

Legislative
Assembly
of Ontario



Assemblée
législative
de l'Ontario

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

No. 36B

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

N° 36B

1st Session
44th Parliament

Monday
17 November 2025

1^{re} session
44^e législature

Lundi
17 novembre 2025

Speaker: Honourable Donna Skelly
Clerk: Trevor Day

Présidente : L'honorable Donna Skelly
Greffier : Trevor Day

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

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

ISSN 1180-2987

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Monday 17 November 2025

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 17 novembre 2025

Report continued from volume A.

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PROTECT ONTARIO BY CUTTING RED TAPE ACT, 2025

LOI DE 2025 POUR PROTÉGER L'ONTARIO EN RÉDUISANT LES FORMALITÉS ADMINISTRATIVES

Continuation of debate on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 46, An Act to amend various Acts / Projet de loi 46, Loi modifiant diverses lois.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Questions?

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: Thank you to the member opposite for your presentation, and thank you to the member from Ottawa for your special presentation. In your presentation, you mentioned this bill is a very important bill for the people of Ontario, and I respect your comments and your view.

Under the leadership of Premier Ford and the Minister of Red Tape Reduction, our government remains committed to making life easier and more affordable for the people and businesses of Ontario. We want the people to keep more of their money in their pocket and for businesses to spend money and time where it really matters: reinvesting into their businesses and creating more jobs for the good people living in Ontario. By taking these actions, we are building stronger and more resilient communities—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Question, please?

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: My question to you, member from Ottawa: Can you please tell us—businesses in your riding rely on you to help us to continue to make life easier and more affordable.

Mr. John Fraser: Thanks for the question. Of course, we want to make life easier. What I was trying to say in my debate is it would have been a lot easier for that 88-year-old widow who the government was refusing to give her day at court—it would have made her life a lot easier, instead of having to hire lawyers and having to go through all this and having the government shut it down—because the government's really actually more interested in big corporate interests, right? Look at the Skills Development Fund.

Actually, look at insurance right now. Do you know that there are changes to insurance that if you don't have car insurance and your son or daughter is out walking in the street and they get hit by a car, you can't sue that person's insurance? That change is coming. That's not

making life easier for people; it's making it better for corporations. It's allowing—auto insurers are now the payer of second resort. If you have benefits, your benefit company has to pay for it first.

There's nothing there for the people. It's all for the big companies.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Questions?

Mr. John Vanthof: I listened intently to all three members who spoke, particularly the member from Kanata—Carleton, and I share many of the positions she expressed regarding omnibus bills. She used a term that I haven't heard here very often, and I would just like her to define “banana republic.”

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: Thank you to the honourable member for his question. I think in normal parlance of speech, it's when you don't have a rule of law. It's when you don't have a rule of law and the guy at the top of the pyramid makes the law as he goes along. I think we're seeing more and more of that here in Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Further questions?

Mr. Joseph Racinsky: Given our government's recent A- grade awarded by the Canadian Federation of Independent Business—which is the highest grade we've ever received, and I will remind this House that we got a C under the previous Liberal government, which is the lowest Ontario's ever received—Ontario is actually now recognized as one of the top three provinces in Canada when it comes to our red tape reduction work. We're cutting unnecessary regulations. We're fostering a more competitive and innovative economy. So will the members of the third party join that side of the House and this section of the House in reducing burdensome red tape?

Mr. John Fraser: If your definition of “reducing the burden of red tape” is not allowing an 88-year-old widow a legitimate day in court to determine whether or not something belongs to her that was taken away from her—if that's your definition, protecting yourself from having done that and protecting the company from having done that, you can have all the red tape reduction you want because I want nothing to do with it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Further questions?

Mr. Deepak Anand: My question is to the member from Kanata—Carleton. Speaker, as we know, red tape is a hindrance. It hurts our province's ability to grow, to create jobs, to provide the people of Ontario a prosperous life. Under the leadership of this Premier, we have worked hard to clean up their mess. We have reduced the regulatory burden by 6%, saving the people and businesses of Ontario \$1.2 billion and 1.8 million hours.

I was listening to the member. She said there are certain things in this bill which are great and can be supported. Can the member share what are those components that you like in this bill?

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: So I think that sharing the information about sex offenders—as long as that’s done well within certain guidelines, I think that could end up being a positive thing that could come out of this bill.

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The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): I recognize the member for St. Catharines.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Thank you, Speaker. Thank you for recognizing me tonight.

I’ve listened to the three speakers and I’m just wondering—Bill 46 allows companies under the Mining Act or the Aggregate Resources Act to remove crown forest resources without forest management plans or sustainability requirements. Do you agree that giving industry this power without meaningful safeguards threatens Ontario’s forests, especially in sensitive regions? The Niagara Escarpment could be one.

Mr. Ted Hsu: I think it is actually very important to make sure that we have the right guidelines. That’s why I challenge this government to bring this bill to committee, unlike the 15 other government bills that have skipped the committee phase.

Now, maybe the guidelines simply say—for example, if you look in the Environmental Registry—that you could take out deadwood for personal use. That sort of thing you could remove from a forest and if you limit the quantity, that seems very reasonable. Maybe you need to put in a road or a hydro right-of-way—something like that. Maybe you need to put in a service building.

So, within the right guidelines, I think it makes sense to reduce the amount of permitting needed to do certain things, like to remove certain items out of crown forests.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): I recognize the member for Don Valley North.

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: Since the member from Kanata—Carleton told us what in the bill she could support and what she found helpful in the bill, could the member from Ottawa South tell us what in the bill he finds that he cannot support and why he finds it so challenging?

Mr. John Fraser: In case you missed it earlier on—well, first of all, when my colleague just said, “Take the deadwood out,” I had some thoughts in my head. I was going to go on that line. Because I got asked a different question, I just want to repeat that, in this bill, the government is indemnifying itself and a company from any court proceedings with regard to the rights of an 88-year-old widow to have her day in court—taking that away. Not to award her money; not to award her something that’s not hers—it’s to ask the courts to make a decision. The government is taking its time in a government bill to do that. What does that tell you?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Further questions?

MPP Paul Vickers: The opposition has spent years defending the same bloated bureaucracy that drives up costs and drives out investment. They talk about helping workers and small businesses, yet they constantly vote

against every measure that makes it easier to build, hire and grow.

While our government is focused on cutting red tape, unlocking opportunities and empowering job creators, the opposition seems more interested in preserving outdated systems that serve no one but the bureaucracy itself.

So I ask them: Will they finally admit the endless red tape isn’t protecting anyone, is punishing everyone, and will they stand with the people who build Ontario or keep standing in the way—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): I recognize the member from Ottawa South.

Mr. John Fraser: Respectfully, to the member: The bureaucrats could have prevented the government from giving \$10 million to a strip club owner.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Further debate?

Hon. Doug Downey: Good evening. I’m very pleased to rise in the House for second reading debate on the Protect Ontario by Cutting Red Tape Act.

