.	Sarrazin, Stéphane
Coe, Lorne	Khanjin, Andrea	Saunderson, Brian
Cooper, Michelle	Leardi, Anthony	Scott, Laurie
Crawford, Stephen	Lecce, Stephen	Smith, David
Cuzzetto, Rudy	McCarthy, Todd J.	Smith, Laura
Darouze, George	Mulroney, Caroline	Tangri, Nina
Denault, Billy	Oosterhoff, Sam	Thompson, Lisa M.
Dixon, Jess	Pang, Billy	Tibollo, Michael A.
Dowie, Andrew	Parsa, Michael	Triantafilopoulos, Effie J.
Firin, Mohamed	Piccini, David	Vickers, Paul
Gallagher Murphy, Dawn	Pierre, Natalie	Williams, Charmaine A.
Grewal, Hardeep Singh	Pirie, George	
Gualtieri, Silvia	Quinn, Nolan	

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

Nays

Armstrong, Teresa J.	Fraser, John	Sattler, Peggy
Begum, Doly	Gélinas, France	Shamji, Adil
Blais, Stephen	Gilmour, Alexa	Smyth, Stephanie

Bourgoin, Guy
Brady, Bobbi Ann
Burch, Jeff
Cerjanec, Rob
Collard, Lucille
Fairclough, Lee
Fife, Catherine

Hazell, Andrea
Hsu, Ted
Kernaghan, Terence
McCrimmon, Karen
McKenney, Catherine
McMahon, Mary-Margaret
Rakocevic, Tom

Stevens, Jennifer (Jennie)
Tabuns, Peter
Tsao, Jonathan
Vanthof, John
Watt, Tyler
West, Jamie
Wong-Tam, Kristyn

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Trevor Day): The eyes are 58; the nays are 30.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I declare the motion carried.

Report adopted.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The bill is therefore ordered for third reading.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: I beg leave to present a report on Value-for-Money Audit: Financial Services Regulatory Authority: Regulation of Private Passenger Automobile Insurance, Credit Unions and Pension Plans, 2022 Annual Report of the Office of the Auditor General of Ontario, from the Standing Committee on Public Accounts and move the adoption of its recommendations.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Mr. Rakocevic presents the committee's report and moves the adoption of its recommendations.

1340

Does the member wish to make a brief statement?

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Speaker, I do.

As Chair of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, I'm pleased to table these four reports today.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the permanent membership of the committee and substitute members who participated in the public hearings and report-writing processes.

The committee extends its appreciation to officials from all of the ministries and agencies that participated in the respective hearings.

The committee also acknowledges the assistance provided during the hearings and report-writing deliberations by the Office of the Auditor General, the Clerk of the Committee, and legislative research.

With that, I move adjournment of the debate.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Mr. Rakocevic has moved the adjournment of the debate. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Debate adjourned.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: I beg leave to present a report on Value-for-Money Audit: Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corp.: Casinos, Lotteries and Internet Gaming, 2022 Annual Report of the Office of the Auditor General of Ontario, from the Standing Committee on Public Accounts and move the adoption of its recommendations.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Mr. Rakocevic presents the committee's report and moves the adoption of its recommendations.

Does the member wish to make a brief statement?

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: I move adjournment of the debate.

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

Debate adjourned.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Speaker, I beg leave to present a report on Value-for-Money Audit: Tourism Support Programs, 2023 Annual Report of the Office of the Auditor General of Ontario, from the Standing Committee on Public Accounts and move the adoption of its recommendations.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Mr. Rakocevic presents the committee's report and moves the adoption of its recommendations.

Does the member wish to make a brief statement?

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: I move adjournment of the debate.

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

Debate adjourned.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Speaker, I beg leave to present a report on Review of Government Advertising, 2023 Annual Report of the Office of the Auditor General of Ontario, from the Standing Committee on Public Accounts and move the adoption of its recommendations.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Mr. Rakocevic presents the committee's report and moves the adoption of its recommendations.

Does the member wish to make a brief statement?

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: I move adjournment of the debate.

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

Debate adjourned.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I beg leave to present a report from the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs pursuant to standing order 109.1(a).

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Ms. Armstrong presents the committee's report.

Does the member wish to make a statement?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I move adjournment of the debate.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Pursuant to standing order 109.1(a), the report is deemed to be adopted by the House.

Report deemed adopted.

INTRODUCTION OF GOVERNMENT BILLS

BUILDING A MORE COMPETITIVE ECONOMY ACT, 2025

LOI DE 2025 VISANT À BÂTIR UNE ÉCONOMIE PLUS CONCURRENTIELLE

Ms. Khanjin moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 56, An Act to amend various Acts / Projet de loi 56, Loi modifiant diverses 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): Would the minister like to make a statement?

Hon. Andrea Khanjin: I want to thank my two parliamentary assistants, the member for Wellington–Halton Hills and the member for Markham–Thornhill, who have got my back right behind me, who help me with great work in reducing red tape.

Speaker, the proposed legislation you see before you, the Building a More Competitive Economy Act, if passed, will strengthen Ontario's economy by supporting local businesses, streamlining regulatory processes, advancing labour mobility and building a resilient foundation for long-term growth and competitiveness that will make Ontario the best place in the world to do business in the G7, leading us to being a destination for investment, innovation and economic growth.

RESPECT FOR TAXPAYERS ACT (HALDIMAND COUNTY TRUSTEE VACANCY), 2025

LOI DE 2025 POUR ASSURER LE RESPECT DES CONTRIBUABLES (VACANCE DU POSTE DE CONSEILLER SCOLAIRE DU COMTÉ DE HALDIMAND)

Mr. Calandra moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 57, An Act to vacate the office of the member of the Brant Haldimand Norfolk Catholic District School Board who represented Haldimand County between July 8, 2024 and July 15, 2024 / Projet de loi 57, Loi visant à déclarer vacant le siège du membre qui a représenté le comté de Haldimand au sein du Brant Haldimand Norfolk Catholic District School Board entre le 8 juillet 2024 et le 15 juillet 2024.

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): Would the minister like to briefly explain the bill?

Hon. Paul Calandra: The bill really is quite a simple one. It would, for all intents and purposes, fire the trustee who, along with a couple of other colleagues, went to Italy between July 8, 2024, and July 15, 2024, and spent thousands of dollars in doing so. That was money that was taken out of the classroom, taken away from students. The trustee named is refusing to pay back the money that he spent on, for all intents and purposes, what is a vacation. This bill—really quite simple—would fire that trustee for refusing to pay back the money that he owes to parents, students and teachers.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

LUDGER MICHEL ESTATES LIMITED ACT, 2025

MPP West moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill Pr17, An Act to revive Ludger Michel Estates Limited.

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

First reading agreed to.

1350

FRANCO-ONTARIAN BOOKSTORE PROMOTION AND PROTECTION ACT, 2025

LOI DE 2025 POUR LA PROMOTION ET LA PROTECTION DES LIBRAIRIES FRANCO-ONTARIENNES

Madame Collard moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 58, An Act respecting Franco-Ontarian bookstores and other Franco-Ontarian cultural institutions / Projet de loi 58, Loi concernant les librairies franco-ontariennes et d'autres institutions culturelles franco-ontariennes.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Would the member like to have a brief statement?

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Yes, briefly, Madam Speaker. Thank you.

C'est un projet de loi qui est assez simple mais qui a une grande importance pour la communauté franco-ontarienne car il vise à protéger et assurer la survie de nos librairies franco-ontariennes. Ces librairies franco-ontariennes sont les gardiennes de notre culture et de notre langue.

Le projet de loi crée simplement une obligation pour les institutions financées par les fonds publics de s'approvisionner en livres français auprès de nos librairies

franco-ontariennes. C'est une mesure simple, mais que nos librairies espèrent depuis très longtemps.

PETITIONS

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Speaker, I want to introduce a petition organized by Ontario Nature calling on the government of Ontario to retract, repeal, Bill 5, noting that the bill infringes on Indigenous rights, gives unchecked powers to provincial ministers, dismantles protections for Ontario's most vulnerable species, and undermines labour standards and our democratic processes.

More than 1,500 people have signed this petition. There is no doubt that Bill 5 is bad news for Ontario, and frankly, will provide the opportunity for scandal from any government in the future that maintains this bill.

I support the petition, and I hand it to page Alyssa to be tabled.

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I want to thank the 10,000 students who signed petitions in a campaign that was organized by the Canadian Federation of Students-Ontario. The petition is entitled "Hands Off Our Education."

These 10,000 students come from all over the province. U of T, TMU, OCAD, Algoma, Nipissing, Waterloo, McMaster, Trent, Laurentian, Lakehead—the list goes on. These students are all very, very concerned about the government's plans to go ahead with Bill 33. They're calling for a rejection of Bill 33. They are very concerned about the autonomy of student organizations and the ability of student organizations to continue to provide vital services on our campuses. They are very concerned about the language of merit-based admissions, which can restrict institutions' mandates to improve access. They're also very concerned about the parts of Bill 33 that threaten primary and secondary, K to 12, education in this province.

So they're calling for the rejection of Bill 33, a defence of students' rights to organize and the autonomy of student organizations on our campuses, and for an immediate injection of public funding into the post-secondary education system.

I'm proud to affix my signature to this petition and will send it to the table with page Aditya.

ROAD SAFETY

Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady: I have a petition here entitled "Time MTO Fixes Highway 6 and Haldibrook Road."

We have a very dangerous intersection at Highway 6 and Haldibrook Road in Haldimand county that requires the immediate attention of the Ministry of Transportation. The minister sits in a government that has campaigned on creating efficiencies and eliminating delays caused by red

tape, and it's time that he speak to the Ministry of Red Tape Reduction and immediately make safer the intersection of Highway 6 and Haldibrook Road.

I have hundreds of signatures that I'll be tabling today and many more to come.

I wholeheartedly support this petition. I will affix my signature to it and send it to the Clerks' table with page Simone.

TENANT PROTECTION

Mr. Ted Hsu: The petition today comes from my constituents in Kingston and the Islands who live in rental housing that was occupied after November 2018. These are mostly retirees who are now feeling the squeeze of increases in market rents, whereas they are on fixed income, such as OAS and CPP, which have not kept pace with rental inflation in newer units. They also point out that when they first rented these apartments, it was not possible to get a longer, multi-year lease so they could have some idea of what their expenses would be.

They have a very interesting suggestion. They're petitioning the Legislative Assembly to amend the Residential Tenancies Act so that rent control measures would come into place. For units that are occupied two years after occupancy first occurs for newer buildings, they're asking for rent control measures to come in. They're allowing market rents to be adjusted as the landlord wishes for a couple of years, and then they would like the rent control to come in after that.

YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH

Ms. Catherine Fife: Last session, I tabled a motion at social policy committee, where it sits right now, asking this Legislature to review social media patterns and use by youth in Ontario. This motion was actually inspired by Dr. Alison Yeung from Kitchener-Conestoga, who has been exploring the overuse and the addictive nature of social media platforms and the content that children are seeing online.

We do know that there has been an uptick in legal issues pertaining to the use of social media. School boards have actually filed lawsuits because social media and the addictive nature of those algorithms are interrupting learning in our school system. Educators have said that it's really impacting the mental health of youth in Ontario.

This petition, quite honestly, just asks this committee for us to work together as lawmakers to review the addictive nature of social media platforms, hold those companies to account, and then also have the public health units in Ontario issue warnings to parents, especially for those zero to five, because this is interrupting brain development.

At one point, we'll be able to throw all the money that you want at education, but if we don't stop the addictive nature of social media and its negative impact on mental health for youth, then we're really abdicating our responsibilities as lawmakers.

I urge the social policy committee to call this motion. Let us work together towards solutions. We all can be part of the solution for Ontario.

POLICE IN SCHOOLS

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: I rise to present a petition entitled “Mandate the Removal of Police-in-School Programs and Policing-in-School Programs from Educational Spaces in Ontario.” The petition is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

Speaker, as you may know, there is little to no evidence that police-in-school programs and policing-in-school programs prevent or reduce violence in educational spaces. There’s little evidence to support that notion, and these programs don’t make educational spaces safer.

Speaker, you also recognize that there is ample evidence of detrimental negative impacts of police-in-school programs and policing-in-school programs on students, and particular impacts on Black, Indigenous, racialized, 2SLGBTQIA+, disabled, neurodivergent, students with precarious immigration status and other intersecting identities.

There is also very little evidence that these programs will work.

There are students who are suffering and seeing lesser conditions because what really is the matter is that the classroom sizes are overlarge. They need to become smaller.

More ample supports and resources, including more teachers, need to be hired. Education workers, education assistants, support staff, mental health support, wrap-around services, before- and after-school programs, food school programs, clean air, clean water, along with other issues that have to be addressed—these are the root causes that are breaking down and making it much more difficult for these students to thrive.

Multiple school boards in Ontario have already removed their police-in-school programs, including the Toronto District School Board, the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board, the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board, and other post-secondary institutions.

1400

We know that there are many systemic issues and underlying issues that have to be addressed.

This group of individuals is calling on the Ontario government to do the following: to mandate the immediate removal of all and any police-in-school programs and policing-in-school programs across all educational levels, from kindergarten to grade 12 and post-secondary institutions, as the first and necessary step in making sure that Ontario is investing in education and not bringing cops in classrooms.

I’m proudly submitting this petition on behalf of a coalition called Policing-Free Schools Canada and their director, Andrea Vásquez Jiménez.

EDUCATION FUNDING

MPP Alexa Gilmour: This morning I was at a Fund Our Schools rally, where a sea of families in red for

education were opposing Bill 33. Then, at lunchtime, we heard from no policing in schools.

Now I stand before you, tabling yet another petition around the safety and the security and the education of children in schools. This one is called “Save Public Education.” I am proud to say that that members of my riding gathered these dozens of pages here to sign it.

They’re very concerned with the underfunding of our school system since 2018. They are demanding that the province stay back in their lane to ensure that trustees are reinstated, that the supervising of these school boards is reversed, that the funding cuts are reversed, and that children in classrooms can once again experience learning that is free from oversized classrooms and a lack of special-ed needs being met.

It is my honour to affix my signature, to stand with these parents in demanding that the schools are properly cared for—not by supervisors, but by the elected trustees—and that the funding is reinstated for them.

HOSPITAL PARKING FEES

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: It’s a pleasure to be able to rise in the House once again to speak for the fine citizens of my riding of St. Catharines. They have been coming in my office regularly and saying, “Can we eliminate hospital parking fees?”

This petition has several names on it—where hospital parking fees have been creating financial burdens for patients, for seniors, for families, for health care professionals and hospital staff.

My colleague from Niagara Centre has worked hard, as well, to bring this forward.

Hospital parking fees amount to an unfair tax on health care workers. Hospitals require adequate funding to ensure high-quality and accessible care for all Ontarians.

They have signed this petition to the Legislative Assembly. They want this government of Ontario to immediately adopt the recommendations of, again, patients, families, seniors, health care professionals and staff, by eliminating hospital parking fees across the province and by ensuring hospitals are adequately funded as a concrete and immediate step to assist Ontarians.

I want to say that Lisa Lafontaine from Port Colborne signed this, and she fully agrees; I do too, and I’m going to be affixing my name to this petition.

Let’s eliminate these hospital parking fees so that people can continue to afford to visit their loved ones.

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

MPP Alexa Gilmour: I rise with a petition before me called “Repeal Bill 5.” Before the Legislature paused in the summertime, I was getting dozens and dozens of signatures demanding that we stop Bill 5, and now we are asking for the repeal in this petition.

Those who have signed this are saying that the special economic zones go too far and that that ministry power is a power grab; that the First Nations leadership has not

been properly consulted; and that the treaty rights, they feel, will not be respected.

So they are asking for the repeal of Bill 5, to start over with full consultation, including with First Nations, and to make sure that we proceed properly and cautiously in areas across the province.

I am gladly signing my name to this, giving it to Aditya, and tabling it today.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WORKING FOR WORKERS SEVEN ACT, 2025

LOI DE 2025 VISANT À ŒUVRER POUR LES TRAVAILLEURS, SEPT

Mr. Piccini moved second reading of the following bill:
Bill 30, An Act to amend various statutes with respect to employment and labour and other matters / Projet de loi 30, Loi modifiant diverses lois relatives à l'emploi et au travail ainsi qu'à d'autres questions.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos):
I recognize the Minister of Labour.

Hon. David Piccini: Speaker, it's an honour to rise today.

I welcome everyone back to the Legislature to speak about Working for Workers Seven Act.

I want to first say that I'll be splitting my time with parliamentary assistant Sheref Sabawy and parliamentary assistant Laura Smith, the member from Mississauga—Erin Mills and the member for Thornhill, respectively.

I'm pleased to rise on the Working for Workers Seven Act. This proposed legislation is another powerful step forward in our unwavering pro-worker agenda. If you look over the past number of years, we've put a real line in the sand, as a government. We have said we will, at least once, if not twice a year, put forward progressive measures to support workers in the province of Ontario. This is the first time we've had this, ever—where a government puts a line in the sand. And I'm proud to say that it has received unanimous support from this Legislature.

All of our Working for Workers bills that I've introduced since becoming minister have received unanimous consent and the support of opposition parties—because they, too, recognize the steps this government is taking to support workers in every corner of Ontario.

Now we're continuing to advance these legislative changes.

We know we're navigating an economic landscape that includes US tariffs on Canadian goods, and, through that, workers need to know we're laser-focused on protecting them.

The proposals I will outline, with the help of the incredible parliamentary assistants, will build on previous Working for Workers bills that we've introduced. We're on our seventh—I've often said, as many books as Harry Potter now. We continue to put these progressive pieces of

legislation forward. And I want to thank everyone who has contributed. Our goal is simple. Ontario workers and businesses are supported through these challenging economic times—and everyone who has supported us, from workers, employers, union partners, training providers, community organizations, small business owners, shopkeepers, and the people of Ontario who elected us, of course, to our third mandate.

Speaker, the bill builds on previous bills we've introduced since being elected, focusing on productivity. Perhaps the number one issue that we are focused on in the Ministry of Labour is driving Ontario's productivity. When Canada's productivity is in decline, it's imperative that we reduce barriers, ensure a low-taxation environment, create the conditions for economic opportunity so that we can get workers to work and, when we know there are economic headwinds, when we know President Trump launched an all-out assault on key sectors, that we have training pathways to support workers, that workers see themselves.

I love that Premier Ford and this government recognize that training, at any age, at any stage of your career, matters. Whether you're a hospitality worker, whether you're a chef, whether you're a first responder, whether you're a construction worker or a manufacturer, you matter. And we want to make sure that we're supporting lifelong learning in the province of Ontario.

Our proposals contain 18 measures under three key themes in this bill: protecting Ontario workers, fighting worker abuse, and supporting skilled trades.

If passed, this bill and complementary regulatory changes would, among other things, require certain construction projects to have a defibrillator and training on how to use it. This builds on steps we've taken with naloxone kits, steps we've taken to ensure properly fitting protective equipment so that women and people of all body types can enter the construction trades. This is helping employers with the costs offset by WSIB premiums. Speaker, this is saying that when seconds save lives, we're going to have a defibrillator on job sites saving lives.

1410

The gentleman who spoke at that event was a GFL worker who found himself waking up on a road. Thankfully, a paramedic went by. When he woke up, he had the patches on his chest from a defibrillator. He and other members of the Mikey Network actually took us through how to put a defibrillator on. I had never actually done that before—and so we're ensuring this isn't just saving lives. He lost his dad—and he said it was his dad looking down on him, saying, "It's not your time." Well, for workers in situations like that, moving forward, we will have defibrillators on site. We won't be depending on a happenstance passing by of a paramedic. This matters.

We're creating a new unpaid leave for employees in situations of mass termination so that they can begin looking for a job sooner. This complements a new requirement in effect since July 1 for employers in mass termination situations to provide information about

provincial employment services to affected employees. We've been doing this with Steelworkers.

I want to thank Kevon Stewart, who has been such an important partner in this. Kevon has fed in important information here and stood with us to launch POWER centres. I know a member opposite knows Kevon. We launched those centres, which build on the action centres—that has been incredible work through successive governments.