Before I begin, I want to thank the Minister of Red Tape Reduction for sharing her bill with us and for allowing many of us to speak to some of the great things that are in this bill. I also want to thank my great team and the dedicated teams in our government that have worked together because you can see—I’ve heard the opposition talk about how many items are in this bill. There are a lot of items, and we are moving as one to reduce red tape to make sure that everything in Ontario is smoother and is a good place to do business. It’s been a tremendous team effort across the board to build on our plan to cut red tape, to protect Ontario workers, families, jobs, and I’m grateful to everyone who worked so hard on it.

Now, we use the term “red tape,” and we think that sounds almost like a slogan or something that people don’t fully understand what it means. But as somebody who came from a jurisdiction with many small businesses, what red tape actually means—and particularly at this time of year—is more time with your family. It’s more time in your community. It’s more time to reinvest back in your business.

Reducing red tape is taking away things that don’t need to be there, things that—I heard some of the members opposite about “why take this away, or why take that away?” Well, why leave it, Mr. Speaker? That’s the whole point.

You can’t be timid about this. We’re fighting for our lives in our economy with what’s going on in the US. Why would we not take every opportunity to make it easier to do business, to reinvest? And when you are tired, you can go home. You can make sure that you have the infrastructure that you need, the roads, the bridges, the highways, all of the pieces that you need to be successful, to move goods, and all while you’re being more efficient at work, because quite frankly, any efficiencies at work turn into reinvestments in our communities. That turns into investments for hockey kids and for dance kids and for all the sponsorships.

I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, I’ve been involved in Kiwanis for some 25 years. We do a charity auction once a year. We go to small businesses across our communities, and they donate goods and we auction them off and we raise

money to put back in the community for kids. I can tell you, all those small businesses, every single one of them, give because it's the right thing to do, because they're part of community. Any time we can make their lives easier so that they can reinvest back in our community, it's always the right thing to do.

My colleague mentioned earlier that the bill, if passed, would support the province's goal of cutting red tape to make Ontario the most competitive place in the G7 to invest, to create jobs and do business. In the face of increasing global instability, which I think we all have to agree is an issue—in the face of that global instability, it's supply chains that are disrupted. It's inflationary pressures. It's the ongoing threat of the US tariffs. We're taking strong action to protect the economy and ensure long-term prosperity for families and businesses in the province and particularly the families who are invested in businesses in this province.

This proposed legislation is the next step in our ongoing efforts to cut red tape to modernize legislation, to modernize regulations and to put in place policies that are outdated, burdensome or inefficient. As I said, Mr. Speaker, it's not, "Why is it there?" It's, "Why does it need to be there?" We have to be bold. We can't rely on the 308,000 regulations that this government inherited—or maybe it was 380,000. There are so many, it's mind-boggling.

But we, over successive red tape bills—I think I heard the minister say 15 at this point—have stripped away so many things that don't need to be there, so many things that are an irritant to business, that really accomplish nothing. I'm going to give you a couple of examples of where that red tape is gumming up the system—it makes actually no sense if you look at it. And it makes the government operate better and it's better for the businesses in our communities.

Our proposed initiatives will make life easier, will protect jobs and keep Ontario's economy moving, building on the over 650 actions Ontario has taken since 2018 to cut red tape. Now, Mr. Speaker, that's 650 actions. That's more than 650 pieces of red tape because some of these areas have more than one bit of red tape that are tying things up in knots. Again, this will save people, businesses, non-profits—it's not just about business; it's also about non-profits, people doing the good work in our communities. It's also about the broader public sector. It will save over \$1 billion every year.

I'd like to explain what a billion is, because we roll that off our tongues; I'm not sure the opposition has their head around what \$1 billion in savings is. If you take—I think we all have a sense of what a million is. A million-dollar house—you can sort of picture that. A million seconds, Mr. Speaker, is 11 and a half days. But a billion seconds is 32 years. These numbers are not close. So when I say that we're taking away \$1 billion in cost to our businesses, our people and our non-profits, that is a very significant shift for our economy. As inflation, geopolitical instability and protectionism create new risks, we're making sure that Ontario remains a safe, stable and attractive place to invest, work and grow.

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The proposed Protect Ontario by Cutting Red Tape Act that we're talking about tonight contains over 50 new common-sense changes to help make government work smarter for businesses and more efficiently for people. My focus today is on proposed changes that would help to simplify and reduce backlogs to Ontario's justice system to make it stronger, while also improving accessibility, efficiency and support for families. I also want to thank the stakeholders who have provided such meaningful input and supported many of the proposals that I'm going to speak to.

Now, we're a very open government, Mr. Speaker. As you know, the Premier gives out his number to thousands and thousands of people and hears from people all across Ontario about things that are important to Ontarians. Many of us, myself included, receive DMs through social media—through Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn, X—and some of our ideas actually come from the people who are on the front lines, in the trenches, putting their risk on the line.

Mr. Speaker, there's nothing more powerful than somebody who turns a key in the door every single day and stands last in line to get paid. Those are the people that we are affecting with these reductions in red tape.

Our government has received a very strong mandate from the people of Ontario. It's a mandate to build solutions and to create the conditions to protect and drive our economy, keep the people of Ontario working and make our province more affordable and safe. We're rising to that challenge and we're taking decisive action in this bill and across this session. We're breaking free from the status quo and we're doing things differently.

There's a saying, Mr. Speaker, that the inertia of the past becomes the presumption of the present, and that's very dangerous. We have to question those presumptions and say, "Why are we doing this? Does it fit?" Just because something has been there a long time doesn't make it right in the current context. So we're challenging the status quo. We're challenging the presumption of the present. This has been a central motivation not just of our government, but my work as AG, and it resonates now more than ever as we face these uncertain times.

Now, before I get into the proposals and some actual examples in here, I want to talk a little about how we're dealing with red tape and how we're dealing with the function, in particular with the justice system. It's cutting red tape and ensuring that everyone who calls Ontario home has access and can navigate the system easily, efficiently and affordably.

Our government's work over the years has been largely fuelled by the recognition that we must always be prepared for the future. That has always been clear. Because if the system slows down or if processes become too complex or too costly, the people we serve feel it first—like a victim of crime waiting for closure, or a family waiting for vital support.

That's why we've driven a historic transformation across our justice system, modernizing how it works, investing in our people and ensuring it meets the needs of a rapidly

evolving province. With every courtroom upgrade, every digital portal, every staffing investment, every staffing expansion, it all builds capacity. Each step we take is about restoring confidence and improving access to justice across Ontario.

Our courts were faced with an unprecedented backlog of cases resulting from the global health crisis, but we responded quickly. Just to give you a sense of the magnitude of our effort, by 2027-28, Ontario will have invested more than half a billion dollars to address backlogs, help build a more sustainable system and strengthen public safety. That includes allocating up to 52 new judges to the Ontario Court of Justice. With a current complement of about 300, adding 52 is a sizable investment.

We've also added 700 additional full-time staff—not just crown prosecutors, but victim support workers and clerks and all those who make the system run. And just this past spring, we announced the appointment of 42 new justices of the peace to the Ontario Court of Justice, on top of the 45 we appointed in 2024. Again, this is a system of about 300 justices of the peace and those 87 new appointees in the last two years. We are creating capacity. We're investing in the system. We're investing in people and making sure that things work smoothly.