I think there's no questioning that when you have a terrible incident as a result of a global economic downturn, whatever it may be, you want to know that your government is there. It's probably one of the worst things of my job, but I have to do it. You have to be prepared. Workers deserve to know that Premier Ford and their government are ready for no matter what's thrown our way.

So we have been working with USW, and I want to thank them for their contributions.

We've strengthened WSIB enforcement provisions to crack down on employers who try to cheat the system. A good, telltale sign of a bad actor is someone who doesn't pay their WSIB premiums. So we're taking action, requiring job posting platforms to have a mechanism in place that allows job seekers to report fraudulent postings to the platform and have a policy to address these fraudulent postings.

I know many of us have spoken to people who have navigated the job market, applied to multiple jobs. It was this government that said, "We're going to post salary ranges." I heard from so many workers who say, "You work so hard; you apply; you go through different rounds, just to find out that you'd earn less than you were making today." This really empowers workers, and we've had great feedback from them on these measures that we're building on.

We're streamlining the permitting process to accelerate the building of training centres. This is one I'm most proud of. Working shoulder to shoulder with organized labour, we're putting them first. This is one of the reasons we have such incredible support, under Premier Ford, for organized labour. We show up. We listen. We sit down with these union training halls. We heard, "We want the same provisions college and universities have to build our training centres faster. We play an important role in training the next generation of carpenters, the next generation of labourers, the next generation of steamfitters, pipefitters, electrical workers." All of them matter. That's why we're making sure that they're not bogged in red tape.

I visited Ottawa. I sat down—11,000-square-foot expansion to the carpenters' training hall up there. They waited six months for a sign permit—a sign permit. We have a backlog of apprentices waiting to get into their in-class training. This facility will allow expanded training, and yet they waited six months for a sign permit.

London—another prime example. IBEW—I just got a note from Mr. Gibson there, the business manager—asked to do studies and permits on property that wasn't even theirs, that they didn't own. Speaker, this is part of a culture. It's a culture where we've allowed—a culture of

"no," a culture of delay, a culture where excess fees and permits cause undue burden on many small locals just trying to deliver training closer to home for our next generation. So I'm really proud of that step.

We're providing the authority for inspectors to require in-person interviews for OINP applicants, to combat fraud and crack down on bad actors. I know members of this place have spoken at length about the OINP program; we've had ours cut in half. We've seen fraudulent claims, and we've seen abuse in the system triple. We've delivered independent inspectors, triple the number of administrative penalties, because we've seen rampant abuse, and we're working hard to make sure that we root out those bad actors who would sell a false dream to a newcomer.

Citizenship is a privilege; it's not a right. And when we work to have a system with integrity that welcomes newcomers like my grandfather, who came here to build a better future—a system with integrity, we have the confidence of the world over, and that's so, so important.

We're moving forward with non-legislative and regulatory initiatives, like investing an additional \$20 million into our protecting Ontario workers employment response centres—or POWER centres, as we're calling them—and investing an additional \$50 million in Better Jobs Ontario to expand access to vocational and skills training for in-demand jobs.

We've initiated a consultation on talent agencies and the licensing requirements that we may implement as a government. I heard the harrowing stories of ACTRA employees whose talent agents withheld payments for work that they did. We heard a question today on unpaid wages. This is all part of our plan to better protect workers. And I'm grateful for ACTRA just showing up—listening and hearing their stories—welcoming me with open arms in the Labour Day parade in Toronto, to hear their stories, and then bringing in members. It builds on the stories of so many actors we've heard about. So I appreciate their work on a potential regulatory regime here in Ontario.

We're consulting with industry on further supporting skilled trades apprentices by prioritizing their hiring in public sector projects. We have incredible PLAs, we want to make sure, in pre-qualification and work for our contractors, that we're practising what we preach and that we have apprentices on job sites—actual youth learning apprenticeships, building the Ontario of tomorrow.

When my grandfather immigrated here, he was very much part of a generation, I could say, where they would put their arm around you, point to the skyline and point to projects that they built. And how nice would that be for our next generation, who are entering the trades in significant numbers?

Speaker, under the previous Liberal government, we saw a decline in youth registering for apprenticeships. I remember, on my first meeting of ministers of labour, former Premier Wynne wanted Ontario to be a service economy—a service economy. It's not surprising that, under her watch, manufacturing fled this province, because they didn't care about men and women in the trades,

about people who get up at the crack of dawn to build a better Ontario; we do. That's why we've seen an increase in youth registering for apprenticeships.

We've seen a historic doubling of the number of women signing up for apprenticeships because of progressive measures, in part, that we've taken through our previous Working for Workers bills. These aren't as a result of us—it's because of organized labour, because of contractors, because of small businesses and so many Ontarians who've worked with us to put workers first. They deserve all the credit.

We're introducing legislative and non-legislative proposals supporting key sectors of our economy. But I want to talk about, really, who is going to benefit from this.

Let's talk about keeping our workers safe, prioritizing Ontario's workers.

Construction sites are among the most common places where cardiac emergencies strike, and it's something we can't ignore. Construction workers are at a significantly higher risk due to factors like physical exertion, which can amplify underlying health issues.

We know from ministry inspection reports—and a big shout-out to labour ministry inspectors who are out there. I had a chance to meet some of them when I was last in Windsor, and I value and appreciate the work that they do. They do really important work on the job—they're respected by the sector, and I appreciate the work that they've done.

1420

Those reports from ministry inspectors from 2018 to 2023 include 184 records associated with cardiac events, including heart attacks; of these, over 15% were in the construction sector. We know construction workers are at an elevated risk.

I want to acknowledge the incredible efforts of our construction and skilled trades workforce, the backbone of Ontario's economy.

In May of this year, I joined Mike, that construction worker I mentioned who had a cardiac event. Seconds matter during a cardiac event. Seconds count. Seconds save lives. That's why, under Premier Ford's leadership, we're taking yet another step to protect Ontario by implementing safety for the hard-working people on the front lines, requiring defibrillators on job sites. If passed, this would require, as of January 1, 2026, that constructors be required to install defibrillators on construction projects with 20 or more workers that have a duration of three months or longer. They would be required to have a defibrillator. But the exciting part is that we'll be training countless numbers of people on how to use them.

We're proposing amendments to the Occupational Health and Safety Act that would require the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board to reimburse eligible employers who equip their workplace with a defibrillator to comply with these new measures under the Occupational Health and Safety Act. Constructors falling under these changes would apply to the WSIB to be reimbursed for the costs.

This is something we've heard from the construction sector—from ResCon, who have been a huge proponent. I

want to thank Andrew Pariser for his stalwart work on this and for working with us on this.

I also want to thank LIUNA 183; in particular, Jason Ottey, who has been a member of our Skilled Trades Ontario board, and who has been such a strong advocate for this piece. He joined me for that announcement. I value his advocacy, because it was on day one, when I became labour minister, that he mentioned how important this is and what an increased risk construction workers are at.

It's Premier Ford and this government that are delivering these things. We've listened. We've listened to partners. I want to thank the Mikey Network. We expect this will be on thousands of projects all over Ontario, and we'll build on those life-changing measures that we introduced.

Common sense sometimes isn't too common in this world. So by saying to people of all body types, "We're going to make sure you have properly fitted protection equipment, and we're going to make sure that that expands to all workplaces"—when I was in, I think it was, British Columbia for our first meeting of ministers of labour, a woman with BC Building Trades came out. I remember then-Minister O'Regan and I sat down and we spoke with her. He was the federal minister at the time we spoke. She showed us the gloves. This was a power line technician wearing stuff that was outright too large for her. When women are already working hard on job sites, breaking down barriers and smashing glass ceilings on construction sites, and then having to worry about working extra hard because their equipment simply doesn't fit, this is wrong.

So we're bringing forward these measures to say to the next generation of women, "You've got a place." Often, you've got to say, "See me to be me."

I want to thank all of the incredible women.

I want to thank Natasha Ferguson from A Women's Work, who has brought me out. She does complete programs, supported by our Skills Development Fund—of all women, many of whom are newcomers—breaking down barriers and creating more diverse job sites. She has done an incredible, incredible job.

I want to thank so many advocates.

We had an incredible team from Carpenters Local 27 here today. They've done an incredible job breaking down barriers for women.

I want to thank Victoria Mancinelli, who has always been there to champion progressive measures for women.

I want to thank so many in my own community who've come: constituents who've spoken to me; moms and dads at our Level Up! skilled trades career fairs, who have come up to us to say—the most common words: "We've never tried this before." We're the first government to bring these career fairs all over Ontario—to get real hands-on experience.

So from properly fitting protective equipment, to say you'll be safe on a job site, to common-sense things, like ensuring we have washrooms for women on job sites, ensuring we have these defibrillators on job sites—all of these things matter and demonstrate that we have workers' backs.

Speaker, with the challenging US tariff dynamic, we're stepping up with these changes to our Employment Standards Act to make sure that we support those workers.

We're looking at mandatory layoff referral to employment services, better integrating it. It shouldn't take becoming an elected member to learn how to navigate employment services. So we're working with our POWER centres, and I want to thank those—there are so many effective training programs out there that do it for free.

I heard about Jesse, a participant in a very recent In Motion & Momentum+ training program in Wingham, Ontario, facilitated by YMCA of Owen Sound Grey Bruce. There has been no greater champion than the member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound—the member from Huron–Bruce, so many of our incredible advocates for rural Ontario who say, “No, we're going to make sure rural Ontario's voices are at Queen's Park table, and champion training pathways for those affected by layoffs.”

I just want to close by once again highlighting the most important piece that I feel really will empower and is a legacy change, and that is the construction of our training centres. When we work closely with college-university partnerships for construction management—I spoke about that earlier in this place, about the program that ECAO is doing in conjunction with Schulich for construction managers. You always have to have that talent pipeline.

One of the most profound experiences I've had is with organized labour, going to union training halls and seeing the incredible youth going through these training programs. To think, at a time when I get emails from apprentices trying to get their in-class training, trying to move—we've supported those apprentices by waiving exam fees. We got rid of the Liberal tax on the trades and waived the exam fees, put tools in their hands—their first set of tools. We supported them financially with that.

Why are we doing it? Because previous governments didn't want to build. They support special interest groups, voices who want to say no to everything—no to building more homes, no to building highways.

It's not a surprise that we won every seat in the Brampton region, campaigning to the people. We want a mandate—you take it to the people. And that's the mandate we got—to build the 413, to build the Bradford Bypass, to build more public transit, to build schools in communities like mine after Liberals closed them down.

We're building new schools in rural Ontario, but we need men and women to do it, and we're getting them into the skilled trades.

Those union training halls that were waiting on delays, the permits—just go to a municipal permitting office sometime; it can be very challenging. So ensuring that we're better supporting training centres, giving them the same sort of privileges that we give colleges and universities, is only fair when their completion rates—you look to the Ontario Construction Secretariat, and they laud the incredible completion rates of unionized training. That's something we recognize here on this side of the House—the incredible job they're doing at those training centres.

Partnering with employers—they have employer appreciation events. Imagine that: Organized labour running employer appreciation events. They're bringing employers in because they have a vested interest in wanting to make sure they're driving a productive workforce.

I'll close with the same thing I led on: How do you drive productivity? You support training. You keep workers safe, because a safe worker is a productive worker. You support workers in the face of incredible economic headwinds. That's what we're doing with this bill.

We're proud to support Ontario workers. We'll always have their backs. They know Premier Ford will stand behind them.

I'm honoured to once again rise to speak to our Working for Workers bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): I recognize the member from Mississauga–Erin Mills.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: I'm honoured to rise today to support the proposed Bill 30, Working for Workers Seven Act, 2025, alongside the Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development and parliamentary assistant Laura Smith.

With the continued support of the Premier, our government is advancing bold measures to strengthen Ontario's workforce and ensure our province remains a global leader in economic resilience, competitiveness and opportunity. This legislation marks another step forward in our government's unwavering commitment to Ontario workers. It builds on the momentum of six previous Working for Workers acts, each one delivering targeted reforms that have modernized our labour system, protected vulnerable workers, and expanded access to opportunities for all Ontarians. Our government remains focused on protecting workers, strengthening communities and securing Ontario's economy in the face of global challenges.

1430

Ontarians have felt the supply chain disruption and aggressive trade policies from our closest trading partners. But under the leadership of Premier Doug Ford, our government continues to bring forward measures that deliver protections and improvements for workers across our province.

Newcomer Women's Services graduation—I had the opportunity to join the minister in this meeting and see first-hand what is the impact of our SDF fund in a group which I think we could name a marginalized group, and they managed to revert that. They were celebrating servicing a thousand women. A thousand families got affected by this training. It opened opportunities.

As a newcomer myself at some point, when I came to Canada, I know what challenges face a new immigrant. It's not only the cultural change, not only the language barriers, not only less communication, less network—it's actually difficult to navigate the system and know some of the basic services which any newcomer can have and can make use of to advance forward.

Starting a small business as a newcomer—if the qualifications do not run up to the bar, they can start a

small business. How can they do that? Who can help them? How can they get a permit? Who can they apply for that? What do they have to be careful of? What type of permissions should you get? This is what this group was helping the newcomer women to do. Many of them started their own small businesses out of their homes, serving for their families.

Speaker, this weekend, I joined Minister Piccini to the Newcomer Women's Services in Toronto for their graduation ceremony, and I met with the people, met with the real women who made use of that program.

Every newcomer deserves a fair, efficient path to success. Ontario needs their skills to fill critical shortages in health care, technology and construction.

So as I always mention, this is the type of legislation which has helped a win-win-win situation—a win for the province, a win for the employer, and a win for the employee at the same time.

This is one of the very close-to-my-heart bills. I have been participating in Working for Workers since Working for Workers 1, which was introduced in 2019-20, which did remove the two years of Canadian experience from the credentials system, opening the doors for many of the new immigrants to be able to get their credentials and get their permits to work as professionals. Thirty-seven different verticals made use of that, including professional engineers.

Working for Workers 2 actually enabled mobility, so any professional who has a licence from another province or any jurisdiction recognizing Canada should be able to exchange his licence and get to work fast.

This is the kind of legislation which opens doors—newcomers, new grads, security and safety of the workers.

Speaker, the minister already laid out an overview of this bill.

I will now highlight some changes we are proposing to the Ontario Immigrant Nominee Program, OINP, to better support our labour market and to continue to protect the integrity of our system.

Ontario's economy is dynamic. Our labour market needs are constantly evolving, and our immigration program must evolve with them to keep the pace.

The OINP program is the immigration program through which Ontario nominates applicants for permanent residence, to meet specialized labour market needs to fill critical gaps. It is one of the most effective tools provinces have to fill immediate needs for in-demand sectors like health care. That's why we are proposing measures to give Ontario more flexibility and integrity in administering this program. Let me outline the key changes.

Stream flexibility: We are proposing regulatory changes that will allow our program to better respond proactively to changing labour market demands and ensure that nomination streams are directly aligned with Ontario's economic priorities, all while cracking down on fraud in the system that has slowed down the process for other highly skilled newcomers to Ontario. This stream flexibility would allow the program to respond proactively to

changing economic conditions and ensure that nomination streams are directly aligned with our economic priority.

To ensure our immigration program is based on integrity, we have proposed a new authority for OINP inspectors under the Ontario Immigration Act, to request in-person interviews with applicants when there are concerns about the credibility of an application. We know fraud exists, and it only harms those who follow the rules and proper guidelines of our system. In-person interviews will ensure the program is fair, transparent and less susceptible to fraud. This is just one more tool to crack down on bad actors who attempt to abuse our immigration system.

I also know that there are concerns from Ontarians about delays in decisions. The federal cuts to our OINP allocations by the federal government have slowed our processing times because we must focus on in-demand applications first and foremost. The broader measures in this package will help reduce the administrative burden and improve processing time. So my opposition colleagues who have been concerned should support this package as soon as possible.

Together, these changes will increase responsiveness, preserve trust in the immigration system and help ensure the right candidates are matched with Ontario employers.

Lately, many newspaper reports and a number of my constituents have talked about some families leaving Ontario for other places in Canada or sometimes outside of Canada because they cannot get through the system. They can't get the jobs they are qualified to do. Every skilled worker who leaves Ontario is a loss to our province. It is something our government works on, and we'll continue to propose changes which open the road to newcomers and new graduates to get a job and integrate into the system as soon as possible.

Since 2021, our government has introduced six Working for Workers packages, each filled with impactful actions based on what we are hearing from Ontario workers. This latest package furthers our impact under several key pillars.

1440

We've been protecting vulnerable workers' jobs and wallets since our second package in 2022. For example, in 2024, we brought in tip-pooling transparency, mandatory pay for trial shifts, and we clarified the rules against wage deductions for stolen goods or dine-and-dash incidents, because no one should have their wages deducted or see themselves put in harm's way because of someone else's criminal activity.

We are mandating salary rate disclosure in publicly advertised jobs posted as of January 2026, empowering job seekers with critical information and ensuring transparency from employers to prevent exploitation.

In our fifth package, also in 2024, we doubled the maximum fine for individuals convicted of violating the Employment Standards Act, sending a strong message that exploitation will not be tolerated.

Our Working for Workers packages have also been protecting workers' safety since 2022, when we mandated

naloxone kits at workplaces where there is a risk of workers having an opiate overdose, helping save lives in the face of the opiate crisis.

As Minister Piccini shared, we are taking the next steps now with mandating defibrillators on certain construction sites. We also made changes to require proper PPE fit in all sectors in our fifth and sixth packages, in 2024, ensuring safety equipment is effective for everyone.

Finally, we introduced minimum fines for repeat offences that result in the death or serious injury of one or more workers in a two-year period in our last package, which passed in December. This followed increased penalties for Occupational Health and Safety Act violations in 2022 and 2023, reinforcing our commitment to safe workplaces.

We have met workers where they are and fought worker abuse since the inception of our Working for Workers legislation pieces. In our very first package, we made licensing of temporary health agencies and recruiters mandatory, bringing accountability to a previously unregulated sector.

In our third package, in 2023, we increased maximum fines under the Employment Protection for Foreign Nationals Act for employers or recruiters who are convicted of confiscating passports or work permits from foreign nationals, protecting vulnerable foreign workers.

We further strengthened ESA penalties in our fifth package, in 2024. We improved compliance around immigration representatives, enhanced the administration of the Ontario Immigrant Nominee Program and brought one more measure to a system that has been impacted by bad actors taking advantage. These measures from the past and present are to ensure that we can proactively prevent exploitation for our province's most vulnerable workers.

Finally, we've continued previous work to support the skilled trades in this latest, seventh package. Our latest proposal follows earlier initiatives introduced in 2024, as part of Working for Workers 5, that made apprenticeships more accessible by allowing students to participate in more apprenticeship training while completing high school and requiring tech-ed credits in grade 9 or 10.

Our latest package, Working for Workers 6, introduced Skilled Trades Week, as well as creating alternative entry criteria for apprentices who don't meet traditional academic standards so that more people have an opportunity to enter the skilled trades for better jobs and bigger paycheques. These changes are helping build a pipeline of talent and ensure that more young people see the trades as a viable, rewarding career path. This is a strong foundation we are building on today with Working for Workers 7.

Madam Speaker, this legislation reaffirms our government's unwavering commitment to a pro-worker agenda. It builds on the strong foundation of six previous Working for Workers acts, each delivering targeted reforms that have improved protection, expanded opportunities and modernized Ontario's labour system. I want to thank all those who contributed to the development of this bill: workers, employers, unions, training providers and community organizations. Your insight helped achieve a

package that reflects the real needs of the Ontario workspace.

Our Working for Workers 7 package continues this momentum with a bold, forward-looking set of proposals focused on protecting Ontario workers, fighting worker abuse and supporting the skilled trades. It is a testimony about our government listening to the workers of Ontario, listening to Ontarians from all over the spectrum of the workspace, to change the bylaws, to change the regulations to meet the dynamic needs of the workspace.

With that, I will close: I fully support this bill. I'm very proud that I am part of the government who brought that bill in and I know that we are ready to go further and further, maybe for Working for Workers 20 at some point in time, if that will improve the space and workforce protections for safety.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): I recognize the member for Thornhill.