This level of capacity-building is something we haven't seen in decades, and I actually think is something we have never seen. This level of capacity-building is historic, and it's at the right time as we build capacity in our economy. We build capacity by reducing red tape. We build capacity by making strategic investments. We can do both things at the same time, and we are doing that, saving businesses in this province billions and billions of dollars.

Now, Speaker, let me turn to our proposed initiatives within the bill, the Protect Ontario by Cutting Red Tape Act. I want to talk specifically about how we are going to improve the efficiency of the Ontario justice system for the people of Ontario by increasing flexibility in Divisional Court cases.

For those who don't know, the Divisional Court is a branch of the Ontario Superior Court, and it functions as an appeals court and also as the primary court for judicial review of government action the province. Okay, that's a complicated way of saying we have the Ontario Court of Justice, the Superior Court of Justice, and, as an adjunct for some things, we have the Divisional Court. Well, historically, because of the nature of the court, almost all the cases have to be heard by a three-judge panel. That's a lot of judges, when the Ontario Superior Court operates with one judge and not a panel of three.

What we heard from our justice partners, and the Superior Court of Justice in particular, is that some of the cases that they're hearing as a panel of three really only need to be a single judge. They told us that in some instances putting a case in front of a three-judge panel is just not an efficient use of judicial resources. Now, there will be those who say, "Don't change things. We're not sure what the effect is going to be," but that's not us. We listen to our partners who say one judge is enough for some of these things, and we can redeploy the other two judges to do

more, to create capacity, have more days in court for those who need it. Those Superior Court judges deal with civil, they deal with family and they deal with criminal court. By creating the capacity, by not wasting three judges where we can use one—it just seems logical when you say it out loud. Yet there will be some who say, "But we don't know. Why not just leave it the way it was?"

Well, I think, Mr. Speaker, if this were to pass, we will see efficiencies within the Superior Court, within the Divisional Court, and I definitely believe it's the right way to go.

Now, because of the proposed change, people attending court may even experience earlier court dates or faster resolution of their cases if fewer judges are required. It's pretty clear what the potential benefits of the proposed change will be, if passed.

One more thing, Mr. Speaker: The flexibility of scheduling judges is one of the few ways our province can address the shortage of federally appointed judges, which will ultimately reduce backlogs.

Speaking of clarity—it's a segue into the potential change we're introducing in another part of this bill. We're proposing an amendment to part III of the Succession Law Reform Act to make the rules clear for substitute decision-makers. Let me start by saying that the Succession Law Reform Act sets rules in Ontario for how a person's estate is distributed, so when somebody is deceased, how their wealth or how their items are distributed. It applies whether you have a will or whether you don't have a will. This is the act that oversees that distribution.

It also outlines how a person may designate a beneficiary for certain financial plans. If you think of a TFSA, an RRSP or any number of other items—an insurance product—you designate a beneficiary, or it will by default be paid out to your estate, but you may designate a beneficiary. This change will affect that. It will affect it this way.

Our suggested amendment applies to situations where a substitute decision-maker has been appointed to make decisions for someone who can no longer manage their own property. Now, Mr. Speaker, I don't want to get too far in the weeds, but a substitute decision-maker is somebody that is appointed either by an individual who is appointing somebody to make decisions for them when they're incapacitated, or it's somebody that the court has appointed after an application. It's called a POA. When you appoint your power of attorney to make financial decisions for you when you're incapacitated, then that individual can do certain things financially. They can renew financial instruments. And this is where the glitch is. Those financial instruments can be renewed, but the beneficiaries cannot, so in some instances your RRSP or—I won't name particular financial products, but some of the financial products, when they need to be renewed—like an insurance product, it's probably the easiest to understand, when you renew your insurance, maybe at the end of a term, if I'm incapacitated and my power of attorney wants to renew my insurance, they cannot add the beneficiaries on that I put on the original insurance before I was incapacitated. That doesn't make any sense. There's a glitch there that doesn't work.

1840

This change will allow the substitute decision-maker, will allow the power of attorney to fill in the form and say that the beneficiaries that I had originally put on my insurance will go on the renewed insurance, if they match. That's where the mischief would be, if we allowed them to change it to anybody in the world—but no, if they match, then it's a valid way to use the power of attorney. We thought about this—how do we fill that gap and not create mischief, not create opportunity for people to be taken advantage of? It's a relatively small thing until you're personally affected, and then it's a really big thing.

I'm really happy with this. Whether it be for a pension or a RRIF or some other financial vehicle, sometimes they have to get renewed and they have to be dealt with properly. It has to be reflected in the financial instrument or it's not going to take effect. If you designate a beneficiary on your insurance or on your RRIF or on your TFSA or whatever the product is, when you pass away, that financial vehicle doesn't go through your estate, it doesn't go through probate. It doesn't go through any of that. It goes around the estate directly to your beneficiary. That's the whole goal of this, so that we can keep that happening even if the product had to be renewed. So again, it's a little bit technical but it's definitely the right thing to do.

Now there's one other item in here that helps protect children. When it comes to providing better services for children in this province, I just want to highlight this. It's the Children's Law Reform Act—it's in here. Currently, the act sets out rules for determining parentage in Ontario and states that only the Superior Court of Justice or the unified Family Court have the authority to make declarations of parentage.

Now, to explain further, a declaration of parentage is a court order that legally confirms who a child's parent is under Ontario law. When they do that, the Superior Court or unified Family Court can order a blood or DNA or other test in the proceedings for the purposes of determining that child's parentage.

Our proposed change adds in the Ontario Court of Justice, the other level of court that deals with family law, to make determinations of parentage in cases where it has jurisdiction, so that you're not having a proceeding in the Ontario Court of Justice and having to run off and get an order from the Superior Court just to accomplish the same thing. That is classic red tape: It takes time, takes money and it doesn't get you to a different end point. It just gets you there more efficiently and faster. It also means that when they order those blood or DNA or other tests, the Ontario court can do it directly.

These changes aren't just about the filing fees. It's about time; it's about why you would do it this way. It's all part of our modernization of the court system and the things attached to it. We're open. I hope we have more red tape bills because we have a lot more to do as a province to take away the red tape to get us in the spot that we need to be, to be totally competitive. But I can tell you, the 50 items in here are an absolutely fantastic addition to the 14 red tape bills that have come before.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm watching the time, so I look forward to the questions in the next 10 minutes.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): The member from Nickel Belt.

M^{me} France Gélinas: I thank the member for his overview of some of the schedules in Bill 46. I guess my first question will be: There are 22 or 23 different schedules in this bill that have nothing to do with one another, from iGaming to children to forestry. Can you guarantee the people of Ontario that this bill will go to committee so that the people of Ontario have a chance to talk to us about what they see in the bill and some of the changes that they would like to see? Can you guarantee that it's not going to be rushed without a chance for the people of Ontario to have a say in a bill that is as widespread as Bill 46?

Hon. Doug Downey: I appreciate the question from the member opposite. I'm not in a position to make a commitment but I can tell you this: What I heard from the previous speaker, from one of your colleagues, was, "We don't know if we should change stuff. We don't know." This is how we got into this mess. There were so many things that people just say, "Well, just leave it the way it is." And it stacked up and it stacked up and it stacked up until we had hundreds of thousands of pieces of red tape.