Ms. Laura Smith: It's a great privilege to rise in the House today to support Bill 30, Working for Workers Seven Act, 2025, alongside the Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development and the member from Mississauga—Erin Mills. I want to commend the minister for his ongoing leadership and steadfast commitment to Ontario's workers. I also want to extend my appreciation to the Premier for his consistency in supporting legislation that puts people first and strengthens our economy. This government is proving, once again, that we are protecting Ontario by working for workers and building a province where opportunity is accessible and people feel protected and empowered in the workplace.

The minister has outlined the key measures we are proposing to protect Ontario workers, key themes of the proposed bill, and I would now like to highlight some of the additional measures we are putting forward to fight worker abuse and to continue supporting the skilled trades.

I'll start with what we're proposing to fight worker abuse, which is a significant issue. One of the cornerstones of a strong and fair labour system is accountability and that's why we're proposing measures to strengthen our workforce safety and insurance system by enhancing enforcement under the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act. These amendments would target the few bad-actor employers who suppress claims or who make false or misleading statements or representations to the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board about injured workers' claims or even evade paying WSIB premiums. They are a small segment of the province's otherwise law-abiding business community, but they truly undermine the system and make it unfair for everyone else, including the hard-working Ontarians who rely on and deserve WSIB support when they are ill or injured. The time of avoiding paying your fair share or falsifying records is over and it ends now.

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This bill proposes new, stronger enforcement to crack down on bad actors and ensure claims are respected: a new offence for non-payment of premiums, enabling our courts to issue restitution orders to recover unpaid premiums, so everybody is supporting a system that protects workers.

We would also increase maximum fines for corporations convicted of two or more counts of the same offence in the same proceedings from \$500,000 to \$750,000, and new administrative penalties for failing to keep accurate payroll records and for making false or misleading statements about injured workers' claims. Fake, misleading statements only slow down our system and prevent workers from getting the help they need, and these changes create new administrative penalties and offences for non-compliance, enabling the WSIB to send a clear message: Employers must play by the rules.

We will not tolerate abuse, exploitation or fraud in Ontario's workplaces. The majority of employers contribute their fair share, and they do so to the system that protects all of us, and we will ensure that the few bad actors also follow.

We are also taking concrete steps to help protect job seekers from fraud. In 2024, job fraud cost Canadians over \$47 million—nearly \$15 million of that happened in Ontario alone. This is simply unacceptable. These scams don't just steal money; they steal hope, time and opportunity, impacting youth and newcomers disproportionately. That's why we're proposing a new requirement that job posting platforms must have a mechanism or procedure in place for users to report fraudulent, publicly advertised job postings to the platform, and a written policy on how these platforms will address such fraudulent postings. The reporting mechanism or procedure will have to be displayed and the policy will have to be posted clearly on a job posting platform. This measure will foster a safer environment for job seekers, restore a sense of trust for those entering the job market for the first time, and help reduce identity theft and financial scams. Our proposal will help ensure job seekers are not left vulnerable. This is about protecting Ontario workers.

As part of our continued commitment to protecting vulnerable workers, we have also launched a consultation on whether talent agencies in Ontario should be licensed. In 2022, Ontario's film and television industry reached a record of \$3.2 billion in direct spending and supporting over 45,000 jobs. That's a huge amount of people and funds that were provided because of these workers. Despite the challenges posed by the US writers' and actors' strikes in 2023, the sector still contributed \$1.8 billion to the province's economy.

Additionally, recent remarks made by US President Donald Trump proposing 100% tariffs on foreign-made films have sparked some serious concerns for Ontario's screen industry and the thousands of workers who rely on that industry. Now, more than ever before, we need to protect the workers who bring billions to our economy and entertain us at home.

Currently, talent agencies operate without oversight. There's a concern within the industry about some bad actors and the impacts it has, not only on performers, but the reputation of ethical talent agencies and the industry as a whole.

We were also elected here in this room to protect all workers, and this legislation would take action not only to

safeguard this vital industry but also to ensure that the people who bring our stories to life are treated with fairness, dignity and respect. This consultation is allowing us to work very closely with the performers, industry experts and other ministries to design a licensing framework—one that ensures fairness, transparency and respect in the industry.

Additionally, we're launching a consultation on employer access to electronic monitoring data to protect employee privacy. As digital surveillance tools become more common in the workplace, we need to ensure employee privacy keeps pace with technology. This initiative will explore what types of data employers can access, whether new restrictions or definitions are needed and how we can better protect employee rights in a modern, tech-driven workplace.

We want to ensure that workers' privacy is respected and that data is handled responsibly, and that transparency is the norm, not the exception, because in an ever-increasing digital world, Ontario workers deserve our protection. This work will guide us in the development of future policies and ensure Ontario remains a leader in upholding workplace dignity and fairness.

Next, I'm going to explain what we're proposing under this package to support the skilled trades. To ensure young people have real pathways into meaningful careers, we are exploring ways to make apprenticeships an essential part of public infrastructure development. With one in three trades workers set to retire in the next 10 years, supporting apprenticeship infrastructure is essential to supplying critical industries with a trained workforce.

We will consult with industry leaders and relevant ministries and agencies to identify how apprenticeship hiring can be prioritized in procurement for public works, such as highways, hospitals, housing and transit. This effort will give apprentices more access to on-the-job training, continue to build our future workforce and help employers fill skilled labour gaps. This is about giving more youth opportunities to enter the workforce.

One of the most exciting ways we're making the skilled trades more appealing to our young people is through the Trades and Tech Trucks initiative. Ontario's demand for skilled trade workers continues to rise and we're responding with forward-thinking initiatives that introduce students to trades early, sparking their curiosity and confidence. That's why we're expanding the Skills Ontario Trades and Tech Truck Program. This innovative mobile lab experience delivers hands-on exposure to trades careers. These mobile learning labs are pretty incredible. They're already giving students hands-on exposure to skilled trades in exciting and accessible ways.

Currently, four trucks serve school districts and communities, but the wait-list already stretches into 2026. We're adding additional trucks to continue building on the momentum we've already witnessed. Each truck is staffed with skilled facilitators and features interactive workstations.

It's a really great experience for the youth. They reach out to youth in schools and in camps, at community events, including the younger students in grades 7 and 8, which I

think is really important when you speak to the youth. Giving them these options at that young age—it's going to help us reduce the burden of school infrastructure because these trucks will reach every corner of the province and spark an early interest in rewarding, high-demand careers.

We know that preparing students early opens the doors to meaningful employment. That's why we're investing in innovative ways to engage the youth and build a strong pipeline of future skilled trades professionals.

One of the most powerful ways to protect Ontario workers and support the skilled trades, particularly in the face of current global uncertainty, is by ensuring access to fast, practical training opportunities for our youth. That's why we're proposing new ways to accelerate the construction of training centres across Ontario through the Skills Development Fund Capital Stream.

And through this bill, we're proposing streamlining planning approvals under the Planning Act and the ability, via regulation, to make scoped exemptions from, or impose conditions or limitations on, municipal powers under the Municipal Act with respect to SDF capital projects. This will support faster training for the future skilled trade workforce.

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Additionally, there have been some programmatic changes to express access to early stage capital planning funding through the SEED Pathway, allowing funding recipients to move from design to delivery faster if they choose to subsequently apply for this GROW Pathway.

And with the launch of the SDF Capital Stream program second round in 2024 we introduced the SEED Pathway, a new funding pathway that funds early stage project development, like technical drawings and designs, to help the organizers prepare for larger investments through the ongoing GROW Pathway, which supports capital projects that build new training centres and upgrade or convert existing training centres. These changes will allow recipients to build more training centres more quickly so that workers impacted by tariffs or shifting market conditions can upskill, retrain and rejoin the workforce in strong, sustainable careers, building the future of our province.

We've already seen how red tape can stall progress and prevent important projects from happening. For example, this government invested over \$4.5 million through the Skills Development Fund Capital Stream to help IBEW Local 773 build a new state-of-the-art training centre in Windsor. By streamlining approval and cutting through unnecessary red tape, we're going to help projects like this one move faster, move forward so that we can get more people trained into jobs and contributing to Ontario's economy.

With economic uncertainty all around us, our government will do whatever it takes to protect our greatest competitive advantage: our highly skilled, world-class workforce. In the face of aggressive trade policies from the United States, including tariffs that threaten Ontario's key industries, these initiatives are not only strategic but essential. By accelerating access to training and re-skilling

opportunities, we're ensuring that Ontario workers remain resilient, adaptable and supported through any global challenge.

The Working for Workers Seven Act represents more than just legislation. It's a reflection of meeting the people of Ontario where they are. When we talked about the tech trucks going to these students across the province of Ontario and bringing that accessibility of that skill to them, it really makes me happy both as a mother and as a person in the House right now.

It's the continuation of the government's promise to protect our workers, values that put dignity, safety and the opportunity for our workers at the forefront of everything that we do. We're holding bad actors accountable, we are fighting fraud and exploitation, and we're investing in young people and the future of work in Ontario.

Year after year, we continue to protect and uplift Ontario's workforce and economy by using every resource at our disposal to put our province ahead of any economic challenges, because we believe that every person deserves the chance to build a better future through the dignity of hard-earned paycheques.

I'm just going to talk briefly about something that I had the pleasure of bringing to my riding of Thornhill last week. I was privileged to provide a round table for the skilled trades. It involved a group of many different experts. There were teachers—there were actually high school teachers—there were businesspeople who owned businesses that complement the building industry, literally diverse trained individuals. I actually met a female driller, and she was a fascinating individual. We want to make sure that the young people have a pathway to these people. We have to find ways. As the minister said, one in three skilled trades workers is set to retire in the next 10 years, and supporting apprenticeship infrastructure is essential to supplying critical industries with a trained workforce. And we're going to consult with our industry leaders and relevant ministries and agencies to identify how these apprenticeship hirings can be prioritized, especially in procurement for public works such as highways, hospitals, housing and transit—so much that's happening in my own riding right now.

The minister talked about his own family and his grandfather coming here. My father came here, as well, many years ago, and it's great—because he worked in infrastructure, he would look to a building, and he would say, "Do you know what? I was a part of that." I could actually look at the CN Tower right now, and I know that my father was a part of that. He had a great sense of value to what he was doing. We have to pass that forward to the next generation.

We have to be responsible about what we're doing so that we can provide these apprenticeship programs for the next generations.

I really was excited to talk about the innovative mobile lab experience, the trades and tech truck program, because that allows these kids to really have that hands-on experience. I thought about the future of the next generation. Maybe they're going to that truck and they're

seeing something that they could never see before. We're talking about a child in grade 7 or grade 8, and they're getting that remarkable experience. They're thinking to themselves, "Maybe this is something that I could do in the future." They're giving them that tangible experience.

I can tell you first-hand, when I had that round table last week, this was exactly what we were talking about. Everybody at that table—I was astonished. They said it's about training the youth. It's about making sure that they have the best position to move forward with what we're doing, because we're going to retire. We have to make sure that they've got what it takes to move forward. That's why I'm so proud to be here.

I encourage every member in the House to join me in supporting this legislation. Let's work together to protect our province's greatest strength—our highly skilled, world-class workforce—by supporting our workers and breaking down the barriers for the next generation.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): Questions?

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I'd like to thank the Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development as well as the MPP from Thornhill for their presentations.

In the seventh iteration of the official Working for Workers bill, there seem to be things that are still missing, that workers have been asking for time and time again. Those would include allowing for people to join unions more easily with card-check certification, to bring in legitimate anti-scab legislation.

In their presentation they spoke about the WSIB, and yet for some strange reason this government has not listened to workers who have called for ending the practice of deeming and ending the use of phantom jobs. I want to ask the minister, how can you have so many Working for Workers bills and still miss this so many times?

Hon. David Piccini: I thank the member for the question and for his contributions.

Speaker, as I've often said in the past, we are always willing to listen, to sit down, to look at measures that we can put in place to support workers. I've had extensive conversations about a number of those measures that that member brought forward. I'm always willing to sit down with him at any time to discuss those issues and draw a finer point. I think at times the way in which some of these proposals are brought forward isn't conducive to what we're hearing from stakeholders. But I'm always willing to sit down and discuss his ideas to strengthen our Working for Workers legislation.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): Questions?

Hon. Sam Oosterhoff: One of the things that I really do appreciate about leadoffs is the depth and the complexity of the debate that is able to occur as a result of 60 minutes dedicated to some of the ins and outs of legislation. I appreciate that, but sometimes it's good to perhaps take a little bit of a step back again and focus on the highlight reel.

For those who are just tuning in, after a robust hour of explanation of all the pieces of this legislation, all the intricate parts, I'm wondering if the member for Thornhill would be able to provide an overview of what she thinks the highlights of this legislation are and why they're so important.

Ms. Laura Smith: I want to thank the minister for the question.

Because I'm a mother—it always gets down to that—I really appreciate the value in bringing the trades forward at the youngest age possible. I think that when we encourage, especially female students—when we get them involved in that area, the possibilities are endless.

1510

When I sat on the other side of the table last week, I was opposite a driller, a woman who was in her thirties. She was really excited about what she was doing, but she was more excited about bringing it to the next generation.

That's what made me really happy to talk about the tech trucks. I learned about the tech trucks when they first came out, and I thought they were magnificent, because it really brings the work to the kids, which I think is important.

That's why I'm so proud and happy to be here to talk about this today and honoured to put this forward in the House.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): Question?

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: My grandmother used to use the same tea bag four, five, six, seven times, and the tea was, after a while, as you can imagine, tasteless, colourless and very weak. Bill 30 here reminds me of that tea bag. Yet, this government has so many opportunities to actually stand up and support workers, and here, they haven't.

We recently read a Toronto Star article that I highlighted—that \$200 million of wages were stolen from employers, and that the government hasn't been able to somehow enforce that.

And we've seen this government not pass anti-scab legislation. We've seen the government not stand up for workers, when they try to take away their collective bargaining rights or even something as simple as 10 paid sick days.

Speaker, why is the government not supporting workers with those simple worker-positive instruments that I've just talked about? They have an opportunity—number seven, in Bill 30—and yet it's colourless, tasteless tea.

Hon. David Piccini: I've never been much a tea drinker—more coffee—but I respect the analogy. My grandmother was similar, but with other foods. So I appreciate that, and I appreciate what she's saying.

I would respectfully push back, and I'll offer her a story close to home. Parliamentary assistant Sheref Sabawy and I were at the graduation for the Sister2Sister program this past weekend with Sara Asalya, who is executive director of Newcomer Women's Services. I saw that that member was featured in her annual report—and I'm glad because I think it's something we both share. The measures we've put forward here on OINP, to bring integrity to the

system—was something we heard extensively from many of the young women who were there, who come here with legitimate skills and laud the efforts we've taken through successive Working for Workers bills, to streamline credentialing, to ban Canadian work experience. That's not weak tea. That's strong tea.

And that was put in this bill—building training centres faster and bringing trade tech trucks to rural Ontario.

We drink coffee, out in Port Hope, from Tim Hortons, but it's strong coffee.

And it's strong trade tech trucks getting kids into the trades.

This is strong legislation I'm proud to stand by any day.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): I recognize the member from Wellington–Halton Hills.

Mr. Joseph Racinsky: Thank you to the members for their speeches. It was very, very informative.

I'm proud to be a part of a government that has been supported by labour, by workers, in the previous election. I think a lot of that has to do with the work that has been done by this government in previous bills and in this bill as well and this minister, under the leadership of Premier Ford.

As mentioned, about the support for young people— young people getting into the trades, which is so important, and that was mentioned earlier.

Can you talk a bit more about how this bill will help young people get into the trades and get work faster?

Hon. David Piccini: Thanks to that member for his advocacy—always taking a keen interest in the next generation getting into the trades.

I think it's no wonder, when we look to the 21-plus union endorsements we had—it's because we show up. It's because we listen to their concerns. It's because we've put forward “strong tea” when it comes to the pieces that they want to see to protect workers, to ensure they're properly protected on the job site, to ensure they're healthy and safe, and to support their training.

This measure here for training centres—I think many people forget that at these training centres, we're actually training a next generation of workers, of apprentices, who are graduating high school, going right into a hall, getting training and ending up on the job site.

The trade and tech trucks—and this member comes from rural Ontario, as do I—we're bringing these into schools. At Campbellford high school, the most common thing I heard: “We've never tried this before.” So we're breaking down barriers—or the IBEW trade tech trailer that's going into Indigenous First Nations like Hiawatha and Alderville, who I work alongside in Northumberland–Peterborough South, the riding I serve. We're bringing it closer to home. We're so proud to do it with these strong measures.

Thank you for the question.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): I recognize the member from London West.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I wondered if the Minister of Labour had read the report that came out last week from the Workers' Action Centre where they point out that the

number one issue that they hear about from workers in this province is not reflected anywhere in Working for Workers 7—it wasn't in 6; it wasn't in 5, 4, 3, 2, or 1. It is the issue of wage theft, which has gotten rampant because of this government's lack of proactive enforcement, over the time since they took office.

Workers in Ontario have seen over \$200 million—and that's what we know of, it's likely much more than that—stolen from them by employers.

So my question is, when is the government going to introduce a Working for Workers bill that takes action on protecting workers from having their wages stolen?

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Thank you to my colleague from the opposition who's talking about this issue.

In multiple of those bills—Working for Workers 7, Working for Workers 6 and Working for Workers 5—we raised the fines. We added a lot of heavy punishment on repeat offenders who are bad players.

We need to make sure that we are standing up for workers.

And I would like to put on the record, to my colleague in Toronto Centre, this—

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): I recognize the member from Waterloo.

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's a pleasure to join the debate here today on Bill 30.

I do want to also say I'm going to be sharing my time with the member from Sudbury, who has done a lot of work on this file, and who spent most of the summer, actually, working with workers, and I think is a much-needed voice on a piece of legislation like this—which I'm now calling “working for some workers”—in the province of Ontario.

I do want to start by saying there's a general sense right now in the economy—and if you look at the Ontario Chamber of Commerce report on the economy, economic confidence in Ontario is at an all-time low. I believe there are a number of reasons for that, of course. The tariff and trade war with the guy to the south is not going very well. I can tell you one thing that's not working very well in that regard is the theatrics around addressing the tariff and aggressive trade war. Pouring out a bottle of whisky in a great show of what some might refer to as solidarity is not a solution. It's actually fairly demeaning for those workers at that plant to see that—and, also, just to lead without a plan.

In my short time that I'm going to be addressing Bill 30, I'm going to address the economic reality that's going on right now in Ontario, I'm going to be referencing some of the programs that are not effective—mainly the OINP and the Skills Development Fund, which the minister referenced—and then also propose some solutions that we need right now. We need to accelerate some proven strategies that will strengthen the economy and stabilize the economy, because there has to be a multi-faceted approach to this. Workers are at the very heart of that, and Bill 30 misses the mark. The “weak tea” analysis by our colleague here is bang on. Workers in Ontario deserve so much more.

I'm just going to reference, very quickly, the labour force survey that takes stock of where the jobs are going, where the jobs are not going, who's employed, who's not employed. They've measured these stats between 2019 and 2025.

1520

The Ontario unemployment rates among teens in particular, ages 15 to 19, climbed from 14.9% to 22.2% over that period of time. This means that one out of every four teenagers in Ontario who is looking for work cannot find work. It means that they are unemployed not by choice and not by not working hard, as the Premier insulted them by saying—it's that the jobs are not there. This leads back to the Ontario Chamber of Commerce report citing low economic confidence by those job creators in Ontario. These are recession unemployment numbers, so it should be all hands on deck. You can take any—you can do the elbows up, all hands on deck, but there needs to be some action, because press releases and theatrics are not working. Youth are desperately trying to find jobs, and they're losing hope.

Also, it should be noted that these are the stats of those people who are actually still looking for work. There's a whole segment of the population who, after they've sent in their résumé to 100 employers and they're not getting a call back and they're not getting any feedback, are losing hope. Some of them are just not even trying anymore because there are no jobs there.

So the question to the minister here is, where is the plan to incentivize youth hiring? Where is that strategy? We need that strategy. We can all agree that a youth unemployment rate of 22.2% is unacceptable. We need to rise to the occasion. Why haven't we expanded the work-integrated learning programs that have proven to be pathways to jobs and to success?