I am very confident in the pieces that I talked about and others that are in there. We have worked with justice partners, we've worked with others and I'm very confident that we that we have it right. That being said, there may be a rigorous discussion around other items as they come up. I know we'll have a minimum of six and a half hours of debate on this and we'll see where it goes.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): I go to the member from Don Valley West.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Thank you to the Attorney General for his remarks. The Attorney General mentioned that he's listening to judicial experts. I'm wondering, firstly, if he read the letter from the privacy commissioner, and I wonder if he will likewise listen to her and remove or amend schedule 16, and if he's not going to listen to her, why not?

Hon. Doug Downey: We do listen to experts; we listen to people in the fields. After many discussions with the three Chief Justices and associate chief justices and many others—FOLA, which is the Federation of Ontario Law Associations, and the Ontario Bar Association and many, many, many others—we interact with them; we policy-develop. But we also hear from front-line people. I'll give you an example. Commissionership: If you have a commissionership—some in your office will have that—when I became the Attorney General, I said, "These only last three years. My passport lasts 10 years. What is that—"

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Response, please.

Hon. Doug Downey: Maybe I'll get to answer in the next question. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): I recognize the member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound.

MPP Paul Vickers: Families expect fairness when they buy a product or sign a contract, but for far too long the Consumer Protection Act was stuck in the past, loaded

with outdated fine print that frustrated people and punished honest entrepreneurs.

Can the minister tell us how Bill 46 finally fixes that broken system and ensures families get the transparency they deserve while giving small businesses the freedom to thrive so we can keep building a stronger, fairer and more competitive economy that rewards hard work and not red tape?

Hon. Doug Downey: You know, consumer protection is something that's very important, whether it be for sales at your home or whether it be major items that you buy. I spent many years dealing with clients who bought things in a situation that didn't make sense and created uncertainty and created financial instability. It created all sorts of challenges. Within this bill, it creates more certainty, it creates structure and it creates predictability. When you have predictability, structure and certainty, you can then right a wrong. You can make sure that people are protected and that things are getting dealt with in a way that vulnerable people won't be taken advantage of.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Further questions?

Mr. Joseph Racinsky: Thank you to the minister for his comments this evening. My question is about the Courts of Justice Act in schedule 7. Access to timely court services is very important in my area, in Halton region specifically. We're really excited about our government's plans to move forward with a new courthouse in Halton region, which was great news.

I just wanted to know if the minister could elaborate on how the changes in this bill are going to continue to help residents in Halton and Wellington receive faster services at the courts.

Hon. Doug Downey: Thank you for the question, because the Halton courthouse has been a discussion for some time. The court facilities between Milton and Burlington and Halton have been a little cumbersome, but we saw an opportunity to deal with red tape, quite frankly, in that piece, because for a very, very long time, we've built courthouses the exact same way we always did. Do you know why? Because nobody said, "Why are we doing it this way?" So we're in the midst of a review to say, "Do we really need bookshelves in judges' offices anymore? Do we really need that? Do judges all need their own bathroom anymore?" And I'm not the only one raising this; the judges are raising it themselves.

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I look forward to the next question.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Questions?

MPP Lise Vaugeois: My question is really about the Crown Forest Sustainability Act. Forestry companies need to follow certain rules—they've got to go through environmental assessments and so on—but, for some reason, you are offering unnamed projects the right to skip over all of this and simply remove parts of crown forests without any provision. Can you explain how that is a consistent way to look after our forests?

Hon. Doug Downey: The member from Timiskaming—Cochrane, after he let everybody know that farmers don't like politicians and lawyers and engineers—I was shocked

for a moment because my father was a locomotive engineer who drove trains for a living, but he clarified it's not them—then went on to talk about how the act that Bob Rae, his government, brought in hadn't been touched for decades. That's exactly what we're talking about. We need to update these things. We can't be afraid to go forward and update where there is red tape, and the context may not be what it was when Bob Rae was the Premier.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Further questions?

MPP Paul Vickers: Keeping communities safe is one of the most important responsibilities of government. Christopher's Law has helped police track high-risk offenders for over two decades, but technology and enforcement have evolved. People expect us to stay one step ahead of those who threaten public safety.

Can the minister share how Bill 46 strengthens Christopher's Law, modernizing it with new tools, stronger tracking and faster data sharing so police can protect communities and families more effectively than ever before?

Hon. Doug Downey: This is the next step in forward-thinking that my friend the Solicitor General—when we talk about the bail tracking and the bail dashboard, which he literally came up with himself when we got deployed—congratulations for that—this is the next step in terms of using technology to accomplish the goals of the original act. We need to use technology, and we need to be looking forward to what's possible to protect our communities, to make sure that our children are safe and to make sure that our partners are safe. Everybody needs to feel safe and be safe. This is it next step in that.

I look forward to seeing more of it roll out as the Solicitor General brings the item forward.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Question?

Ms. Chandra Pasma: The Attorney General said earlier that he didn't need to commit that the bill would go to committee because he's quite confident the bill gets it right, but one of the things that this bill does is it reverses a change that was made last year in an omnibus bill by that government. I'm wondering, does the Attorney General believe that this bill gets it as right as the last bill did?

Hon. Doug Downey: That's a very good question. As somebody who tucks into pieces, it's very important that we understand how they're going to roll out. I don't think that there's any particular insight that the opposition will give us in some of these items.

I didn't say that it can't go to the committee, but I'm not committing to whether it will or not. That's not my purview; I'm not the House leader, and everybody knows that. But it is important that we do consult, and we have consulted on these very important pieces, so I think we're in a good space.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Further debate?

Ms. Chandra Pasma: It's always a pleasure to rise on behalf of the residents of Ottawa West—Nepean. Today I'm speaking to Bill 46, which is an omnibus bill. There are 22 schedules in this bill that cover topics as diverse as iGaming, forestry, the LCBO, sex-offender laws, the City of Toronto Act, motorized snow vehicles, long-term care, funerals and cremations, consumer loyalty programs, the

Ontario Infrastructure and Lands Corporation Act, the Royal Ontario Museum, and succession and inheritance laws. All of this is crammed into one omnibus bill that we are provided with only a short amount of time to debate and examine.

We are sitting only 13 weeks out of this entire year, and that's if the government allows us to go to the end of this scheduled session. That's a quarter of the entire year that we are spending here debating legislation and debating proposals to address the challenges that the people of Ontario are facing. When you cancel sessions of the Legislature—when you don't show up to work and all we have is 13 weeks to do everything—then the only way you can get through things is to cram them into single pieces of legislation, to skip public scrutiny.

The government has not allowed committee examination of the majority of its bills. Committee is the moment where the public, the people of Ontario, have the opportunity to come and share their thoughts on legislation; where experts and stakeholders have the opportunity to come and raise questions and concerns and share things that perhaps we as representatives have not thought about yet, that makes legislation better. But you can't do that if you're only sitting 13 weeks.