We see no evidence on this side of the House of a job strategy that is addressing the moment that we are in this province. Certainly, we see lots of distractions, though; I can tell you this much.

The Skills Development Fund, which is supposed to be this \$2.5-billion—it's not an insignificant amount of money; it's a considerable amount of money. The application process here has proven to be quite problematic, one might say. The Auditor General, in particular, has referenced what has been going on here. Just as a little tutorial—this is a fund that exists for the not-for-profit sector, for training centres and for unions to apply to have targeted job training so that people can actually get jobs. That's the goal of the fund. The problem is—well, there are a number of problems with it. The Auditor General has found, of course, that there's such a lack of transparency with this program that it's undermining confidence in the very program. If you follow the money on the Skills Development Fund, you will find that there are direct connections between the minister, the ministry and who is getting the money. This is a problem. It was a problem for the Liberals when they were in power, and it was essentially referred to as cash-for-access. It is also a very big problem for this government, I would say. Of course,

that is why we are demanding transparency on how the government is determining who gets the money and who gets the funding and who gets the press release, I guess.

The Auditor General concluded that the selection process for the skills development funding was not fair; it was not transparent, and it was not accountable. This is the very language that the Auditor General used. The Auditor General is an independent officer of the Legislature who has a duty to follow the money and tell us where that money went, why it went there, and if there are no answers and there is no clarity, then that is flushed out into the light of day. Well, we've got a lot of light on this issue these days.

She went on to say, "Given that the minister's office selects the applicants for funding and does not select only the applicants that have the highest overall score, this can create an appearance of real or potential preferential treatment by the minister's office in its selection of applicants to fund. It is also not fair, transparent or accountable to those applying for funding or to the public."

I'll just give you a quick example. The YWCA in Waterloo region does an amazing job of supporting women and supporting entrepreneurs and supporting housing. They've applied for the Skills Development Fund. It's a program called AutoCate. There's a female leader in our community who's a very successful mechanic now. She sees these pathways for women to become mechanics as something that is quite plausible and possible. Partnering with the YWCA, they've put their application in. They don't have a lobbyist in their corner. They don't know people in the ministry. They don't have tickets to the Maple Leafs game. They certainly don't have access to the Fashion Week in Paris.

It was so funny, earlier today, when the minister said, "Oh, I saw MPP Jeff Burch." He actually said that. And he said, "I know he likes Paris." This member is very focused on Ontario, so Paris, Ontario, for sure—but not Paris, France.

So there's a lack of confidence. The Skills Development Fund is a good program, but it's only a good program if it undergoes a very strict and transparent and accountable way of determining where that funding is going. In, really, showing preferential treatment to companies and organizations and lobbyists and former campaign managers, you are undermining the integrity of the program and therefore compromising trust. That is a problem for all of us in this House, but it's really a problem for the people who are supposed to get jobs, who are supposed to have pathways to a career. This is absolutely in violation of the code that we all sign on to as members.

Actually, we even say a prayer in this place that we're going to do our best for everybody—not just a few, but for everybody.

When the Auditor General came out—she went on to say that 54% of the applications selected by the minister's office and approved for funding were ranked as "poor," "low," or "medium." But these applications received about \$742 million, or 56%, of the funding allocated in the first

five rounds. There were 670 applications that ranked “high” that were not selected for funding. Surely, this is indefensible. It’s an indefensible position to be in, right?

I will say, in past years, former ministers have resigned for less than getting caught not being transparent with tax dollars, as the Auditor General has revealed.

So I hope that for the organizations like the YWCA, that has put out a program for women to get into the mechanic trades, there’s some transparency as to who’s going to get the funding and who’s not going to get the funding.

Right now, though, you’re in an indefensible position on the Skills Development Fund. The outcomes, as well, need to be evaluated on the return on investment for that funding, for those workers. At the end of the day, that’s our job—to make sure that the funding is appropriately addressed, to make a difference in the lives of people we’re elected to serve. That’s why we’re here. For the love of humanity, it’s crazy.

So, lots of attention on the Skills Development Fund—for good reason, I want to say.

This latest one from the Toronto Star: “Government Secrecy Clouds \$237 Million in Funding to Groups that Endorsed” this Premier. That’s a problem. It’s 2025.

We shouldn’t be replicating ourselves on some of the antics and shenanigans that are going on in the United States—I’ve always wanted to say “shenanigans” in this House. Actually, you’ve given me lots of reasons to do so—usually with an expletive before or after, though.

Anyway, the government has refused to release the scoring system used to rate hundreds of funding applications. It is not your money. This is the key piece—is that the program is the program for Ontarians. Ontarians are funding the program. They have a right to know what the scoring system would look like. There are so many unanswered questions about how applicants were ranked, whether the public money was distributed on merit or influence. And the government has denied any policy decisions were made for political reasons.

Well, I think you protest too much.

In fact, I was just talking to some of the folks in the media corps about this. And the media here at Queen’s Park, they’re going to apply for the Skills Development Fund.

They want to travel around, do a committee session like they did on the municipal integrity report, and then do nothing about it. That’s what we got with that piece of legislation.

1530

There has been some analysis. I mean, we shouldn’t have to FOI every little bit of information to have some transparency around where the funding is going. But the Star did, and they found that 17 unions and groups that endorsed the Ford government in the February 27 election—six hired consultants with Tory links to connect with the Ministry of Labour, according to the Integrity Commissioner’s lobbyist registry. And of course, these lobbying firms include Rubicon Strategy, headed by a former campaign manager for the Premier, that boasts on

its website that it has successfully secured millions in skills development training dollars for several Canadian unions and social services partners.

In all, the total funding—almost \$100 million; \$100 million is still a lot of money. I know that we’re going to be headed to a trillion dollars worth of subnational debt in this province, but \$100 million still is a lot of money and still requires the accountability that we all should feel strongly about in this place.

This was a special report that was done by the Auditor General. She found that the labour minister’s office doled out \$126 million in training money to 64 organizations that use lobbyists to push applications ranked low and medium—once again, not fair, not transparent, not accountable. This should not be how a ministry is running their program.

And you know what? I have to say, if the Liberals were doing this, in the past you would be outraged. You would be outraged. In fact, you would be calling for resignations. You would be calling for people to be fired. I mean, the OPP were involved prior to—with the Liberal government. I mean, there’s a good reason that this definitely needs to be investigated, right? It absolutely does.

The other part about Bill 30 is that not only does it miss the moment and miss the target and is ineffective in meeting the economic crisis and the jobs crisis that we are seeing in Ontario right now, it’s that there are solutions in front of you.

I want to just quickly address the Ontario immigrant newcomer program. This program is your program; this is the province of Ontario’s program. You’ve taken a \$1,500 application fee from skilled workers from around the world. They’ve come to Ontario under your program, and they have one year to pass the program and to secure work, which most of them have done. But you know what’s not happened? The government of Ontario has not honoured your commitment to those very workers.

We have an anesthesiologist down in Hamilton who applied to come to Ontario, paid the \$1,500 fee, obviously was working in the hospital down there and was accepted into the community, but the government can’t do their damn paperwork, Speaker.

You want to talk about red tape? It’s blue tape; it’s your tape. It’s your program. You’re failing people in Ontario right now.

Every single dollar that goes into this fund should go to workers and to employers who create good, unionized jobs. The fact that these people have brought their families here, had to restart their whole life in Ontario, and then the government’s own program fails those workers is damaging our reputation, but also hurting our economy. Folks are headed back to their countries, and they do not look fondly at this province for your pure incompetence on the whole.

The other key piece that should be a really huge factor right now in Ontario is on child care. Child care is an economic driver, right? Some 89,000 Ontarians are not working today in Ontario because they cannot find child care. They had jobs. They had careers. They had hope for

the world, and the federal government came to the table with a considerable amount of money to fund the CWELCC program, but can Ontario even do that properly? No, you cannot.

Tomorrow, I believe, is the 25th anniversary of child care appreciation day in the province of Ontario. It's hard to appreciate a child care worker when you can't find a child care space that the federal government is supposedly funding, but the Ontario government can't get its act together in order to pull off the program.

Finally, one more line on the Ontario immigrant newcomer program: I want to thank our shadow minister for citizenship and shadow Attorney General for bringing forward this issue just last week. This is one of the quotes from that press conference around securing global talent to join Ontario's workforce: "Ontario is losing skilled global talent at a time when we can least afford it.... The OINP is an important tool in strengthening Ontario's economy, bringing in skills and talents vital to our province's key sectors like health care, technology, agriculture, and manufacturing, but its present form leaves skilled talent waiting years for jobs that may never come."

This is not the way we used to treat workers who are coming to this province. There have been endless delays, weak oversight that plague the system. Obviously, the Ontario immigrant newcomer program should work for people because they want to work for us. They want to be part of the solution. "As usual, the Premier reflexively blames the federal government for the massive OINP backlog, but applicants were already enduring years-long waits before recent federal changes"—own your responsibility; this is on you. Yes, the federal government has cut the applicants down, but these are existing applicants, workers right now in Ontario who signed on to be part of the solution in the jobs and the economy.

One final line on the OINP is from immigration attorney Elizabeth Long. She says, "These nominations are a lifeline for newcomers to Ontario, but the government not processing their applications in a timely manner has devastating repercussions. People lose their status and are forced to leave the province, unable to provide for their families, or even to qualify for the program again, having lost both money and time they can't get back. This is inhumane."

It is inhumane to treat people like this. There are 34 open cases right now in my office in Waterloo. I know you have cases if you're meeting with people. We shouldn't be treating people this way. We just shouldn't.

Ontario used to be an economic engine that recognized people's potential and recognized that immigration actually is part of the way that we are, can and should be successful.

I just want to say, not only does Bill 30 miss the moment, but it misses the moment for us as a province; it misses the moment for workers. It certainly is not contributing to a stronger economy where we all can reach our potential, because when we reach our potential, the province as a whole does as well.

Now, I would like to share my time with the member from Sudbury.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): I recognize the member from Sudbury.

MPP Jamie West: Before I forget, happy Diwali, everybody. Unfortunately, I missed the Diwali festivals in Sudbury because our flight system doesn't allow me to leave in the evening. So I just wanted to say that to everybody.

I want to share some of the context. We're debating Bill 30 and my colleague from Waterloo talked about some of this, but this was an interesting year. We had an election on February 27; this bill was tabled three months later. The election was based on protecting Ontario, fortifying our province and taking care of workers.

On May 28, this bill was tabled. We're just now starting to debate it—October 20. It is seven months and 22 days after the election. People are feeling the squeeze. They're losing their jobs. This is a difficult time for the province of Ontario.

Now, the Premier has been calling it a jobs disaster, and I think that comes with some credibility. We have 800,000 workers in Ontario who are unemployed. We have nearly 18% unemployment. There is sky-high food bank use. I haven't been able to read the latest version of Feed Ontario's report, but I know, from the previous six years I've been here, that every year more and more working people are going to food banks. Speaker, 22% of youth are facing unemployment and one in four youth don't have a job.

The answer from the Premier to this has been, "Try harder." It is not their job to try harder in an economy like this. It's our job as legislators to make it easier for them to get jobs. Yet, on top of this, in this environment, we have this recent scandal of the Skills Development Fund, this kind of cash-for-access system. It seems to be rewarding people, yet 54% of the applicants who the ministry staff, the non-partisan staff, said are low-ranking and should not receive the money—the minister stepped in and said, "Absolutely, they should." Those low-ranking people got \$742 million of taxpayer dollars. That means that 670 higher-ranking organizations that probably could create jobs for these people in Ontario didn't get any funding and didn't get an explanation for it either.

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As my colleague said, the Auditor General did a report on this and the Auditor General cannot be scathing, but it is tough to not be scathing when you hear it was "not fair, transparent or accountable, and there was little rationale to explain why the high-ranked applicants were not chosen." We saw this before. This is a rerun. This is Ontario Place. This is Therme Spa. This is the greenbelt grab. This is not working for workers; it's working for donors.

Look, I'm not against the SDF program. I think it's an important program. It is a lot of money that's supposed to be invested in helping people get work. There are some recipients who absolutely need the funds. I'm not downplaying those and I'm sure certain members, when they speak, will highlight the people who should get the funds—the skilled trades, the police, the firefighters, the first-line responders. But they are not going to talk about

Scale Hospitality that, during estimates last time, I thought got \$11 million, but, turns out, they got \$17 million. The Ministry of Labour couldn't tell me what the return on investment was just for training those hospitality workers. He couldn't tell me how many people were trained, what they got trained on or how long the training was. For \$17 million, you should be able to have those answers at your fingertips.

My issue isn't with the fund; it's how the Conservatives use this fund. Let me give an example about an organization—I don't believe they applied for this, but it's just a great thing—Employment 4 Good. It is a social enterprise in Sault Ste. Marie, and they provide accessible, low-barrier employment and skill-building opportunities for community members who are experiencing barriers. Two main enterprises that they have: One is called Grocer 4 Good—they employ neurodiverse people who face barriers to employment—and the other one is Cafe 4 Good. They employ youth with a focus on positive skill-building, community connections and establishing healthy habits.

One of their employees wanted me to share something and I told them I would read it for them. Their name is Rene: "I've been navigating this system for over 20 years. Places such as Cafe 4 Good are few and far between.

"The stigma very much associated with social and mental health services, agencies and resources across different cultures and ethnicities is something very real in our country.

"I know first-hand how big of a barrier in and of itself this was for me throughout my lifetime and it continues to be for many of my peers today.

"However, here at Cafe 4 Good, the stigma behind some of these things ceases to exist. It is different here."

I'll tell you about Rene, because Rene came from the criminal justice system, and I asked how much can I share about it. And they sent me even more:

"You see, having recently come out of a life of crime and violence, chronic drug addiction, homelessness, prison and mental health, the idea of a social enterprise aiming at the development of work and life skills and the lives of young people with barriers not unlike my own, not only seemed like the perfect resource for me at the time, barely a year sober, but also the perfect opportunity to give back what was so freely given to me from a variety of different resources over the years...."

That's a great story. That's somebody who really has a lot of doors closed to them. This is an organization, through Cafe 4 Good and Grocer 4 Good, that helps people overcome those barriers. Lisa Vezeau-Allen, who is the founder, told me Rene is their number one mentor and does the best job of them all.

If I was the Minister of Labour—and I plan to be the Minister of Labour. But if I was the Minister of Labour, I would let ministry staff know that I have a conflict of interest. I know Lisa. I've been to Cafe 4 Good. I think it's a great organization, but I would recuse myself. I would tell them, because of my relationship, I need a third party to look at this to make sure it is a good thing. I don't want

the appearance of me having my finger on the scale. I think when you say that to somebody, "I really like Lisa. She's a two-term councillor. She's a great individual and does great work, but because of my personal relationship, I want to be hands-off," that's the difference between the New Democrats and the Conservatives. The Conservatives are like, "Oh, ice seats at a game? I'm there. Trip to Vegas? I'm there. Going to Paris? I'm there." That's what you call corruption. You can't do that.

Look at the context of this. We're debating Bill 30. It's seven months after the election, four months after it was tabled, 800,000 workers unemployed, 18% unemployment and sky-high food bank use. I heard a story over the weekend about people at pick-your-own orchards stealing apples. I don't mean eating an apple while you're walking around picking apples. I mean putting apples in their baby carriage to bring home because they don't have enough food.

This morning, I asked a question about wage theft: \$200 million in wage theft from employees where employers are stealing from them—\$200 million that we know about. About one eighth has been collected in the last 10 years—one eighth.

Record low enforcement to enforce the Occupational Health and Safety Act, to enforce the Employment Standards Act, and \$742 million from SDF funding going to organizations that were ranked low—and probably because of that ranking, aren't even going to be able to deliver on the resources that they're promising.

And so what do you get in this? A Working for Workers bill—seven of these, so now we're getting to the good meat, right? The first, there were some good things in them, but they're pretty lightweight, mostly around clean bathrooms. So let's get into it.

Number one: AEDs. I'm not minimizing the importance of an AED. I have a friend at the smelter who had a heart attack. He was revived. I think AEDs are important. In the workplace I was at, we're implementing them across the board. So if you're a large construction site, you will require an AED and the government will reimburse you for the purchase of that. I'm not against this, but it doesn't meet the moment of what we're talking about. When 800,000 people are unemployed, they would rather have jobs. The \$200 million that was stolen, those workers would rather get that money back in their pockets. And you could do both. You could tackle those two things and provide AEDs.

The next part of this bill: job-seeking leave. We know because of Donald Trump that there's going to be a lot of trouble. Now, I think we could fortify and strengthen all our organizations. There seems to be a lot of focus on the Conservative side about photo ops with workers. I want to see the investments. There's been a lot in Sudbury, but I think we can be more proactive about what to do.

Look at my colleague from up north, a whole career in the forestry industry. Our forestry industry seems to be left behind by the Conservative government. One location after another is being shuttered without the investment that's needed to keep them afloat.

And so, in the bill, you have job-seeking leave. It basically says—like what happened with Oshawa and the Premier said the ship has left the dock—you're going to lose your job, and when you do, you could look for one unpaid. Holy cow. I cannot imagine a single person excited about that. This is the thing you're bragging about. This is the thing you shopped around in a press conference all summer about—that we didn't sit for five months about—so you can brag about how you're working for workers. Basically, what you say is, "Look, you get three days to look for a job if you're being laid off, but there are some strings attached."

First of all, you've got to have at least 50 people losing their jobs, so it doesn't apply to everybody. They're not going to tell you this in a press conference, but these are the details. It has to be a layoff of 50 or more people. You have to know in advance you're being laid off. You can't just be surprised and laid off all of a sudden, which rarely ever happens—the advance notice.

You have to notify your employer ahead of time that you're taking your three days off, and you have to provide proof to your employer that you were looking for work.

First of all, this is the most strawman legislation I've ever heard of. If I am losing my job and I'm going to look for a job, do you think I am going to care that there's some legislation that I'm going to pull out and argue with my foreman or my boss about how I'm allowed to do this and here's your notice? This is garbage. This is meaningless to people; it is meaningless.

This is legislation that is written for people who are not losing their jobs. They go, "Oh, I guess they're doing something," but the Conservative government is not doing anything for those workers. You can look for a job. We already are looking for jobs.

Employing a mechanism for reporting fraudulent job postings—I don't know where to start with this. Here's the thing: The minister and the PAs, the associate ministers, spoke about this in their lead debate. As we know, more and more jobs are posted online. You could have fraudulent jobs online. It's not fair to workers. So now, on the online form, you need to have a visible way to report it. So a little button you can click on—or maybe on the splash page it says, "If you notice anything fraudulent, you can click here or email here." You need a policy which—oh my goodness, I know we're in a building full of people who are into policy. But it's basically a piece of paper that says, "Here's what you've got to do"—a little bit of a boilerplate. And you've got to keep records. That's it.

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You have an employee who finds a fraudulent job posting. Maybe they get ripped off. Maybe they applied for the job, and they worked for two weeks, and they don't get any money, and they worked for another two weeks because there's two weeks holdback, and now they're out four weeks of pay, and they want to warn other people about this.

You're getting ripped off because the Conservative government is not going to get your wages back. They've already proven that over the last 10 years. You'll just be added on to that \$200-million pile.

So you go to Monster.com or wherever you're applying for your jobs and you click the button and you say, "This is fraudulent." And they say, "Okay, it's good, because we have a policy also. We're going to keep records of it." And that's all. There's no accountability; I mean, technically there is—but you have to know. You have to be a policy nerd. You have to know the legislation. There's a way to make a complaint, but it's probably not even going to be proactive because the number of employment inspectors has dropped dramatically. So this, again, is meaningless.

As my friend would say, you can go down the rabbit hole and pick a hair out of the nose of the rabbit, but that is not a successful way of doing business. There isn't any accountability. There's nothing built into this that those people have to notify the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Labour inspector will investigate. It's just, you have to have a button to click. That's it. Are you kidding? How come we couldn't debate this last year, after we came back from the election?