That's how we end up with bills like this, that are trying to look at snowmobiles and funerals in one schedule and the next. This isn't even the only bill that's like this right now, Speaker. Another bill that's before the house, Bill 60, has 16 schedules. Those schedules cover things like the Landlord and Tenant Board, water and waste water, development charges, the Highway Traffic Act and photo ID cards, because, of course, those things all have something to do with each other.

Just as a time-saving suggestion for the government, Minister: Maybe next year, the government can just put all of their policies in one single bill. Then we would only need to sit one week to pass it, without any debate or committee.

This particular bill that we're looking at tonight, the short title of it is the Protect Ontario by Cutting Red Tape Act. For those who aren't familiar with red tape—because the government uses it a lot as a buzzword. It's not always well defined what they mean by it. Usually, they mean it as a pejorative: something that they just don't like. But what red tape actually means is excessive regulation or bureaucracy that has a financial or time cost to comply with.

It's not clear what a lot of the measures that are in this bill actually have to do with red tape. They're not actually about saving time or financial implications or cutting back bureaucracy. I'm going to get to some of that, but I just want to start by saying that, with this government, it's clear that not all red tape is created equal. In fact, they really like some red tape, apparently, because they're creating quite a bit of it in the education sector these days. Bill 33, another bill that's before the House, requires every single school name in the province of Ontario to be approved by the Minister of Education. We won't be able to open a new school or change a new school name without the personal approval of the Minister of Education. It takes quite a long

time already to get a new school built, and now, as part of that whole process, school board trustees and board staff are also going to have to take the time to submit a name for approval to the Minister of Education.

The Minister of Education, who should be worrying about appropriate funding to make sure that our kids have the supports and resources that they need, is apparently instead going to be taking his time to examine the names of schools everywhere in the province of Ontario to decide whether or not they meet his taste. Why is that level of bureaucracy necessary? How is that solving a single problem for our children? How is that saving a single resource or adding a single cent to our classrooms, Speaker? That's the definition of red tape.

Then there are these signs that the school boards are required to post in front of new builds, renovations and expansions advertising the government of Ontario, which the school boards have to pay for. They have to take the funding that is supposedly going to building new schools, to repairing schools—and we desperately need new schools and school repairs, because the FAO says that there is a significant shortfall between what the government is committing and what we actually need to repair and build new schools, in the order of \$11 billion; so that if we don't increase investments, 75% of schools will be below a state of good repair in the next eight years. But instead of ensuring that every penny we are paying is goes towards building these schools, the government is saying, "No, no, you have take some of that money and put up a sign that advertises the government." Tell me that is not a waste of time and money, Speaker.

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And now they're creating a whole new level of bureaucracy for parents who just want help for their kids, who have a question about what's happening in their child's school. Instead of being able to call a democratically elected trustee who will advocate for them, they're going to have to call this new—well, we don't know what. Office? It kind of sounds like it might be a call centre or maybe an AI chatbot. We don't know who's staffing it. We don't know where the resources are coming from to fund it. So either these resources are once again going to come out of classrooms, or are we going to have some kind of central bureaucracy at the Ministry of Education that is staffing the phone lines for school boards across the province? This is the definition of useless layers of bureaucracy that aren't actually addressing any of the challenges that families in Ontario are actually facing.

I want to look at some of the particular schedules in Bill 46. There's not a lot of detail in here, which I think is why it's really important that the government actually allow this bill to go to committee, so that we can hear what stakeholders have to say, because we do know some of them are raising concerns.

Schedule 5 regards consumer loyalty programs, so when you get points on a credit card or something like that. This might not be a bad thing. But the section says that all the rules will be made by regulation, so we don't know what the rules will actually be. This is another example of the government saying, "Just trust us." But this government

has given us so many examples of why we should not trust them, so why would we trust them here? And the Ontario Bar Association is raising concerns because the legislation allows for these regulations to apply retroactively. There are people who are signing contracts right now—consumers and businesses—who could have the rug swept completely out from under their feet. These terms and conditions could change retroactively. Well, that's not how you can trust that you're signing a contract in the province of Ontario.

As I just mentioned earlier to the Attorney General, schedule 7 is actually removing a clause from the Courts of Justice Act that the government passed just last year in another bill that they rushed through. We see example after example of this. Again, this is why we need to have fulsome debate here. This is why bills need to go to committee, so that members of the public and experts can come and share, because what we see is that the government says with great confidence, "This doesn't need to go to committee because we know it's great. We know it's fixing everything." And then the government has to spend time after that going back and making revisions because it turned out everything wasn't great, that there were challenges, that there were things that could have been foreseen if they had just taken the time to listen to people and to be willing to work with them to make changes to address the challenges.

So now they're going back and have to fix this legislation. Is this actually going to fix the problem? Well, why don't we allow the Ontario Bar Association to come and tell us whether or not they think this is actually fixing their concerns or whether there are more revisions that still need to be done?

Schedule 9: It says retroactively that an agreement that the public guardian reached with a private company four years ago is legally valid, and it takes away the rights of any person to appeal that decision. Now, we've already heard earlier tonight what specific case this is referring to. I have serious concerns when we are talking about using legislation to legislate away the rights of an elderly woman in the province of Ontario. But I have even greater concerns about the precedent that this sets, that when the government wants to side with a corporation, they can just pass legislation retroactively, rubber-stamping whatever that corporation wanted and taking away the rights of the people of Ontario to use courts to protest that their rights aren't being respected.

If the government is so confident that this is a great deal, that this is the right deal, that the agreement is legally sound, then allow people to exercise their rights to challenge this in court. Allow these decisions to be made by judges that, yes, in fact, the agreement is valid, that people's rights were respected. We as legislators should not be spending our time here rubber-stamping corporate agreements and taking away the rights of individuals to pursue justice.

Then there's schedule 16, Speaker, which the Information and Privacy Commissioner has raised some significant concerns about. I'm just going to read some of that into the record because the IPC is very concerned about amendments that allow the Ministry of Red Tape Reduction to have "a very generalized authority to collect, use, and

disclose personal information, for broadly stated consultation purposes. Public consultations by governments typically involve individuals and others sharing their personal or professional opinions, including opinions that oppose the government of the day, on matters that may be sensitive or controversial."

The commissioner goes on to say that section 38(2) of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act "establishes that institutions are not prohibited from collecting personal information, if it is expressly authorized by statute, for the purposes of law enforcement, or necessary to the proper administration of one of their lawfully authorized activities, as follows:

"'Expressly authorized by statute' means that the specific types of personal information to be collected must be clearly and explicitly outlined in the relevant law. An express authorization to collect, use or disclose must also be well-justified and well-constructed in articulating both its purpose(s) for collection, use and disclosure, and its limitations on those activities."

The commissioner concludes, "Schedule 16 seeks to use the first condition above, by establishing express authorization for the ministry to collect, use and disclose personal information.... Unfortunately, the amendment, as drafted, does not include any of the elements of a well-constructed express authority. The bill currently before the Legislature does not specify what personal information may be collected under the authority, it uses a single sweeping sentence to broadly permit the ministry to collect, use and disclose personal information for generalized consultation purposes, and it does not address fundamental data minimization principles.