The next part of the bill I want to talk about, because this is the hallmark—there used to be part of these Working for Workers bills, that I would talk about how this is already a law, and it became a running joke because they would write legislation that already existed. The other part that is a hallmark of these bills is doubling the maximum fine. There is nothing that the Conservative government loves more than the paper tiger of doubling the maximum fine for employment violations—because the previous maximum fine, typically, has never been levied. So even the last Working for Workers bill—when we were doing amendments, I said, "Instead of doubling it, why don't you make it \$100 million?" If you're never going to file it anyway, just go huge with it. Don't just double it. Make it 75 times the maximum. It would be better for your press conferences. You're not going to follow through anyway. It's a nonsensical, meaningless thing to say.

This morning, during question period, I talked about the \$200 million in wage theft. And to explain that, for \$200 million—you have to know, as an employee, that you have had money stolen by your employer. You have to recognize that—"Hey, when I was working overtime, I was supposed to make more money during overtime, and they didn't pay me" or "When I was at work, they were supposed to pay me, and they didn't" or, like what happened about 10 years ago here in Toronto, a gas station told somebody for several months that they were training them and you don't get paid for training and just kept them as a training centre. And that's still relevant because that money still counts from that 10-year gap.

So you've got workers getting ripped off by their bosses—bad bosses ripping them off. At the same time, \$200 million is reported. So the person says, "I know this is"—and they file a report, because do you know who doesn't, typically? Newcomers in this community, people who are vulnerable, people who are worried they're going to lose their job. So many people are going to food banks. They need any sort of income that's coming in. So you need that strength and that resolve to actually report it was

stolen. Then an inspector has to investigate it and determine, yes, it was stolen from you. So that \$200 million, that's the tip of the iceberg—of people with a lot of resolve.

The government says, “Yes, there's \$200 million.” And then they decide, “Now let's go after about half, about \$102 million. No point in going after all of it. We'll go after half.” And out of that half, the Conservative government was able to collect less than a quarter—less than one eighth of the original \$200 million. They want people to believe that they are standing with workers and fighting with workers because they got about an eighth of the money that was stolen from them—and for a lot of those workers that means no money at all.

Also, there's going to be a reporting system, where they can click a button to say that they were tricked, in a job-reporting thing.

Also, there's going to be a clean bathroom.

Also, there's going to—what are we talking about?

There is an urgency happening right now that I'm sure we feel on this side. If you go to the grocery store and talk to people—average, everyday people, people who don't debate for a living—they're worried. Retired people are worried. Young workers are worried. Parents are worried. Parents like me, with adult kids who all live at home because they can't afford to buy a house, are worried. Things are going to be tougher with Donald Trump. We all know this. And this is the meat and potatoes that you give to people?

I heard a speech on leadership once. I love this quote. He said people are thirsty for leadership, and you can either quench that thirst or you can hand them a dry, empty paper cup. This bill is a dry, empty paper cup. There is nothing in this bill to get excited about. It's not bad, but there's nothing exciting in it. There's nothing giving hope to people. There's nothing that's helping people make ends meet. It's all right, but this should not be your first labour bill coming back after Donald Trump has become the President, after everyone's life is in chaos, when people are worried about losing their jobs, in the middle of knowing that 800,000 people don't have a job.

Stop by someone who doesn't have a job and tell them they're going to have an AED if they go to a construction site and see how excited they get. I'm not putting down an AED. They do save lives.

In fact, getting to the AEDs—my colleague from Nickel Belt tabled the Defibrillator Registry Act. So this is the idea that if you're having a heart attack—say you're out with your children, you call 911, and the 911 operator can tell you where the closest AED is. So if you just happen to see someone—you don't know them—you can find an AED and bring it to them. They're really easy to use. Once you open them, they'll walk you through and they tell you what to do. They work really well. She tabled that in 2020. Then, a member from the Conservative Party—I can't look up the title, sorry—tabled a similar bill, which is fine. Sometimes we borrow each other's bills and we enact it in larger legislation. That was passed. But five years after that has been passed—that was passed in

2020—if you call 911, it's unlikely that they're going to be able to tell you where an AED is. So if you have one at a construction site and you haven't enacted this part, in a large construction site, you may not know where it is. A worker might know there's an AED and might know that his co-worker is in real trouble and might not be able to find the AED for them.

I want to go back to this maximum fine thing. I'm talking about a law, but there's a reason for it—with a maximum fine. We know there's \$200 million in wage theft. We know, for example, in Waterloo, there's a company called Dutchie's. Apparently, they're opening a third location. They're well known in Kitchener-Waterloo for being the biggest wage-theft employer. They only hire newcomers. Your first work experience in Canada is an employer known across the province for stealing from workers—not held accountable. For some reason, they can't get their fingers on them. Every local newspaper knows about the story, can tell the story, but the Ministry of Labour can't seem to figure it out. The Minister of Finance, who's supposed to collect the money, can't seem to figure it out. But there is work that can be done. And why isn't it working well?

Why aren't there maximum fines? One, there isn't the willpower to levy the maximum fines. But also, in a government that's working for workers, why, in 2018, did a Conservative Ministry of Labour instruct Ministry of Labour inspectors to not initiate any new proactive inspections? This wasn't COVID—it wasn't about social distancing. This was a mandate. This was a policy choice from the Conservative government. “Don't go out and find trouble. Don't go out and protect workers. Just let it slide.”

1600

Those ESA—Employment Standards Act—officers go out and proactively find organizations that are the bad actors in business. When they penalize them—it's the same as a speed camera. If you get a speeding ticket, you might slow down; you might get a little worried about it if you're doing the same thing. If you stop doing the proactive investigations or inspections, well, that means that fewer inspectors are going to go out and fewer issues are going to be fined, and it will drop down. The ministry's own data knows that this is a great, proactive way to stop wage theft—but they're not doing it, and as a result, workplace inspections are 77% lower than they were seven years ago. That's a major drop—and it's not by accident; it's by design. It's not a bug. It's a feature.

What the Conservative government loves to do is find a bunch of folks in hard hats and maybe in medical gear and get a photo, but they don't want to be there when there's trouble. I've never seen them on a picket line. I've never seen them standing around a bunch of workers who are struggling. I did see them high-five on Bill 28 when they forced a bunch of workers back to work who were using food banks. But I don't see the compassion they talk about when they talk about standing with workers.

I've talked a lot during these Working for Workers bills. I've got to say—I want to be honest, because sometimes we're very partisan. There is some good work

in these bills. There is WSIB recognition of cancer. There is work that is important in these bills. And some of the stuff in these bills becomes a little bit dull, because you're cleaning up legislation—and I want to be fair to that. But when you get to the seventh version of a labour bill in times like we're having now and what you're serving up is kind of milquetoast, it's nothing to be proud of or brag about.

People ask me this sometimes in my riding about when we sit—I know we're busy in our ridings; I'm not downplaying that. But we normally follow the schedule similar to a high school program. So if your kids are in high school, we're probably here at Queen's Park. When they go home at March break—we're home for Easter. We're off during Christmas. We normally don't sit through the summer unless something urgent is happening. There's a balance. But we haven't sat for five months. There are important things we could be doing and things we could be resolving and fixing and helping.

A lot of the focus in the bill doesn't meet—I feel like someone came from a different timeline and didn't realize the situation we're having here and was like, "Let's clean up this thing with AEDs, and maybe there will be a button someone can click when they apply for a job."

In the Working for Workers bills, they love to talk about the trilogy—and I don't know how to say a "four-ogy," afterwards. They love to talk about how many they've had. I don't know why they keep saying this is the seventh. It's technically the ninth.

They don't want to talk about Bill 124; I wouldn't either, if I had Bill 124. Bill 124 is basically if you put steroids into the Liberal Bill 115. The Liberals, in Bill 115—they attacked just education workers and capped their wages at 1%. And the Conservative government said, "Oh, hold my beer." They said, "What if we did it to all public sector workers?" With that 1% cap, they frustrated people, no doubt, but they also drove a lot of people who are in the public sector medical field away from that field—forced people into early retirement, had people who won't come back to train new people in the health care sector, particularly nurses. It was a disaster on the health care system—Bill 124.

During COVID, nurses were protesting that the government didn't respect them. It's unbelievable.

The cost for this was \$6 billion in compensation—because it's a violation. It wasn't just a bad idea, as a bill; it was against the law, and it cost them \$6 billion in compensation. There are more cases that are coming forward—but not just that it cost us that, as a province. The taxpayers paid for a bill that they knew was never going to fly, and paid for the appeal of the court challenges to this bill. It's a stupid thing to do with taxpayer dollars. They never want to talk about Bill 124 because it's embarrassing for them, and also because they want to build the narrative of "we're working for workers."

The Conservative government—they love the headline; they don't like the fine print, right? The headline of the bill, Working for Workers—someone who's busy at a Tim Hortons or skimming through it and they say, "Oh, man,

that's great. They're back out—nothing for me in this one, but maybe the next one. Maybe when they get to 12 or 13, there will be something about me. But it seems like they're doing something."

For Bill 124—speaking of creative writing—the title was Protecting a Sustainable Public Sector for Future Generations Act. Oh, chef's kiss. You rip off public sector workers to the tune of \$6 billion and counting, and you call it something just shiny and friendly like that. It's like drowning somebody and calling it the "Breathing Underwater Act."

Bill 28 also has a lovely title. It was the Keeping Students in Class Act. And so you know how you keep students in class is that you take the EAs—you take the lowest-paid educational workers, so not the people you typically think of as a teacher, but the other people in the education system who support all of that, the one-on-one staff, the support staff, the people in the offices. A lot of those members make very little money.

You may remember, Speaker, I was speaking about this. I shared stories about people who are trades workers. I know they love to talk about trades workers. There was a trades worker in Sudbury who had to move back in with his parents. He and his kids had to move back in with his parents—because that's how low they get paid there.

There was an EA who had to go to a food bank and had so little money that she couldn't afford child care, so she had to bring her little kids to the food bank with her. So she couldn't even hide from her kids that even though Mom had a full-time job working for the provincial government, she couldn't put food on the table for her kids.

My colleagues from the New Democratic Party—we shared stories about this time and time again.

And the Conservative members, a majority government, all stood up and voted this through—literally stepping on their necks.

And then I forget the fines—Bill 28 also included a fine of \$4,000 per day if they had a strike and \$500,000 per day for the union.

And just like Bill 124, Bill 28 used the "notwithstanding" clause and it violated the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, because you have a constitutional right to strike.

The Minister of Labour and the Minister of Education, when they passed this bill, knowing there are workers going to food banks, knowing there are workers who can't afford to move out of their parents' house, who have to move in with their kids—when they passed Bill 28, they got up and high-fived like it was the happiest day of their life, like they had won the lottery. I can't even imagine that.

I've talked in the House before—I grew up below the poverty line. We lived in geared-to-income housing. My mom worked full-time, just like this lady I spoke about. She had two kids. My mom had two kids. We didn't have to go to the food bank—or maybe my mom had enough money that we went to child care and I didn't know she was going to the food bank. But things were tough. In my

head, as a child, I imagined that the government of Ontario would be trying to make my life better and not high-fiving each other, passing a law preventing my mom from negotiating better wages. That's shameful.

That's what they talk about when they say they're working for workers—"We're working for workers who don't complain, who don't want to negotiate, who don't want a better stop in life, and who want to be in photos with us. We're working for workers who have lobbyists. We're working for workers who are donors. We're working for workers who want to be in the photo and want to smile with us and want to endorse us and want to quote with us. But we are not working for any worker who is struggling or who doesn't agree with us or doesn't want to give us what exactly we want to say. And also for the employers—if the employers complain, speak up or do anything, they are probably going to be denied funding." That should be the long title of this act.

I want to say, these OSBCU/CUPE members defied this Bill 28, and I'm proud of them, because they refused to go to work. When the government said it was a strike, they said, "It's a protest." And I'm proud to say that members of my caucus, New Democrats, joined them on the lines. The response from the Conservative government was, they began tweeting photos of us on the line, as if we were the bad guys for supporting workers—because in their mind, they were like, "If you're standing for workers on strike, then you're not really part of our team. You should be standing with us, pushing down these workers." I'm particularly proud to say that they won. They won, in fact, to the point where the government passed a bill that I like to call the "Men in Black" bill, because the bill basically was, "Look here: click—that never happened." That's how bad of a bill it was. It wasn't just repealed or retracted; it was like this bill never happened, and we'll never talk about it again. I'm proud to bring it up on a regular basis when we do these Working for Workers bills.

1610

So let me summarize.

The Premier was looking for a reason to call an election because he knew that things weren't going well and people were getting caught on. He was concerned about the greenbelt grab and the fact that it didn't build any houses and was more just about trying to transfer a couple of billion dollars over to some wealthy developer friends. Donald Trump got elected, and he said, "This is my time."

He called an election, on February 28, to protect Ontario—if you believe the hype, it was, "Protect Ontario. We need this mandate," which seems weird because every government leader, every party leader had said, "Let's work together. This isn't the time for partisan politics. We need to protect Ontario." But the Premier said "No. We need to protect Ontario." We're like, "That's what we said." So he called the election. On February 28, we had an election. It changed a handful of seats—but primarily, we stayed about the same.

Three months later, they tabled the first labour bill, to protect the people of Ontario with vigour and gusto. Then they don't even start the lead debate until after the

summer, and "summer" I use loosely, because it's October—I've already taken my boat out of the water—so not really summer. The summer session was pretty long.

Seven months, 22 days after the election; four months, 22 days after the bill was tabled, we're debating a bill that's not really what anybody is crying out for. Again, it's not that it's bad; it's just not really good. It doesn't really, really help people. It's not a bill where I would say, "Oh, my God, this Working for Workers bill is going to protect Ontario."

We're sitting here. In each of our ridings, we have people who are unemployed, are worried about becoming unemployed, or they have friends or family members in that situation, and they are scared. Some 800,000 people in our province are unemployed, 18%—just shy of 18%—unemployment; sky-high food bank use again.

I expect the Feed Ontario report to say again that more working people than ever before are using food banks. During the election, I cannot tell you the number of senior citizens I spoke to who just openly told me they're forced to use food banks. There was one couple where the husband's entire pension cheque goes towards their bills, their housing and hydro. Her entire pension cheque supplements that. They only get to eat because of food banks. That wasn't even uncommon during the strike.

Youth unemployment is higher than it has ever been—one in four people without a job.

Housing is completely unaffordable. People are getting ripped off on rent; it's being jacked up higher than you've ever seen before, and unscrupulous landlords are getting away with stuff that you would never expect before.

People, in their distant memories, remember the COVID crisis in long-term care, when military people were brought to tears by what they saw, and a government that rewarded them with 30-year contracts, saying, "Ah, it wasn't that bad."

You have the scandal of the Skills Development Fund—742 million of taxpayer dollars supposed to be in place to help people get better jobs, bigger paycheques. In the midst of this, you're just finding out that if you do get a better job and bigger paycheque and your employer steals those wages from you, the Conservative government is not going to have your back.

We are in a place right now where people want something better. They want that sign of leadership. They want that quenched. And the Conservative government grabs a dry paper cup and holds it up for everybody and says, "This is working for workers."

I think we can do better. Again, it's not that the bill is terrible. It's just not what you need. It's not what it's standing for. I've talked about Bill 124 and Bill 28. I've got about three minutes. And I wanted to say that New Democrats, we have labour bills that we put through. The Conservatives voted against them on a regular basis—I hope they would adopt them. But we're proud of our bills.

My colleague right behind me, he's got a deeming bill. WSIB—there's a phantom job. If you can get a phantom job and somehow pay your bills with phantom money, WSIB will deem you and take some of your money away from you.

My colleague from Thunder Bay–Superior North, she has a WSIB bill that is so ambitious, it's almost rewriting the act to actually help workers to follow the Meredith Principles, to work the way it should, instead of being a thing where the Conservative government and the Liberal government before them decided to just keep funnelling the money to the workers then blame the fact that there's not enough money, until you can't actually—or give the money, hundreds of millions of dollars, back to the employers, and then blame the fact that there's no money in the pot so you can't help the workers. And those workers, instead of being on WSIB, they can go to ODSP and live in poverty for the rest of their lives.

Anti-scab legislation—I'm here because of anti-scab legislation. I waited for a year for someone to bring an anti-scab legislation while I walked a picket line. Right? I'm proud to table it on a regular basis. Conservatives are proud to vote it down. Prior to them, the Liberals were proud to vote it down.

The member from London West has a gig workers bill, not the one that the Conservatives passed, where they're like, "Yes, we're fine with Uber ripping off workers and misclassifying them as contractors," but an actual one to protect gig workers so they have access to protections like ESA and the occupational safety act, so they make more than four bucks an hour after all their expenses.

My colleague from Toronto–Danforth: heat stress bill to protect workers who work in hot environments.

These are all bills that would be substantially stronger than this.

I want to recognize too, in the last 20 seconds I have, my member from Waterloo, who has been leading an advisory committee, meeting industries across the board about ways we could help them and their workers. What we do is we meet with the employers, and we also meet with the workers for feedback on it, and we revise that on a regular basis.

There are things we can do that are better than this, but this is a dry, empty cup.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): Questions?

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: I would like to thank my colleague from the opposition.

You mentioned during your very nice speech multiple points. He kept saying, "This bill had that; it's a good thing. This bill had that; it's a good thing too. This bill had that and it's a third good thing." So, I can point to about three different points—good points, as you mentioned them.

Maybe we have some other prospect and a couple of other points, but do you think this will prevent you from supporting this bill with all the good points—up to you, what you are saying—which can help workers, newcomers and new grads to get into the job market?

MPP Jamie West: Look, I said it a couple of times because I'm trying to not be as partisan and trying to be fair. The bill isn't terrible. It's just not good.

There are people who are desperate right now—literally—people who cannot afford food, and this bill

doesn't meet the moment when it comes to actually working for workers. You want a Working for Workers bill? Let's table one tomorrow, saying that we're going to give back half of the \$200 million that was stolen from workers. I'll sign off immediately on it. That's something we could stand behind. That would actually put money in people's pockets.

Again, if someone has a heart attack and there's a defibrillator nearby and we're able to tell them there's an AED and how to use it, I'm all in favour of that, but I want to make sure that the 800,000 people without a job get jobs.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): Question?

1620

MPP Lisa Gretzky: I heard the minister talking earlier about how they're supporting women workers, so talking specifically about coveralls fitted for women, clean portajohns for women. While he may think that that is truly supporting all of womankind, I do want to draw attention to the fact that when it comes to women workers in this province—and my colleague talked about some of the bills that this government has brought forward, anti-worker bills—those bills were anti-women-worker bills. We're talking about nurses, developmental service workers, PSWs—the lowest-paid people who are living in their vehicles or shelters or going to food banks. And this government said, "Hey, we've got an answer for that. We're going to bring in Bill 124 and suppress your wages further."

When we're talking about education workers—the lowest-paid education workers who get laid off every summer, work two to three jobs to try and keep a roof over their head, are living in shelters, going to food banks—this government's answer was, "Oh, those scary women. We're going to bring in Bill 28 because they're asking for too much, and we're going to suppress their wages even more and push them down even more."

So I want to be clear: The anti-worker bills that this government has brought forward are anti-women-worker bills.

The minister also said earlier that they're going after employers that are not paying into WSIB, which is interesting because this government is actually giving workers' WSIB money back to employers. They're giving it back to the employers and taking it away from the workers. Yet when my colleague from Sudbury asked specifically about cracking down on the \$200 million in wage theft, where employers have stolen money from workers, the minister wouldn't even answer the question.

I'm wondering if my colleague from Sudbury could explain maybe why the minister doesn't want to address that.

MPP Jamie West: I don't understand why not. It seems like something you should be doing.

The previous number that I had before the report from the Workers' Action Centre came out was actually \$60 million, so \$200 million just blew my mind because it's even more ridiculous they're not able to chase after it.

When you talk about women and protecting women, helping women be successful, I think of the Ontario Autism Program and how badly it has failed the people of Ontario. Because when families start to fall apart, generally, women end up taking care of those kids and bearing the burden in disproportionately larger numbers. Just statistically, that stands.

We need to be funding these things so that our kids are successful and so families can stay together.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): Question?

Mr. John Fraser: Good afternoon. We had a pop quiz this morning, but the unfair thing about the pop quiz, guys, was I didn't let anybody on this side answer the question.

Since we're talking about skills development, and conflict of interest is so topical, could you tell us what conflict of interest means, and perhaps provide some examples that might clarify for the members opposite who didn't seem to have a clue about what a conflict of interest meant?

MPP Jamie West: Sometimes, in this room, when we talk about conflict of interest and what's happened with the greenbelt and now the SDF, it feels like a training video they give you where they have to give you a really easy example everyone would understand. Because most of us would understand that if you're doing something that feels a little fishy and funnelling a lot of money to, let's say, a developer, then maybe you shouldn't go to Vegas with them and maybe you shouldn't get a massage with them. Or if you're using the SDF fund to highlight and push up some of the lower-ranking ones above the higher-ranking ones and ensure they get a lot of money, then maybe you don't want to go to Paris for the wedding, or maybe you don't want to accept the tickets to have ice-side seats at a Leafs game, and especially, you don't want to be in a photo cheering and yelling so everybody knows it.

It reminds me, in fact—a friend of mine, we're at the curling club and during the greenbelt scandal, he just said, "They're not even good at corruption." Unbelievable.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): Question?

Hon. Sam Oosterhoff: I want to thank the member opposite for his speech this afternoon. But I have to tell you, we heard a lot from the member opposite about their own legislation, we heard a lot about his concerns in a number of different areas, but he didn't talk that much about the actual legislation itself.

This is a classic bait and switch. It's what we see from the NDP. They'll talk about things over here, they'll talk about things over there, but they don't want to talk about the legislation that's in front of them. They don't want to talk about an iterative approach to strengthening workers' rights here in the province of Ontario that we've taken through successive pieces of legislation. The reason they don't want to talk about it, Speaker, is because they know that this builds on a legacy of continuing to strengthen workers' rights here in the province of Ontario, to make safer workplaces here in the province of Ontario and to continue supporting workers here in the province of Ontario.

So my question to the member opposite is, why does he spend all of his time, when it comes to government legislation, talking about his own party's ideas instead of actually debating the legislation in front of him to begin with?

MPP Jamie West: Thank you to my colleague across the aisle. Look, I live 400 kilometres from here. We can get there walking, or we can get there driving, or we can get there by flying. Walking is going to take us years, driving is going to take about four hours, and flying is going to take one. What you're doing is crawling to Sudbury with these bills. They're not bad, but they're not getting there.

When you say they're iterative and they're slowly helping workers—you want to help workers? Help them get in a union, card-check certification. Give them that ticket to the middle class. Want to help workers? All the people who are gig workers, who are getting ripped off by these large multinational corporations—get rid of DPWRA and classify them as employees. Treat them fairly. Let them at least make minimum wage.

But these little, tiny nudges—when you talk about bait-and-switch—they're just an excuse to stand on a stage in front of reporters and to tell people who don't know any better that people are going to have clean washrooms on construction sites even though they had that right for more than 20 years.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): Question? I recognize the member from Mississauga—Erin Mills—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): Oh, is it your turn? My apologies. I will recognize the member from Mushkegowuk—James Bay.

Mr. Guy Bourgouin: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

You know, it's the seventh bill on the workers, and you've talked so eloquently of what's missing and what's been missing right throughout these seven bills. But we're facing so much stress now from the US, and now we're going to see even more companies closing, more companies going under CCAA. We know the impact that's going to happen on workers, because who gets paid first? The banks, and then you've got the shareholders, and then you've got—guess who's at the bottom—workers.

So I'd like to hear from you, if they really want to help workers, because you mentioned so many—but that wasn't mentioned. I want to give you the opportunity to mention how CCAA affects a worker when companies go protect themselves. Who gets paid and who doesn't?

MPP Jamie West: I've got 10 seconds: They're last in line and typically don't get the money. You could pass legislation to make it effective so they're first in line. This is what we saw with Sears, with Hudson Bay, and with other companies where workers end up last in line.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): Further debate?

Mr. Stephen Blais: Thank you very much. I'll be sharing my time this afternoon with the member from Ottawa South.

Madam Speaker, I'm pleased to stand here today to debate Bill 30, Working for Workers Seven Act, because I think every single person in this chamber says and believes that they care about workers. Many of us talk about opportunity, about dignity, about the chance to build a better life for their families. That's not a partisan idea, Madam Speaker; that's an Ontario idea.

But, if we're going to call something Working for Workers, then it actually has to work for workers—not for lobbyists, not for donors, and not for political insiders. Because, right now, too many Ontarians are falling behind while this government congratulates itself.

Let me tell you what I'm hearing in Orléans and across Ottawa and across the province. People are working harder than ever, and somehow, they're still falling further and further behind. The cost of groceries is going up. The cost of their rent is going up. The cost of their hydro bills and their water bills and their property taxes have gone up and up and up. And jobs, well, those jobs aren't as secure as they used to be.

1630

Just last week, Stellantis announced it's moving Jeep Compass production from Brampton to Illinois. That's thousands of Ontario auto workers now facing pink slips because their jobs are heading south.

Madam Speaker, it's not just the auto sector feeling the squeeze. In the town of Ear Falls up in northwestern Ontario, the local sawmill has suddenly shut down indefinitely. That mill is the community's economic heart. Its closure means that about 150 unionized workers are out of a job, with no timeline and no certainty for when operations might resume. When a plant like that closes in a small town, it doesn't just hit paycheques. It hits the local hockey team, the grocery store, the gas station—the entire community. These are proud, hard-working people who want nothing more than a fair shot to earn a living. Yet in too many corners of the province, they're being left behind.

At the same time as we see these plant closures or plant relocations, we see that youth unemployment has climbed to record levels—I think it's now over 14%, the highest it's been in a decade. That's one in seven people out of work. You can't build a future if you can't get a start.

Unemployment in Ontario is at staggeringly high levels, and this is not something that has just come out of the blue. This is not a Trump phenomenon. My colleague from Ottawa South and I were in the media studio last December talking about unemployment rates. You know who wasn't President last December? Donald Trump wasn't President last December. So, this is not only a Donald Trump phenomenon. This has been building and building and building. What's clear is that we don't have a booming economy in Ontario. What we do have, though, is families wondering how long they can hang on.

This bill talks about working for workers, but when you look at what's really happening in Ontario, it feels more like workers are the ones doing all the work, while the government's friends get all of the rewards. The Skills Development Fund was supposed to be the answer to

many of these economic and labour issues. A \$2.5-billion fund to help workers retrain, to help small businesses find talent, to make sure Ontario stays competitive sounded great until we learned how the money was actually handed out.

The Auditor General told us what happened: Over half of the approved projects were rated “poor,” “low” or “medium” by ministry experts. Yet, somehow, at the direction of the Minister of Labour, those low-rated projects took home some \$742 million. Meanwhile, hundreds of high-scoring proposals from real training organizations were left on the sidelines.

When you look at who did actually get the money, you find a who's who of government friends, donors and lobbyists. Speaker, that's not working for workers; that's working the system.

And let's be clear: This isn't just about one bad decision, it's a pattern. It's the same pattern we saw in the greenbelt scandal. It's the same small circle of insiders getting ahead while everyone else falls behind because they play by the rules.

Madam Speaker, you would think, after the greenbelt scandal, after losing ministers and members of their party, after a multi-year RCMP investigation, that the government would have learned its lesson, but instead of cleaning up, they just changed the venue. They went from farmland to job training. It's the same playbook, just a different field. They took a program meant to help working people and they turned it into a \$2.5-billion piggy bank.

So let's be honest and clear about who gets hurt when that happens. It's not the folks with lobbyists. If you can afford to hire a lobbyist, I would argue you're probably doing pretty good. You're probably amongst the highest level in our society, Madam Speaker. But do you know who can't afford to hire lobbyists? The single mom in Windsor trying to retrain after her plant closed or the young man in Sudbury who wants to apprentice as an electrician but can't get into or find a program. It's the newcomer in Ottawa trying to upgrade her credentials so she can work in her field again. Those are the people that Bill 30 and the other Working for Workers bills were supposed to try to help, but while they're filling out applications and hoping for a fair shot, the minister's office is busy making calls to their friends.

Madam Speaker, you can't tell those workers to pull themselves up by the bootstraps when the government keeps tying their shoelaces together. It's just not how we're going to help people move forward.

Let's call it what it is. Let's put some meat on the bones here, so to speak, because when you follow the money, the story kind of tells itself a little bit.

Pace Law Firm got \$3.3 million. Its president is now the chair of Metrolinx—just a small government agency. He doesn't make a lot of money, somewhere in the high six figures. Of the 252 people they trained, I think 35 got jobs. That's a heck of a record.

King Animal Hospital, founded by major PC donors, walked away with \$1.3 million.

Scale Hospitality, as I understand it, owned by a personal friend of the Premier's former principal secre-

tary, landed \$17 million. Their application came in late, it scored low and was still approved by the minister's office to, "Take another look."

I don't know about you, Madam Speaker, but when my son has a project due at school, I ask him to get it done on time. And when he doesn't do particularly well and the teacher says he's getting a bad grade, I don't call the teacher up and say, "Have another look." That's not how we teach our kids to act at school. That's not how I think anyone in the public expects applications for government money to work, and I think it's clear in that case that the minister likely overstepped.

1640

But it goes on; there's more. The Social Equality and Inclusion Centre is apparently tied to a long-time ally of the Premier, and this person, who is a friend of the Ford family, was described as "Rob Ford's favourite nightclub owner." We know that Rob Ford used to like to party.

Apparently, these guys pulled in \$6.5 million. That's not economic development; that's political development. If you've got the right connections, you get the contract. If you don't, you get the rejection letter.

Let's zoom out a little bit. Ontario used to lead the country in job creation. We were the economic engine of one of the biggest and most important economies on the planet.

Now we're leading in lost potential. Stellantis moving jobs south isn't just about one company; it's a warning shot. It's a government that's asleep at the wheel while others invest, innovate and protect their workers.

While the Premier was telling friends and partisans at rallies that he was a big supporter of Trump's and wished he won the election, Donald Trump was criss-crossing the United States, talking about what he was going to do. He was talking about tariffs during the election. Over and over and over again, Donald Trump said that tariffs were one of his most favourite words in the dictionary: "Tariff this and tariff that;" "we need better deals." He's the deal maker. That's what his election was about.

Despite that talk from the former President, the Premier said—and he was caught on video—that he supports this guy. At one point, he said that his support of Mr. Trump would be "unwavering."

Then guess what? Mr. Trump gets elected, and the Premier is shocked that he's actually keeping his word. Maybe we should all be shocked that Donald Trump is keeping his word, but he campaigned on tariffs, and that's what he's doing. As I said before, the news about job losses in Ontario started long, long before Donald Trump got elected, and it started long, long before he took office.

While our youth unemployment hits record highs, the government priority seems to be to protect insiders. If Bill 30 really meant what it says, if it was truly about working for workers, it would start by fixing the system that's stacked up against them.

Working for workers should mean that when you lose your job, you get a fair chance to train for a new one. It should mean that your tax dollars go to programs that actually deliver results, not favours; it should mean that

the public service—professional public administrators, not political staff—decide who's getting the money; and it should mean that government measures success on how many lives they improve, not by how many press releases they can print. That's what fairness looks like. That's what working for workers should look like. That's what leadership definitely looks like.

Bill 30 is another chapter in a long list of slogans from this government: "Open for Business;" "Getting It Done." Now we're on the seventh version of Working for Workers, but you can't build trust on slogans. You build trust on results. You build it on integrity. You build it on fairness.

Right now, the government is failing those tests, because while Ontario workers are falling behind, the government continues to help its friends get ahead. While Ontario youth are desperate for jobs, this government is desperate for photo ops. And while everyday Ontarians play by the rules, the government keeps rewriting them for their own insiders.

The people of Ontario deserve better than this. They deserve a government that sees them not just at election time, but every time a decision is made about their money and their future. They deserve a government that works for them, not over them.

And so, I'll end with this. If this government really wants to work for workers, it should start working honestly. End the insider deals. Stop treating public money like it's party money. And remember who signs the cheques: It's the people of Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): The member from Ottawa South.

Mr. John Fraser: Thank you very much, Speaker, and it's a—well, I'm not going to say it's a pleasure to stand up to speak to Bill 30 or version 7 of the Working for Workers Act. I'm not sure seven is going to be a lucky number for the minister, but we'll see.

I'm going to say what I said for Working for Workers 6, 5, 4, 3, 2 and 1: I'm not sure the Working for Workers Act actually works for workers in this province. Because, if you look at it, it's usually a lot of tinkering, taking some regulation and putting it into legislation—regulations that have been around for a while—or putting something into regulation to give the minister more power.

I don't want to start off being negative—I know I sounded a bit negative. There will be a pop quiz after, but you guys get to ask the questions. So pay attention and you can ask me really tough questions—and my colleague from Orléans—and we're happy to answer them. So, please, take your best shot, as they say.

Here's the thing. The great thing in this bill is the commitment to AEDs and to make sure that employers with more than 20 people have to have them on site, I think, and within three months. That's a great thing. It's kind of a juxtaposition to how long it took the government to act on a private member's bill that the member from Nickel Belt, myself, and the then member from Eglinton—Lawrence had that passed. It took two and a half or three years to actually develop the registry, which was

incredible, because the thing with AEDs is you need access to them fast, and two and a half years was not that fast.

But now the government is moving in a very speedy way towards this, and I appreciate that. Now, I'll ask everybody here, who has an AED in their office? Good. Anybody else have an AED? Good. Get one. They're not expensive. Look, go on a registry, and something might happen in your neighbourhood or around your office, and they'll be able to find that AED and save someone, like my colleague from Orléans. That's what it means. So, think about it, they're not that expensive. Maybe the Board of Internal Economy—I'm not on it anymore—might want to help you out, but it's not that much money, I'm sure we can all afford it.

So that's the good piece about the Occupational Health and Safety Act. But I want to mention two things that the government has chosen to ignore and not follow through on. The first is what's now called Bill 8—it's my private member's bill—and it's an act to amend the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997.

And what it does is it actually provides workplace insurance for workers who are doing similar work to other workers who are covered. These workers are mostly in retirement homes, group homes, youth facilities—but their employer is not the province. So, they're not a schedule 1 employee. They don't have to be covered by WSIB. But if the thing that they owned—and these all are things that the province is paying for, right? It's just, in their facility, the workers are covered and, also, workers in retirement homes, similar work to long-term-care homes. They're not covered. And what that means is a lot of workers, mostly women, working two or three jobs, aren't being covered by WSIB, which means all of those jobs are covered if they get injured.

But other people, if they're working in another place that the province owns, they get covered. Same work, different coverage: totally unfair.

Now I've talked to every Minister of Labour since 2017—and that's including Kevin Flynn—and each one of them has said to me that they were going to do it, and it hasn't happened yet.

1650

The bill has been introduced six times and debated twice. I take my inspiration from the member from Oxford who did the same thing with a private member's bill. He knows what I'm talking about. We're going to debate it again. So I'm hoping that the minister is somewhere listening. I hope that you're listening, and you'll take a look at the bill because that is so unfair to those workers.

They're among the lowest paid, working two or three jobs, doing God's work, taking care of the people that we care for most, whether that's a developmentally disabled son or daughter or relative, or an aging family member or friend. We said all these things during the pandemic about how important those people were. Well, we need to show them. I would hope that we could have seen that in this bill, but we didn't see it.

The other occupational health and safety matter that I want to raise is—I've been spending a lot of time in

schools in the last two or three months. Here's the thing we should all know: I know we're talking about trustees and we're pointing our finger over there at these guys as the problem. The problem in our school system is our schools aren't safe. They aren't safe for three reasons: Class sizes continue to grow; special education needs are unmet; and when you build inclusion into that, and the mental health crisis is not being addressed in schools, they're not safe places.

Right now, teachers, educators and people working in schools are treated as if they're an industrial workplace. They actually need a change in regulation that puts them in a part of the act that would be more appropriate to what's happening in schools. There are lots of injuries happening to educators. There are lots of incivilities. There are lots of things that are going on in schools right now that we don't think are going on.

Every day in every board in Ontario, there's a school, an elementary school, where a class is being locked down. There are multiple instances where teachers are treated terribly, where kids are at risk. So, the government is not doing anything in this bill to address that. It was an opportunity.

The AED thing is great but that's not all. I mean, four months and that's the best you can do under occupational health and safety? You can do better.

Now, I'd like to talk about skills development. I'm sure you would all like to hear more about skills development because I don't think you heard enough already today. I was teasing this morning a bit about conflict of interest, but I was trying to make a serious point.

Hon. Sam Oosterhoff: Oh, now you say that.

Mr. John Fraser: Well, I'm making a serious point, right? It's a serious point. The minister says, "Yes, I chose a lower-ranking project, and my friend was lobbying for that company." I didn't say, "Premier, you know what? I've got this problem. I've got these people who I know who are lobbying for these projects that I think are really good, but I've got to stand back because I can't even have the appearance of conflict of interest." And anybody who has sat on a board, or anybody who has been on a municipal council, or anybody who's a minister right now, should know that's what you do. But the minister didn't do it.

And when you look at the preponderance of things like \$27 million for bars and restaurants and nightclubs in downtown Toronto, well, people like the 27,000 people in Windsor who are out of a job or the 24,500 people in Oshawa who are out of a job—how do they feel about that when they see that? How do they feel about that when they see that the money that's supposed to be there for them is instead going to friends and insiders for things that aren't important? And when you look at that money for bars, you've got to wonder, are we paying people to cover costs they would already incur? Are we just backfilling their pockets? Are they training people they would have to train anyway because they've got to hire them? It's a cost of doing business, man. That's what you do: You train your people, you pay them, or you try to retrain them.

So, I look at that \$27 million, and if I was in Windsor, I would be very angry. I won't use the word I was about to use. It's just not fair. It's just not right.

You know, it's the same—let me get the names here. So the same people—there are hundreds of millions of dollars that are going to firms, low- and poor-ranking, and maybe some medium-ranking. One of the distinguishing characteristics is they're represented by lobbyists—lobbyists who the government knows.

Of course, I can't find all the names here, but I will find them in a second, don't worry. They're buried in here somewhere. They're names like Massoudi, Fidani-Diker, Diamond. Am I missing anything, guys?

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Teneycke.

Mr. John Fraser: What's that?

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Teneycke.

Mr. John Fraser: Oh, my God, Teneycke—the big one; the big fish.

How does that give people any confidence that their government is looking after them? It really feels like they're looking after other people. It's not like this hasn't happened before in another way, shape or form.

Then, on top of that—I don't know if anybody's following Mr. X's podcast; I'm sure you all will be at some point because he has some interesting things to say. Now, granted, I don't know Mr. X that well, but apparently, he knows that Minister of Labour very, very well. People who lie down with lions sometimes get eaten by them, right? My dad used to say, if you lie down with lions, you might get eaten by them—

Interjection.

Mr. John Fraser: I hear you chirping over there—

Interjection.

Mr. John Fraser: There we go; anyway—

Interjection.

Mr. John Fraser: Okay, do you want to know what? There's only one member across the way who had the courage to stand up to talk about conflicts of interest and that was the honourable member right over there: the House leader. He stood up, he answered. I thought that was a great thing. Everybody else froze in their seats. I could see everybody glaze over. "What does he mean?" "Conflict of interest?" "Shocking."

Interjections.

Mr. John Fraser: Over there: How many of you would make a decision that benefited a friend and then go to his wedding—

Mr. Stephen Blais: In Paris.

Mr. John Fraser: —in Paris—

Mr. Stephen Blais: During fashion week.

Mr. John Fraser: —during fashion week? It's good to have friends with privileges, that's what my colleague said earlier today.

Common sense, the right thing for the Premier to do is to say, "You're fired, Minister." That's what he should be saying, right? This apprentice, he's got to go, right? It's not working.

Okay, forget all that stuff, forget all the inside stuff—I know you're forgetting already, remember you've got to

ask questions after—forget all that stuff. Just forget it, okay? What did the Auditor General say? Unfair; not transparent; preferential treatment—more than half of the projects and half of the money went to poorly scoring and some medium-scoring projects. And you've got a minister saying, "Yeah, yeah. It's okay. We can do this. I did it for my friend." Then it begs the question, what other friends did it get done for? Which is not a real shocking question given the government's record. It's not really—I don't think it's a shocking question.