"This makes schedule 16 the latest example of a very concerning trend the IPC has noticed in recent years: amending laws by inserting broadly worded express authorities for collection, use, and disclosure of personal information. When consulting with our office on proposed amendments, ministries typically assert that the amendment is intended only to achieve a specific policy objective or permit a specific activity, and it will not be used for more expansive purposes in the future. However, these amendments are written in ways that permit almost limitless interpretation once they are in force. Unfortunately, use of these sweeping authorities is proliferating across Ontario laws despite numerous warnings by my office to cease the practice....

"Considering the concerns stated above, we urge the minister to remove schedule 16 from Bill 46. This will give the ministry additional time to re-evaluate the need to create an express authority and carefully consider other viable options that align better with FIPPA."

The IPC concludes, "It is simply not good enough for governments to lean on the promise that they will never broaden the original intent of these authorities or use them for a different purpose. Ontarians, and their privacy, deserve better."

This is a perfect example. Even the IPC is saying that the government should take the time to do this bill correctly, to listen to people, to withdraw this schedule and start over from scratch. And so I hope that the government will

actually take the time to hear from the people of Ontario about the impact of this and will rethink the use of omnibus legislation to settle past scores, to correct past mistakes and to fail to address any of the real and serious challenges that are affecting the people of Ontario.

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

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Again, I really want to thank the member from Ottawa West–Nepean for what you presented here today.

This is very concerning. When you have the Information and Privacy Commissioner writing such a strongly worded letter that the government seems willing just to ignore, it should be concerning for everyone at home. I don't think anybody would expect, in a bill that this government has given the short title of protecting Ontarians by cutting red tape—that they would expect that this bill, in fact, allows their personal information to be gathered, with very few protections.

We have asked this question before; you have asked it. We see this government that shortens debate and doesn't send bills to committee. Can you express the outrage that Ontarians will feel when they find out that this bill has given away their right to protect their personal information and the government hasn't even taken the proper time to debate and consult on this?

1910

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Thank you to the member for Hamilton West–Ancaster–Dundas for that fantastic question. Every week, I hear from people in my community who are absolutely outraged at the kinds of things that this government is doing without listening to them, without taking the time to consult them, but also ignoring their voices when they are reaching out anyway to say, "I have serious concerns about this."

At the end of the day, our data, our identity, is one of the most fundamental things that we have. When the government gives itself this broad sweeping power to collect whatever they want and to use it for whatever purposes that they want, and the Information and Privacy Commissioner of Ontario is saying, "Hey, wait a minute, this is really serious and concerning. This is not appropriate, and you are doing it more and more," and yet the Attorney General and other government members are standing up and saying, "This bill is great. We got it completely right," I think that's incredibly concerning.

If the government is so sure that they've got it right, then why don't they let the people of Ontario come and tell them whether or not they think they got it right?

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

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: Thank you to the member from Ottawa West–Nepean for your remarks.

The opposition has spent years defending the same bloated bureaucracy that drives up the cost and drives out investment. They talk about helping workers and small businesses yet consistently vote against every measure that makes it easier to build, hire and grow. While our government is focused on cutting red tape, unlocking opportunity

and empowering job creators, the opposition seems more interested in preserving outdated systems that serve no one but the bureaucracy itself.

I ask the member: Will they finally admit that endless red tape is not protecting anyone? It is punishing everyone. Please elaborate on that.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: I think what is protecting everyone, or what should be protecting everyone, is our democratic norms and our rights to have a say in decisions that affect us. What I think is that in this bill, and in most of this government's agenda and in their behaviour this session, we're seeing example after example after example of how the government does not care what we have to say. The government does not care what people think. The government does not care what the people of Ontario need.

We have a massive affordability crisis. There are more than a million people in this province using food banks. The number of homeless encampments, and the number of people who are homeless, is growing constantly. That didn't use to be a problem before this government was in power.

We have 800,000 people in the province without a job, and yet what we have here is a bill that takes away people's rights to privacy on their information. We have tinkering with loyalty programs that may sweep contracts out from under people's feet. We have a bill that retroactively takes away somebody's right to challenge a decision in the court.

None of that is protecting the people of Ontario. None of that is addressing the very real challenges that the people of Ontario are facing and that they deserve help with.

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

M^{me} France Gélinas: I'd like to thank my colleague from Ottawa West–Nepean for her analysis of Bill 46, the cutting red tape act. I would say that I agree with her summary of the bill, but I would like to ask her why she thinks that the government pushes bills through the legislative process without any respect for due process. The Legislative Assembly presents bills for first reading, second reading; after second reading, in a democracy, people have the opportunity to be heard, people have the opportunity to speak to us. We have a duty to listen to them, then make amendments and then it comes back for third reading.

Why do you think that in all of the bills that we've had this fall, and most of the ones in the spring, this opportunity to respect democracy, this opportunity for the people of Ontario to be heard has been taken away? Does she expect this for Bill 46?

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Thank you to my colleague from Nickel Belt for the question. I think it's fundamentally a matter that the government knows that people do not support their agenda. No parent in the province of Ontario is sitting at home saying, "I really hope the government takes away my right to have a say in my local school." There is no tenant sitting at home tonight saying, "I really hope the government makes it harder for me to defend my rights and to be able to retain my housing." There is nobody out there who is saying, "I really hope that the government destroys our sustainable forestry practices so that our forestry

industry can no longer sell our products on the global market.” Nobody is sitting at home saying, “I really hope that the government wipes away any protection of my personal information and data.”

That’s why they can’t allow the public to come to speak here at the Legislature: because they’re going to hear directly from people that they do not support their agenda, and they do not want to hear that. They want to keep their fingers in their ears and to focus on their agenda, instead of actually addressing what matters to the people of this province.

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

Ms. Natalie Pierre: The opposition claims to care about small businesses, yet they oppose a simple common-sense policy that boosts tourism, supports local craft brewers and drives visitors to our parks. This isn’t just about convenience; it’s about creating jobs, supporting rural economies and giving local entrepreneurs the tools they need to thrive.

Why are they against local breweries, wineries and tourism operators who stand to benefit from Bill 46? These are the very people who fuel our communities and showcase the best of what our regions have to offer. Do they not trust people to act responsibly, or do they just prefer to keep outdated restrictions that punish responsible families and stifle economic opportunity?

Ms. Chandra Pasma: I have to say, Speaker, I have literally no idea what the member opposite is talking about.

I am going to talk about the ways in which our party supports small businesses but this government has refused to. Because we are in a trade war with the United States, and our small businesses are affected just as our large businesses are. If we had a genuine buy-Ontario procurement policy, that would benefit our small businesses. They would have the opportunity to bid on local contracts with school boards, municipalities, with the provincial government, and to be able to provide services or products that would benefit our economy and our communities. It would also create local jobs and local revenues.

Instead of supporting that solution that we put forward, the government voted against it and said no. They would rather have that money continue to go to the United States and to other foreign companies. I think a government that was genuinely interested in supporting small businesses would have 100% supported buy-Ontario procurement.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): A very quick question and response.

MPP Lise Vaugeois: There is a piece in here about recycling and blue bins. I’m wondering, given the disaster that has happened with the recycling of alcoholic bottles, I wonder if you feel any faith that this piece is going to address any of those problems?

Ms. Chandra Pasma: No, I have no faith in this government to deliver anything. And if I had any, the Skills Development Fund would have wiped out all remaining faith that I had.

We really see this government can’t manage its way out of a paper box. They couldn’t manage to shift alcohol sales without having a plan for the bottles. It’s the downside of policy by press release, Speaker: You’ve never actually

thought through the details of how you’re actually going to implement anything.

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

Mr. Adil Shamji: Thank you for allowing me this opportunity to speak on Bill 46, seemingly an effort to reduce red tape. Of course, it’s great to be here in the chamber with all of you wonderful members, including my spectacular colleague and member for Beaches–East York, with whom I will be sharing my time this evening.

There are few things that I enjoy more than the opportunity to stand up for Ontarians on a late Monday night. Certainly, on the occasion of legislation that proposes to reduce red tape but actually just reduces accountability, I think it’s more important than ever to spend this time together.

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I wanted to begin my remarks by reflecting on some of the other remarks that I’ve heard earlier this evening, notably the ones from the Attorney General. I’d like to begin by thanking the Attorney General for very kindly and thoughtfully explaining to us the magnitude of one billion. He reminded us that one billion, if expressed in seconds, adds up to about 32 years. So I thought I would use that analogy or metaphor to help this government understand the magnitude of the mistakes that they have made so far.

For example, when they tried to give up \$8.3 billion to their friends and donors through the greenbelt scandal, \$8.3 billion is equivalent to 265.6 years. When they spent \$1.9 billion to move alcohol into convenience stores one year early, \$1.9 billion is equivalent to 60.8 years. That move subsequently caused the LCBO to have a loss in revenue of \$2 billion this year, which is equivalent to 64 years. The government is now proposing to build a tunnel under the 401 that, if we are charitable and say will only cost \$50 billion, is the equivalent to 1,600 years. I hope that this short illustration of the magnitude of this government’s errors and follies will help them to right their ways. I am not going to hold my breath, however.

I also wanted to reflect on another remark from the Attorney General, specifically in relation to his advocacy to weaken the Ontario Divisional Court by reducing the number of judges that may sit over trials. Reflecting on the fact that, especially, the Ontario Divisional Court is the one that reviews government decisions, it all of a sudden becomes so clear why they are so keen to weaken the power of this court.

But the purpose of my remarks this evening isn’t actually to reflect on the Attorney General. They are instead intended to reflect on the substance and content of Bill 46. My remarks will really focus on three schedules: schedule 8, schedule 10 and schedule 16.

Schedule 8 concerns itself with legalizing what is essentially unsustainable and unilateral deforestation. It accomplishes this by creating new regulatory pathways that bypass permits entirely. It allows the minister, I presume, of red tape reduction, or a minister, to authorize forest removals through regulations under prescribed circumstances. There is zero requirement, as far as I can tell, to consider the sustainability of those crown forests. I think

that is of paramount importance as we head into worsening environmental challenges. As we look down the barrel of looming and worsening climate change, our forests are a major source of carbon capture. The thought of, without any consideration and, frankly, without any accountability, being able to go in and potentially eviscerate our forests is concerning to me.

As we've seen before, this is a government that really does not concern itself with accountability. If we have, for example, a mining company that wants to clear-cut without any concern for the environment, there is no way to protect the environment. There is no way to ensure sustainability. There's no way to ensure even consultation with Indigenous people. Why is it that the duty to consult seems to disappear when it can potentially be done by regulation?

I want to turn next to schedule 16. Schedule 16 concerns itself specifically with a number of measures that would allow the Minister of Red Tape Reduction to have sweeping powers over personal information, specifically sweeping powers to have access to personal information, with vague consultation purposes. These powers are authorized with no limits, no safeguards, no requirements even to minimize the amount of data that is made available to the minister. It permits essentially almost limitless interpretation.

I am, of course, expressing my concerns, but I'm not an expert in the information and privacy space, so I will instead refer all members in the House to the Information and Privacy Commissioner, who says this places "unacceptable privacy burdens on Ontarians." It states that this is the next step in a "very concerning trend," and further goes on to state that this risks circumventing privacy protections under FIPPA.

There are those in the House that would say, "Okay, well, we understand that you're going to quote back the IPC's words to us, but don't worry. The IPC has been concerned before and there's never, ever been anything to worry about." In fact, I will take all members in the House back in time, just a few months, to the Ontario Health at Home information and privacy breach, which I was the one to disclose, I believe around June or July. In this privacy breach, this government lost control over the data of at least 200,000 Ontarians.

In the modern age, it's not that unusual that privacy breaches happen, even when people act in good faith. It makes it no less acceptable, but it has been known to happen before. What made this privacy breach so unprecedented isn't the fact that it happened; it is the fact that this government took zero action after it did. It wasn't until I notified the public that patients themselves were notified that their personal health information had been compromised by that Premier and this Minister of Health. And it turned out that their data had been compromised for over three months—three months during which their personal information, demographic information, even their health information could have been—was—available to bad actors.

And so this is an example, an example that literally just happened and which justifies all of us in this House, and

especially those of us on the opposition side, demanding the most stringent regulations and protections in place so that we can ensure that the personal information of Ontarians is protected and preserved. Certainly, this government has given us no reason to believe that they are capable of doing that, and it seems as though the IPC, the Information and Privacy Commissioner, does not have that confidence either.

Finally, I'd like to turn to schedule 10, which purports to offer increased transparency in long-term care. It supposedly calls for the publication of data relating to compliance and enforcement information about long-term-care homes. It says that the director should publish "as soon as reasonably possible" such information, without actually saying what the timeline is for that, whether delays would be permissible, and what the consequences are if those delays are seemingly unacceptable. It allows the director of a long-term-care home to choose "any format or manner"—complete and total utter discretion, permitting potentially the burying of information. And finally, any information that becomes public is—sorry, I'll leave it at that.

As I reflect on what the last few years have looked like in long-term care under this government, the need for transparency, for accountability and real measures to protect long-term-care residents is essential. This is, after all, the government that during COVID-19 performed so poorly, the military had to be called in to long-term-care homes, the government that performed so poorly that thousands of patients died in long-term care. So what we need is more promises—more vague and unenforceable promises—for transparency if we actually want to be serious about protecting Ontario patients.

In the final seconds of my remarks, I want to reflect on the fact that what we need is real action, what we need is real accountability, and this legislation does not offer any of that.

To continue along that line of thinking, I'd like to turn over to my exceptional friend and colleague the member for Beaches—East York.

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

I recognize the member for Beaches—East York.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. And I love spending the night with all of you. Why stop at midnight? Let's do a sleepover—all night, come on. Let's do it. Because that's when we do our best work, right?

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So thank you very much for this bill, Bill 46. Well, we have a few schedules—22 schedules here, right? There are some interesting ones: liquor licence control in provincial parks, funeral, burial and cremation—lots of great stuff.

My colleagues have already talked about crown forests, so I won't really address schedule 8 because it has been covered, but I will talk about schedule 20, which I'm sure you've all memorized: the Resource Recovery and Circular Economy Act. You know I'm a trash girl, and I love waste diversion. Circular economy—we can't say "climate change," right? We can't say "climate change," but we can

say—I think you’re with me on it—“circular economy.” Okay, so let’s talk about that.