The minister openly admitted it on the radio. Nobody else has admitted it over here, but my colleague just described a whole bunch of situations of all the connections between these people who have received money in skills development—a law firm—give me a break. Didn't he become chair of Metrolinx?

Mr. Stephen Blais: Yes.

Mr. John Fraser: Okay, so he gave money to a law firm and then the head of that law firm gets a public appointment. What did he do? Did he hit the daily double? What's going on over there, guys?

MPP Wayne Gates: They don't come to committee.

Mr. John Fraser: Well, that's another thing altogether. Don't get me going.

The dental clinic that opened and had more cabinet ministers at it than a hospital opening—come on, guys—and the donation records to back it up—

Mr. Matthew Rae: Veterinary.

Mr. John Fraser: Veterinary? Did I say veterinary? What did I say?

Mr. Matthew Rae: You said dental.

Mr. John Fraser: Oh, sorry. I got it mixed up. I'll start that again: A veterinary clinic that had more cabinet ministers at it than any hospital opening I've ever seen, and they had a donation record to match. Come on, you guys are smart over there. You can connect the dots. You're watching. I can see it in your eyes over there when we're talking about it.

1700

You know, the poor minister had to stand up. No one was defending him apart from the House leader, who did it once but didn't do it again. The Premier didn't get up. Nobody else got up.

Mr. John Vanthof: It took you 15 years to get that entitled.

Mr. John Fraser: I know. I've never been that entitled. I can say some people were. But that's not fair. That is just not fair. That's not fair—

Mr. John Vanthof: Not you personally.

Mr. John Fraser: Thank you very much. There we go. I thought you were my friend. I thought you were my friend, but I know otherwise, right? I know otherwise now. You're mean, man. You're mean.

But you guys can connect all the dots. You read the papers, right? You look at it. How can you defend it? You can't. It's just like the greenbelt. And what's going to happen is we're going to keep peeling back layers of the onion, even if the minister loses his job—which he is

going to. It will happen. It's coming. It's just going to take you a while to get there.

We all know what's going to happen. We've seen this movie before. Not just with this government; I've seen it in other governments. I've seen it happen—of all stripes. When you mess up like this and everybody else is in on it, somebody's got to go down. And the minister will be going down, and he should. He should be fired, even without all the conflicts of interest, just on the basis of how bad the Auditor General's report was.

Would you accept it? If you guys were over here, what would you be saying? Exactly, exactly what I'm saying, and you should be saying that right now. You should be saying that to your colleagues.

Look, there are 700,000 people in Ontario looking for work. And when they see this stuff and hear this stuff, what do they think, in your riding? What are they thinking in your riding, right? They're not working, right?

Interjection.

Mr. John Fraser: I don't think so.

Right now, when you look at all these people who are already rich, hiring lobbyists and getting lucky off the skills development program while those 700,000 people are trying to just keep a roof over their heads or feed the kids, that's not good. Those people have a right to be angry. That's not fair. It's not just. It's wrong. And the minister should be fired. It's that simple.

We'll park the skills development for a little while. I want to get on to the immigration act. I want to tell you a story. I'm not sure that what the government is doing here is going to fix things. I was at the building and trades convention last weekend, and I ran into an IBEW member who works in my riding and represents electricians. He told me a story about this gentleman who worked through them, apprenticed through them and became an electrician. He was working and employed. He wasn't from this country. They called our office, and we tried to help them with the Ontario immigrant nomination plan. But what happened is everything got shut down. So, you know what? He's got a son who was born here. He's married. He sold his car, gave up his lease and went back home, because he didn't want to risk not being able to come here. Now, what do you think is going to happen with him? It doesn't make a lot of sense.

The other piece I want to bring in is the government restricting residency for physicians to only people who have had a high school education in Ontario. Does everybody know about that? So you have to go to high school in Ontario here to be a resident, to become a physician, to practice in this province. That excludes anybody who was trained anywhere else who didn't go to high school here in Ontario. When I saw that—actually, my daughter saw it first, and she said this is exactly what it means. It means you don't want more doctors. You don't. Because you're just restricting a whole bunch of people here, who might even be Canadian citizens, might be landed immigrants, are trained and you're saying, "Don't come in." I was just speaking to some physicians upstairs, the OMA. There will be empty spots.

I don't know whose brainchild that was—I was going to say brain fart, but I don't know if that's a word I can use in here. Okay, I'll use that. But I don't know whose it was, right? But if you want more physicians, why would you do that?

Now, okay, the Minister of Colleges, Training and Universities is here. You should have kept your head down, because I'm going to talk about colleges. You shouldn't have done that. It's too bad. While the government is developing all these skills—I'm not sure if they're developing skills—they're doing what they do best, which is take care of insiders and friends and donors, right?

Georgian College: What's happening with Georgian College? It's shutting down. What's happening in Algonquin College? How many programs are being cut at Algonquin College? My colleague from Nepean just told a story today about a constituent who had come all the way down here to go to college, just to be told after he rented an apartment that the program was cut.

Cutting hundreds and hundreds of programs and 10,000 workers—the college system is something that we should be proud of, where we should be developing skills. That's the thing that Bill Davis started and built. But this government is letting it wither, while it's taking care of its friends. See, I think you should get that money. See, Minister, I'm fighting for you. I'm fighting for you.

Hon. Nolan Quinn: It's \$2 billion.

Mr. John Fraser: Yes, but it's not working. It's not working. You let it wither.

And the other problem was, you just let people just have a run of the park on foreign students. And you did that because you didn't want to give them any more money. You didn't want to give the colleges any more money and then you come rushing in at the last minute and say, "Here's some money," when it's too late. The proof is in the pudding. They're firing people and they're cutting courses. They're cutting programs.

See, Minister, I'm on your side. I want that money to go to you. I want colleges to be good so that kids can get into programs. We all do, all of us. I think even you do. But it doesn't look very good when the government is spending so much time taking care of their friends. It's the same old names: Teneycke, Massoudi, Fidani-Diker, Diamond. Have I missed anybody? You guys aren't paying attention. That's okay.

Mr. Matthew Rae: Nobody is paying attention.

Mr. John Fraser: Okay. Do you guys know any names over there? Come on, there are a few more. There's a couple of people who work for the Premier's nephew who was a minister before. I can't remember their names right off the top of my head. They helped to take care of the skills development stuff for their clients as well.

Why did people have to lobby the government to get the Skills Development Fund? What's the point? Why don't they just fill out an application? Why do they need someone to go and talk to them? Why don't they just need someone to give them some strategic advice instead of having to go and say "wink, wink, nudge, nudge"? You

know, that hubba-chubba moment where somebody says, "It's okay. You scratch my back; I'll scratch yours." Anyway. I digress.

Hon. Nolan Quinn: Hubba-chubba?

Mr. John Fraser: Hubba-chubba, yes. I got that one into the Hansard twice. That's the third time. And what it means is, "Just a little bit too close, a little bit too friendly. Hey, don't tell anybody." That's what it means. You guys know what it means. Come on. You do it all the time. It's an old white man's term. Come on. Come on, you know—

Interjection.

Mr. John Fraser: Oh, you're not old, okay. I know. Okay.

Well, I don't know. I'm having a heck of a good time. I am focusing. Talk amongst yourselves while I get my spot here.

Interjections.

Mr. John Fraser: Okay. That's great. You're helping me a lot.

The Planning Act, okay. You know, there isn't something the government puts forward that doesn't have something about the Planning Act. The House leader would know that. I think we've had a few housing bills. I think the Planning Act is being made to look like a quilt, and not with matching patches, that's for sure.

1710

Interjection.

Mr. John Fraser: There we go. Once you wash it, it's going to shrink and it's all going to pull apart, but we know that already because it wasn't actually about planning. It was all about land speculation, which is very similar to what's happening in the skills development program, but again, I digress.

I'm going to go back to what the Auditor General said. The Auditor General reports the Skills Development Fund selection process was "not fair, transparent or accountable, and there was little rationale to explain why the high-ranked applicants were not chosen."

Speaking of that, we kind of know who was chosen, but it would be really great to see—and I'm hoping we can find out—who wasn't chosen. Who wasn't chosen?

Interjections.

Mr. John Fraser: Oh, that's funny. Laugh for now. Do us all a favour: Take care of the colleges, okay? Because they're hurting right now—just saying, Minister. They're hurting right now. Speaker, through you, just tell them they're hurting right now, okay?

But that's fair game. I did say that the Premier treated government like it was his personal piggy bank, and I meant it when I said it.

What would be really good to see is who didn't get it that were high-ranked, and if we could find out whose ridings they were from. Does anybody know somebody who should have got it that didn't get it in your riding? You probably do. You're not going to say. I don't expect you to say. But you know what? What would be really good is—why don't we just bring the whole thing in here, in the Committee of the Whole, take a look at the Skills Development Fund and let the minister explain the

rationale for choosing certain things, especially the law firm? It would be interesting, the law firm and the connection between the appointment to the chair of Metrolinx.

You came at the right time. You reminded me as soon as you sat down, Minister. It's like the daily double. He hit the daily double. That's so good. I don't know. I think it should make you guys feel uncomfortable, at least, maybe just moving around in your seats a bit.

The most movement was the Minister of Labour standing up and down all morning long this morning and everybody else just staring forward, glazed, quite silent, except one time when the House leader—well, he didn't really come to his defence. He came to the Premier's defence because the conflict-of-interest question was a difficult one, and the member clearly understands it, so I had to say thank you to him for doing that.

Interjection.

Mr. John Fraser: I do. Yes, because that's what I did. Yes, for sure. Okay.

Why don't we do this? Let's get the lobbying scorebook here.

Rubicon Strategy, Kory Teneycke—\$100 million in grants to their clients. What did he do? I think apart from running government, guys—because you all know he runs your government, right? Apart from doing that, he ran the campaign. Does he still have a chair at the cabinet table?

Amin Massoudi, \$21.5 million; Upstream Strategy, Michael Diamond, \$31 million upstream, apparently without a paddle; ONpoint Strategy, Nico Fidani-Diker—aren't he and Mr. X connected somehow? I made a mistake saying "minister X" this morning; I meant to say "Mr. X." Maybe he could be minister X and Mr. X.

Who else do we have here? Michael Ford staffers David DiPaul and Jonathan Kent became lobbyists and secured their clients \$10 million.

That's a pretty good record, guys. Half the projects, half the money—low-scoring. If that doesn't make you uncomfortable, I don't know what will. You should all want to get to the bottom of it, this legislation notwithstanding, because this is just tinkering.

I know the government is going to stonewall. They're not going to want to show any records because there probably are not really good records, because that's generally what happens when ministers' offices interfere—because we know you don't use your government emails. Why would you do that? Why would you want to keep a record? Just use your own emails. That's what the government does. That's not coming from me. That's the Information and Privacy Commissioner.

Okay, yes. Oh, my gosh. Hey, you know what?

Interjections.

Mr. John Fraser: Yeah, no, I just can't believe it's, "Host a fundraiser, get a Skills Development Fund grant." That's the way: Host a fundraiser, get a Skills Development Fund grant. And then if you're a really big player, you know what happens? You get appointed the chair of Metrolinx. Isn't that so, Minister?

I know you didn't appoint him. We all know it comes from the corner office in the middle. Skills development, greenbelt, MZO, Ontario Place, you name it—all roads lead directly to the Premier's office.

FGF Brands: \$1.2 million. That's what they got. They donated \$66,000 to the PCs.

Interjection.

Mr. John Fraser: Yes. Look at the money. Look at the money—Dentacloud.

King Animal Hospital: \$1.3 million. Oh, that's the one where we had more cabinet ministers at a hospital opening. Their record for contributions are—just a sec here—

Interjection.

Mr. John Fraser: I don't have that here. I'll have to go and dig that out.

Interjection: Focus, John.

Mr. John Fraser: I'm focused. You guys aren't standing up here for 40 minutes. You're all sitting down there and you're going to give me some questions in a little while. So unless you—

Interjections.

Mr. John Fraser: I'm not worried about your questions. I want them. I want them, guys. You see? You're all paying attention, which is the point. That's the point.

What's happening with the Skills Development Fund is wrong. That's not to say everything is wrong with it. There's great work being done out there, but they get painted with the same brushes as the minister doing something for his friend, or these projects awarded clearly based on who people knew, not on the merit of the project.

That's why the government won't back it up. It's wrong. You all know it's wrong, and it's got to come to an end. The government needs to come clean on it. The minister should be fired. It's that simple. And I'm not even talking about the conflict of interest.

Have you all had enough yet?

Mr. Tyler Allsopp: You've got 11 minutes.

Mr. John Fraser: I've got 11 minutes. I could use it if you want me to. What do you think?

Mr. John Vanthof: John, you're on a roll.

Mr. John Fraser: I don't think I'm on a roll. I think it's late in the afternoon and I'm beginning to drag.

So, just to recap—I want to make sure you're all paying attention because there will be a pop quiz at which I'll get all the questions. Well, you can give some to Steve as well, too. I think he'd like them. Yes, maybe we'll give some to him.

Interjection.

Mr. John Fraser: Enough already from you. Oh, my gosh, I thought he was my friend.

Interjection.

Mr. John Fraser: There we go. It's funny, eh? He's supposed to be to my left, but he's really to my right. Have you noticed?

Again, just to recap: occupational health and safety, AED stuff—really good; compliments to the government. It's in great juxtaposition to how long it took them to get to the registry. It's the right thing to do.

All members should have a defibrillator. If you don't have one in your office, they're not expensive. They don't take much to upkeep. I think they even use C batteries now. They're under a thousand bucks, so get one. It will save a life. Again, my colleague knows. You never know; it might be someone on the street, around the corner—they'll know it's in your office. So I commend the government for that, occupational health and safety.

I hope the minister is listening. I hope you can talk to the minister. It's wrong what's happening to PSWs, DSWs—personal support workers, developmental services workers—and youth workers in this province who are working in a place that is not owned by the province. They're not covered by WSIB. Often, they're working two or three jobs. If they were covered and they got injured in one job, it would pay for all their work, income replacement. If they get injured now with insurance companies, they get paid for the hours they worked there. That's it.

1720

There's a reason that I keep bringing this bill forward: It's unfair. In the grand scheme of things in this place, it's this big a problem for us, and it's that big a problem for them. If I have to introduce it a seventh time and debate it a fourth time—if I'm still around here, if you don't kick me out, you don't have enough of me—I'll do it again. I'm not going to stop. I'm not going to stop until I leave this place to make sure that's corrected, because it matters. These are people who care for the people we care for most: the developmentally disabled, older people, youth in crisis. I really want you to remember that, and I want you to talk to the minister about that because I'm not sure he's going to want to talk to me.

Occupational health and safety—teachers, educators, schools—we need to fix that. They're not a plant. They're not an industry. We've got a problem with safe schools. I don't like saying "violence in schools," because I know that is a challenge, but in elementary school you can't describe some of the things that happen as violence, right?

An educator was telling me the other day—his wife went back to work. Literally the first day back, a seven-year-old gave her a concussion. What's happening in schools makes it not a safe place to work and not a safe place to learn. They need to be safer, and one of the things you need to do is to protect those workers in those schools better than we are now and recognize the fact that they aren't a manufacturing plant or an industry.

Immigration act—I just want you to remember that story: A guy came here, got trained, became a journeyman, was married, had a kid, had a place, had a car, and had to go home. Telling people who want to be doctors they have to go to high school in this province in order to get a residency spot is really saying, "We don't want doctors." It's not fair. It's not right.

I don't understand it. I wish somebody could explain to me the rationale in doing that when it comes to, well, fixing our doctors crisis and being fair to people who have acquired skills elsewhere, want to come and work here, want to practise their trade. I can't tell you how many taxi

drivers I talked to who have a skill, who have been trained, who have gone to university, who have been driving a cab for 20 years. Then they tell me, “I’m just so happy my son or daughter is a lawyer,” or a nurse, or an engineer. They’re just happy that their children have succeeded, but they didn’t get a chance to do what they wanted.

I don’t know how we would feel if we weren’t allowed to do what we’re doing here. If somebody said to us, “This thing you can do and you do really well, you can’t do it. You’re not allowed to do it. There’s no way forward for you.”

From an economic perspective, why would you not utilize the resources that were spent on training somebody by somebody else? In the grocery business, I used to hire people from McDonald’s because I knew where they were all trained. When I became an MPP, I hired staff from Starbucks because I knew they had a great HR process and they were trained really well, and also I could talk to them and could see what they were like, and they were interested in service.

My point is, people made an investment—they made an investment in themselves, other governments have made investments in them, their parents have made investments in them—and we’re not letting them do what they can do. So this change they had to the physician residency program? It is not right.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: That’s just draw 1, the first draw. The second draw, they’re eligible.

Mr. John Fraser: It still restricts—with all due respect, Minister, we can parse, right?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: There are multiple draws, John. You know that.

Mr. John Fraser: I do. But you know—otherwise, you wouldn’t be responding to me. We know.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Any international doctor can apply and maybe get matched.

Mr. John Fraser: Well, I was talking to a group of physicians upstairs who are reasonable, normal, thoughtful people, who—don’t take my word for it—just said it’s not going to work.

Interjections.

Mr. John Fraser: Well, no, we increased the matching program, and we also increased international medical graduates.

If you want to talk about this—you’re the group who ended the physician readiness program in 2018, because the Liberals did it, and then you brought it back seven years later. Don’t you think it would have been good to have that physician readiness program through the pandemic and after the pandemic? And then, all of a sudden somebody said, “Oh, look, there’s this really great program. Oh, my gosh.” And the only reason you cancelled it was because the Liberals did it.

The smart thing to do is take a look at things and see if they’re working and then call it whatever you want to call it. Call it the “Ford physician readiness program”—and then all of a sudden, it’s okay.

Anyhow, I’ve got 120 seconds left here, and I want to make it through to the end so my colleagues won’t think that I clocked out on them.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Give us your pitch for leader.

Mr. John Fraser: Hey, do you want to know what? I’m glad you asked me that, because here’s the answer: It’s actually not about one of us; it’s about all of us.

Hon. Nolan Quinn: Aw, that’s cute.

Mr. John Fraser: That’s the point. It’s about all of us.

Interjections.

Mr. John Fraser: No, but it’s true. It should be even the same thing for you guys—it’s about all of us. It’s about the people we represent. It’s about all of us. And somehow thinking that there is only one person who can lead, there is only one person who is going to change the fortunes of all of us—it doesn’t work that way, guys.

Interjection.

Mr. John Fraser: It’s team, buddy. It’s all team, right?

Thanks for asking me the question, because I got asked the question this morning, and I wanted to say that out loud. It’s about all of us—and actually, in this place, it’s about all of us; it’s not about one of us.

MPP Wayne Gates: There’s no “I” in team.

Mr. John Fraser: That’s right. But there is an “m” and an “e.”

Interjections.

Mr. John Fraser: There we go. It’s true.

We’re getting down to the last 49 seconds. The last person at home has fallen asleep long ago, and this has been—do you know what’s great? It’s our first day back, and we’re all still—it’s kind of like getting on the bicycle, but you’re a little wobbly. So if I’ve been a little bit wobbly today and not as intact—but you guys have been good. You’ve listened. You’ve fully participated. And I’m looking forward to your continued participation for the next 10 minutes or so.

Please, let’s get some tough ones going, guys. We’re happy. We’re here to answer your questions. And if you want me to describe a conflict of interest, I’m more than happy to do that for you.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): Questions?

Mr. Matthew Rae: Thank you to my colleagues—there were two colleagues. I know the member from Ottawa South talked ad nauseum this afternoon, but I want to thank the member from Orléans for his remarks as well.

My question is to the member from Ottawa South. He was describing the Ontario Immigrant Nominee Program. The federal government—immigration is a federal responsibility—cut the amount of spots given to Ontario. He was talking about insiders. I was wondering if he used his Liberal insiders—he shares a riding with David McGuinty. Did he pick up the phone and call the federal minister of defence and see if he could help in an immigration issue?

Mr. John Fraser: Thanks for the question.

I have great staff, and they did everything. That’s what they do.

Interjections.

Mr. John Fraser: No, we regularly call members’ offices on immigration cases—we call it the OINP program here.

You can pick on me. Don't pick on my staff. They go all the way.

We did our best, and as a matter of fact, that member from IBEW came up to thank us for all the stuff we tried to do.

1730

I'm just trying to demonstrate a story as to what happened here. I didn't say, "You did it." I said it was a problem.

And I've got a great staff. I hope they're listening.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): The member from Niagara Falls.

MPP Wayne Gates: It's always a pleasure to rise.

I'm going to say my daughter Tara-Lynn is watching. She thought I was doing 20 minutes this afternoon; unfortunately, I'm not. So I just wanted to say hi to Tara. She's the number one fan for the Toronto Blue Jays. Let's hope they win too.

Today, I thought we'd be talking about affordability, talking about the crisis that we have in health care, talking about education and what's going on with education; not talking about a labour bill that doesn't really address the issues that matter to workers in the province of Ontario.

I'll give you a couple of examples because I've only got a minute.

Anti-scab—we continue to have 2% of employers using scabs in a workplace. It makes no sense to me. I have no idea why they can't support getting rid of scabs.

Deeming: You talk about caring about workers. What worker should get hurt on the job and end up living in poverty and, in some cases, losing their family and not being able to pay their bills, and then falling back and being collected by taxes because they've got to go on OW and ODSP? It makes no sense to me.

Speaker, 800,000 people are unemployed in the province of Ontario; 17.9% of young people can't find a job in the province of Ontario.

So my question to the Liberals is, what do you think should happen to the labour minister? And please be clear.

Mr. Stephen Blais: Thank you very much for that question.

Certainly, there are a great number of labour issues in the province. We've seen record levels of youth unemployment. We see jobs fleeing Ontario to other provinces, in construction. We've seen now, obviously, decisions by some to close plants in Ontario and move those jobs south.

Of course, this was while the Premier was boasting about how enormous his support for Donald Trump was during the last election, while Donald Trump was touring the United States saying that he was going to bring tariffs, that "tariff" was amongst his most favourite words in the dictionary. Meanwhile, the Premier was encouraging the former President to win re-election and saying that his support for Donald Trump was unwavering.

That labour shift from Ontario to other parts of Canada and that labour shift south is a huge problem. It's not a problem that the government seems to be addressing very much.

They talk tough about things like electricity—

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): Response.

Mr. Stephen Blais:—deliver on anything. So it would be good if they actually started backing up their tough talk on the Americans with some actual tough action.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): Question?

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: I want to thank my colleagues for their debate today.

I think we've spent a lot of our first day here talking about the Skills Development Fund. It says a lot, I think, about the state of politics here in Ontario that we have to be standing here, rather than doing the hard work that's needed to take care of our economy, to build jobs—that we're having to sit here and discuss process with this government, a government that's unable to be accountable, to be transparent and follow a process. That's what it comes back to, I think, over and over and over with this government.

So my question to my colleague from Ottawa South is process, accountability—what can the government do to be more accountable to the people in Ontario, to stop these types of things from happening over and over again?

Mr. John Fraser: In this instance, just provide the list of applicants, their scoring, who was successful, who wasn't successful, and details as to why people were chosen, which projects the minister or the minister's office or the Premier's office interfered with.

By his own admission—the Minister of Labour said, "I intervened on behalf of a company that was represented by a very close personal friend. Oh, and by the way, I had a great time at the Leafs game with a director of that company." He didn't declare a conflict of interest.

The government should want to shine a light on it and members across should, because in each of your ridings, I am sure there are people who weren't successful because they didn't get picked. They might have been high-scoring, and you may know about some of them.

I think the simplest thing to do is to disclose that information. The minister could do this in the Committee of the Whole—come and tell us all what happened, why it happened. We could ask questions. I think that would be a good way to do it. We should all want to do that. That Auditor General's report was so bad.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): Question?

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: My question for my colleague from Ottawa South—we've known each other for 15, 20 years maybe. He knows exactly what I'm going to be talking about now.

Our friend, colleague, from Toronto Centre said about Working for Workers that it's boiling the tea bag multiple times. I think that's not fair for the Working for Workers series. Working for Workers series, from Working for Workers 1, which removed the two years of Canadian experience—my family waited four years for that.

Second, Working for Workers 2, which cost my family three years and eight months—each one of them changes something for the working force in Ontario.

In my opinion—

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): Question?

Mr. Sheref Sabawy:—this series of legislation is the best thing done for immigrants in the past 40 years.

Can you give me your insight? You were the Liberal at the time.

Mr. John Fraser: Respectfully, to the member opposite, this government has returned billions and billions and billions of dollars to employers but not one plug nickel to these PSWs and developmental service workers and new service workers who are at risk because they're not covered by WSIB—billions and billions of dollars. It's this big a problem for us. It's that big a problem for them.

The problem with the Working for Workers Act? It fixes problems that are this big, not the right ones, and leaves the big problems for people exposed. That's my point. This is just tinkering. Why this number seven—it's because you want to keep saying it. Often, you're just taking things that are regulation and putting them into legislation or making a new piece of regulation or doing something that's really sensible, like the AEDs. That's great—

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): Response?

Mr. John Fraser:—but it's not helping those workers who aren't covered by WSIB. That's my point.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): Question?

MPP Catherine McKenney: To my colleague—either one, from Ottawa South or Orléans: Almost weekly, I get calls from workers in my community who were nominated for permanent residency under the Ontario Immigrant Nominee Program. They have been waiting now for over a year, just for a response to their application. They were actually nominated. They were asked to apply. Many of them are sorry that they ever came, and they're out of jobs.

Would you agree that if this government wants to do something for workers, who they invited, we could follow Manitoba's lead? They're requesting that the federal government actually extend work permits—

Mr. John Fraser: Yes.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): Further debate?

Mr. Matthew Rae: My colleagues are thrilled they get to hear my monotone voice again this afternoon.

It's a pleasure to rise and speak on Working for Workers, Bill 30, the recent iteration of our Working for Workers legislation. It really builds on the important work that our colleagues of all members of government caucus have been doing over the summer as well, but even leading up to this most recent piece of legislation.

I know Minister Piccini, and PA Sabawy and PA Smith as well, spoke earlier this afternoon about our government's desire to continue to support our hard men and women helping us build Ontario, build the homes we need,

build the public transit, the schools, the hospitals, ensuring we are there for them, ensuring that we're making them, first and foremost, the people that we are there to support.

And obviously, in the challenging times that we have, Speaker, with President Trump and his unjustified tariffs, it's even more important that we're there, supporting our workers in Ontario to ensure that they are making a good wage and ensuring that they are continuing to contribute to the economy and to our great province of Ontario.

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Ontario was the first jurisdiction in North America to require naloxone kits in certain workplaces. They'll be the first in Canada, as has been mentioned already, which I think everyone in this place agrees is a very important policy around automatic external defibrillators, or AEDs, and so I hope all my colleagues will be voting in favour of this legislation as it moves forward through the process. But ensuring that these AEDs are on construction sites and projects across Ontario—once again, Ontario is stepping up and leading the way in worker protection as well.

Speaker, I know we're continuing to work to support businesses, and the workplace safety board, or WSIB, will reimburse eligible constructors or people on the construction site up to \$2,500 to purchase the AEDs, which is very important. These measures will improve the chances of workers surviving a cardiac event on a construction project and help businesses shoulder the costs of these life-saving pieces of equipment.

Speaker, as I mentioned, we're in challenging economic times with the man in the White House currently south of us and his administration. Workers really do need programs that get them off their feet, ensuring they're back in the workforce, in the jobs that are high-paying. We'll hear about it from Minister Fedeli and the Premier talking about the good-paying jobs our government is attracting to Ontario.

I've mentioned it many times in this place that Ontario traditionally is not competing with our colleagues in Manitoba or Quebec; we're competing with our colleagues in Michigan, Pennsylvania, Ohio, New York, Kentucky, the Carolinas. We're competing on the global stage for those good-paying jobs, and it's heartening to see that we have a Premier and Minister of Economic Development so focused. Minister Fedeli is literally travelling the entire globe, working to secure more business, leading on behalf of these historic investments we've recently attracted in Ontario—\$46 billion, as the Premier mentioned this morning in question period—and ensuring we continue to attract those businesses, those good-paying jobs.

Some of that has come in expansion. I know locally, in my riding, even last week, Speaker, I had the opportunity to celebrate an additional German investment in Stratford with Cleanfix technologies, which makes, more or less, the big fans on farm equipment. It was heartening that they chose to invest in Canada because of our rule of law, good economic policies, stable investment environment, but also the ability that they see to grow their business not only in Canada but South America as well, and the opportunities that exist there because of where we are and

the great relationship we've had with, in this case, our German allies in Europe—but also seeing that investment and that expansion continue despite the economic hardships we're currently under because of President Trump's unjustified tariffs.

Speaker, that's why we are introducing a first-in-Canada job-seeking leave, giving workers affected by mass layoffs up to three unpaid days to attend interviews, take training and focus on their future without violation of work obligations.

And Speaker, I know the member from Orléans mentioned that there was a situation where there were layoffs and he was mentioning how the Skills Development Fund didn't benefit those individuals. Well, I'm glad to share with my colleague from Orléans that this government actually brought forward resources, money, on the ground, colleagues, to support workers who may be facing layoffs, whether that's through accelerated re-employment, minimizing unemployment gaps—an additional \$50 million was invested through budget 2025 into Better Jobs Ontario and \$20 million into POWER Centres, as they're called. So that's \$70 million in additional resources this fiscal year.

And it's unfortunate, colleagues, that the members opposite chose to vote against that budget that was making those on-the-ground investments directly for those workers who are maybe facing unemployment because of, again, Donald Trump's unjustified tariffs.

So we have been there in lockstep with our partners in labour, partners in the small business and business community to ensure that we are supporting those who may be facing layoffs with this additional \$70-million investment.

Unfortunately, Speaker, members of the opposition voted against that in the provincial budget, which is disappointing. They will have an opportunity, colleagues, to vote on a fall economic statement this fall, which, hopefully, they will choose to support—if they choose to do so—but I'm not going to hold my breath.

Speaker, we're also extending temporary layoff periods from 35 to 52 weeks, with ministry oversight and worker consent, so employees can stay connected on their jobs while businesses ride out tariff-related slowdowns as well.

We're making referrals to employment services mandatory for companies during mass layoffs so that workers are not left in the dark of where the next paycheck will come from, ensuring that those workers know that the resource is there—they're available to them—whether it's through an employment service, whether it's through Ontario Works, whether it's through updating your resumé—those services that have existed for many years, but ensuring that they are aware of them as they search for the next opportunity. Or whether it is, colleagues, the ability to retrain for—potentially they've thought about upskilling and now is the opportunity to do that. Providing them the resources to do so is important. Our government has made those investments and will continue to make those investments to protect the livelihoods of Ontarians, prevent unnecessary terminations and ensure fairness in the labour market.

Speaker, there are some main themes through Working for Workers that we have before us in Bill 30. For example, fighting worker abuse during tough economic times: People are looking hard to find a job and employers are looking to cut corners to save money. There are people that are looking to take advantage of the vulnerable.

As I know has been said by the Minister of Labour previously, Canada has lost \$47 million to fake job ads—\$15 million alone in Ontario, with newcomers and youth often the first targets. This is why we're requiring job posting platforms to have a mechanism in place to report fraudulent publicly advertised job postings to the platform and to help protect job seekers as they search for career opportunities.

We're also cracking down on scammers and those that look to take advantage of people that are just looking to earn a better paycheck and a better job. Through new WSIB enforcement tools, we're cracking down on employers who cheat the system by giving false information, hiding payroll records or skipping payments so injured workers get the support they deserve, and everyone pays their fair share. Speaker, it's important to highlight this, that we're improving new WSIB enforcement tools while also providing the surplus that has existed. Again, WSIB has come to the Minister of Labour and the cabinet and said, "We have this surplus; we're able to give some of that back to employers."

And what colleagues need to understand in this place is that it's thousands of dollars directly back to a small business, and we've been able to do that twice this year, which means, on average, for example, if a small construction company of 30 people could potentially see \$50,000—two times—back to their company so they can reinvest in their workers, reinvest in their company, and that's important.

I've heard it over the break, Speaker, the importance of having that cash and capital available, at the ready, for those companies that may be facing a slowdown—again, because of President Trump's unjustified tariffs on the Canadian and Ontario economies—and ensuring that we're there providing that capital.

You've seen it in some of our tariff responses. Whether it's most recently for those affected by section 232 of more steel, aluminum, and some auto parts—providing a billion dollars to help meet payroll. Because we know when people continue to go to work and are able to continue to put food on the table, they're continuing to be part of our society, continuing to contribute to their communities. Everyone wants that, Speaker. Everyone wants to be able to wake up in the morning to go out to a job that they enjoy and enjoy that they are able to put food on the table for their family. It's important to see these continued investments that we are making as a government.

That WSIB rebate is just one way of doing it—\$4 billion this year, Speaker. We were able to do that a few years ago, as well. Again, it was \$2 billion in that case, as well, so \$6 billion since this government formed government in 2018, to give back directly to employers to reinvest in their company. They're still collecting the

WSIB. WSIB is 100% still there for the workers that need it if they are injured on the job. And through this legislation, Speaker, as well, are new WSIB enforcements, as I mentioned, to crack down on employers who cheat the system by giving false information, hiding payroll records or skipping payments. So we're there for injured workers while also ensuring that we are giving, when able to, the surplus back to our great employers across Ontario.

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We're consulting on protections and regulatory approaches to talent agents, managers and representatives. We're consulting with employers on access to electronic information. We live in the age of artificial intelligence now, Speaker. I know the members of the third party like to use ChatGPT a lot. Hopefully, we'll see a little less of that this session. I'm not going to hold my breath—but examining current access practices around electronic information, potential privacy restrictions and additional privacy requirements.

I know the members of the opposition like to talk about skilled trades today. It's great that they're showing such an interest in our skilled trades, colleagues—finally, after so many years, showing real interest in the skilled trades.

With half a million skilled trades jobs that need to be filled in the next decade and one in three apprentices entering retirement age within that period, we need to train the next generation of skilled trades workers. To do this, we need:

- training centre capacity to build our workforce and ensure we're not slowed down by unnecessary red tape, and the province is waiving permit fees for SDF capital training centres to speed up construction and get workers training faster;

- a legislative change to the Planning Act and the City of Toronto Act—the Planning Act comes up again; I think I could recite it in my sleep some days—exempting training centres with the same consistency of Bill 185, which we've passed before the most recent provincial election;

- legislative changes to impose limits and conditions on the powers of a municipality related to the construction of an SDF training centre;

- a regulatory exemption from the archaeological regulation under the Ontario Heritage Act and under the new regulatory authority; and

- a regulatory exemption from the Conservation Authorities Act, with a safety valve to apply actual requirements in the appropriate situations.

Basically, all this very legalese speak means, if this bill is passed, faster building times mean more apprentices sooner, workers can access new training closer to home, and Ontario's labour shortage is met with action today—not in a year or two years, but today, as we need, colleagues, to do that action.

I know skills development funding has come up often today. I know the technical training group, which has been successful in the past—they haven't hired a lobbyist. I know I'm going to get that question. But the technical training group has been successful in the past in Stratford.

Do you know why, Speaker, I bring this up? I bring it up not only because it is obviously in my riding, but I bring it up because they are training the next millwrights and metal fabrication individuals locally and, really, across southwestern Ontario.

They have partnered with our education system. They use the CNC machines and any other machine they may need in their local high schools, and they also then help those local high schools bring those technologies into those high schools so they can use it with their students. Because, Speaker, similar to other capital, eventually you need to change over those machines. Because modern technology—we know with 3D printing, but you'd be surprised what you can now fabricate in some of these machines.

So that partnership is beneficial not only to, obviously, our apprentices, but to our education system as well. Having that partnership means modern technology in our classrooms, both for high school students in this case, but then also as well for our apprentices.

The technical training group is not just for those young adults. It can be for individuals that have gone on and had a career. Maybe they have gone on to teacher's college, or maybe they had another career and decided, "I want a change. I want a great-paying job in the metal fabrication sector." Then, they are able to still go to a technical training group centre in Perth–Wellington, get that training, get their ticket, eventually, through that process.

Speaker, the benefit of this program in particular—which the Skills Development Fund, again, supported very much so—is that they are able to do this training while still working. They're still able to collect a paycheque at their current job while getting these upskills as well. It's just one example of the important work that the Skills Development Fund does in my riding of Perth–Wellington.

I know my colleagues all across on the government side can provide examples locally of those important initiatives. We're proud to support the Skills Development Fund. We don't need to write letters in secret, in the dead of night, to slip to the minister via email or at question period about how they want skills development funding in their riding. We're proud to stand here and say we've supported the Skills Development Fund. We have voted for the Skills Development Fund. We have voted to increase the Skills Development Fund money for the applications in the most recent provincial budget, which, again, the members opposite voted against. I know our government is focused on ensuring we're continuing to provide those training resources to those individuals.

I'll conclude briefly, but the Ontario nominee program has come up today as well. As was mentioned, the federal government, I think, is lost in their immigration policy right now and has arbitrarily cut and closed applications. I know our Minister of Labour continues to advocate, as the former Minister of Labour did as well and our Premier, from the very beginning.

We want to be treated equally like Quebec, to have a greater say over our nominee program to ensure that we are attracting the best and the brightest to Ontario, because

we know they want to come to Ontario already. We've seen that with some changes we've made in our health care around as-of-right practising. Whether you're educated in Alberta or in BC, you can come to Ontario and practise right away. Whether you're even educated in the UK, Ireland and the US, you can now practise as a health care professional in Ontario. Really, the Ontario nominee program is there to support Ontario meeting its workers' needs, its skills needs, and it's unfortunate that the federal government has decided to cut back severely these important skills that we need. This is not a temporary foreign worker program. This is not general immigration. These are highly skilled individuals working in our economies.

I know under the previous Liberal government—provincially, colleagues, I'm talking about provincially—there were no enforcement mechanisms to punish bad actors. There were no bans. There were no notices. There were no administrative fees, taxes or penalties on these things.

We're proposing changes to the OINP program to launch a digital employer. Employers can submit Ontario nominee program applications directly through the new online portal, return applications that no longer match the job market. The minister can create or remove immigrant nomination streams to meet the labour market needs. This provides flexibility in meeting our labour market needs.

I know the Skills Development Fund, again, has come up a lot today. Tomorrow is a new day. We'll see if they find a new line of questioning—we'll see. My colleague

from Essex wants you to talk about health care, so hopefully you give him a lot of questions tomorrow in question period, colleagues, about the great work we're doing in that sector.

The Skills Development Fund, the additional billion we're investing through our most recent provincial budget to over \$2 billion now in the Skills Development Fund to support individuals that potentially attended the Technical Training Group—I know individuals have gone through that locally, whether it's Community Living Toronto, who has also been a recipient, or whether it's BOLT foundation, which does great work in the GTA, ensuring that those disadvantaged individuals are getting the skills that they need.

I had an opportunity when I was PA to the Minister of Education to attend a BOLT foundation meeting. It was great to hear that those students were saying, "I have never had this opportunity, but because of the skills development funding and because of the BOLT foundation, I'm getting this opportunity to get a better paycheck and a better life."

Our government will always stand on that side, ensuring that we're going to be there for workers who want a better life, a better future, bigger paycheques and a brighter tomorrow.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): Seeing the time on the clock, this House stands adjourned until 9 a.m. tomorrow.

The House adjourned at 1759.

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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	
Schreiner, Mike (GRN)	Guelph	
Scott, Chris (IND)	Sault Ste. Marie	
Scott, Hon. / L'hon. Laurie (PC)	Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock	
Shamji, Adil (LIB)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	
Shaw, Sandy (NDP)	Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas / Hamilton-Ouest—Ancaster—Dundas	
Skelly, Hon. / L'hon. Donna (PC)	Flamborough—Glanbrook	Speaker / Présidente de l'Assemblée législative
Smith, Dave (PC)	Peterborough—Kawartha	
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

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Thanigasalam, Hon. / L'hon. Vijay (PC)	Scarborough—Rouge Park	Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions / Ministre associé délégué à la Santé mentale et à la Lutte contre les dépendances
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	Deputy Speaker / Vice-Présidente Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Tsao, Jonathan (LIB)	Don Valley North / Don Valley-Nord	
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	