Schedule 20 of Bill 46 amends the Resource Recovery and Circular Economy Act, 2016. It provides that the minister may collect records and documents such as contracts, agreements, bills of lading, invoices, information about the operation of a waste disposal site and more from parties that are required to perform responsibilities under the act, namely, parties connected to primary packaging, commercial connections and more.

The act also notes that a regulation may provide that a person who satisfies the condition of having entered into an agreement as outlined by the act must offer the collection services, management services and implementation of a promotion and education program for prescribed material, end products and more. That’s really interesting, actually, that you want some promotion and education program when we’ve heard nothing about EPR. I actually asked your teams from your ministry about whether you would do communications—what kind of communications you were going to do—for extended producer responsibility. And guess what? Zilch—because why would you want anyone to know about it?

The importance of strengthening the circular economy, encouraging reuse and discouraging single-use items, is something that you are all familiar with me crusading for. The sooner we get composting in this building, the better. I’m going to take the rest of my time to discuss the importance of the circular economy—which I’m sure you’re well aware of, but I will have to remind you—specifically in the construction industry.

Have you heard of a company called Ouroboros, like the snake eating the tail? Circular economy. It’s a fantastic organization that works on deconstruction versus demolition. Why would we waste those vital resources when we can use them again? And we all know we’re running out of landfill sites, which is why you’re snooping and sniffing around Dresden against the MPP for Lambton–Kent–Middlesex’s desires and wishes—especially when he was a councillor.

So let’s talk in detail about the circular economy. First of all, the construction industry contributes about \$162 billion to the economy annually, accounting for 7.5% of Canada’s gross domestic product. Canada’s material productivity—how efficiently materials are used to produce economic output—ranks second-to-last compared to the 38 OECD countries. What can we do about this? The average construction material cost to build a 2,400-square-foot home has increased by nearly \$98,000 since early 2020. Tariff threats are adding further uncertainty and pressure to already-strained supply chains. Lumber supply was constrained between 2020 and 2023 due to extreme weather events.

Interjection.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: I know; you don’t want to talk about climate change—but that’s extreme weather events such as heavy rain, flooding and wildfires, limiting production during a period of high construction demand.

Canada’s overreliance on cross-border waste exports, particularly to the US, causes provinces like Ontario a

major crisis if the border closes. Think about it: We are still shipping our waste to Michigan. We are shipping industrial, commercial and institutional waste to Michigan. Let’s be clear on that: It’s not residential waste; it’s ICI—industrial, commercial and institutional. What’s going to happen? We’re talking about Trump and tariffs all the time—or you are—but yet what are you doing about this? Why not invest heavily and seriously in the circular economy?

What can you do? Many things: A more circular building environment can also help meet Canada’s climate targets, reduce waste and mitigate landfill shortages—and also Ontario’s targets. But actually, I forgot. We threw those targets out the window.

Modelling suggests leveraging only three circular strategies: design for disassembly, adaptive reuse of buildings and modular construction. But what do we need? We need hubs. We need spaces and warehouses to house all these deconstruction products. I won’t say waste, because we can reuse them again.

BC does a great job with their meanwhile spaces. There are spaces when a developer buys land and is going through the rezoning process. It’s a good two-plus years. What can they do with that space? In the meantime, they can do all kinds of things: arts hubs, allotment gardens, community gardens. They can use it for the circular economy. The Ouroboros Deconstruction company can use that to warehouse their products. It makes sense: It’s jobs, saving money, saving items from going to our landfill site—which I know you care about—and it’s the right thing to do.

I’m not sure who’s been to Green Lane landfill; that’s the city of Toronto’s landfill site. I’m making the trek soon. It’s in Southwold, Ontario, near London, in case you didn’t know. It is going to be at its capacity by 2035. What’s Toronto going to do with their garbage? Are you thinking about that? Plan ahead, people.

And strengthen this part of your bill, schedule 20. It makes sense financially, logically, from an economic point of view and from a jobs creation point of view. We won’t even get into EPR, but I will tell you that I toured the Bermondsey waste transfer site in beautiful Beaches–East York the other day. They want circular materials—which you know well—to deal with mattresses, something that they have a very difficult time getting rid of.

So let’s strengthen schedule 20. Let’s figure out this whole bill, because it’s basically a godawful mess.

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

Mr. Ric Bresee: I thank the member opposite for her comments this evening. As a former municipal member, I’m very aware of all the challenges with the recycling program, with the landfill services and all of that. But I have to ask: The opposition claims to want that greener economy but votes against every single measure that we put forward that makes recycling easier and investment in that green economy faster.

Bill 46 proves that you can protect the planet and create jobs. It’s balanced; it’s forward-thinking. It’s an approach that cuts waste, attracts clean tech investment and empowers

local businesses to lead the way. Instead of supporting such progress, the opposition clings to these outdated systems that do nothing but slow us down and get in our way.

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Why does the opposition believe that environmentalism means endless forms of bureaucracy instead of practical, results-driven action? Why do they stand with red tape over results? And why are they not supporting the innovators who are actively cleaning up Ontario's economy one project at a time?

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: If you were actually serious about waste diversion, you wouldn't delay your targets. What are you doing for extended producer responsibility and circular materials? You are delaying your targets.

You are supposed to expand public collection in parks and on the streets—you're killing that. You're supposed to expand recycling collection in apartment buildings, high-rises, churches, schools—you're killing that. You are delaying the targets; you propose to delay them by five years. I think you're acquiescing a bit on that.

You are not serious about waste diversion, so we're going to be up "something" creek without a paddle shortly.

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

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Thank you to the member. I was on the municipal council there for 17 years as well, in St. Catharines. We often got our minutes a week before, and I would say, "You know what? I'm going to start reading them backwards; flip it over." We should start with schedule 22 and then go into schedule 20, because often they used to hide things. Because you were there late hours, you didn't make good decisions.

Given that schedule 20 simply gives the minister more power to demand data from the RPRA and producers, do you believe that this actually strengthens Ontario's recycling program system, or is it just a way for this government to look busy without fixing the problem they created in the blue box transition program?

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Extended producer responsibility works well. It's done in Europe. You're putting the onus on the producers to deal with the packaging that they've created, so hopefully it makes them think, "Hey, maybe we'd better use more eco-friendly, biodegradable packaging." So it's a good thing that we're doing it, but I wonder why this government wouldn't brag about that—if they really believed in it and they were doing it right—and do some proper communications, because they're doing zero communications for some reason. Care to share why?

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

Mr. John Fraser: I want to go back to schedule 9, and I just want to ask my colleague this question. In schedule 9, the government is indemnifying itself from responsibility for the decision to take away an 88-year-old widow's day in court about a mining royalty that this government shut down through a PR bill process that we do regularly here.

For the government to actually say we need to be protected from this thing that we did in a government bill, taking away the right of an 88-year-old widow to what might be rightfully hers, to take away her day in court—do you think that's the right thing to do?

Mr. Adil Shamji: On this side of the House, we see this as a pretty black-and-white matter: The answer is no. I think on the other side of the House, the answer would depend: Does this little old lady have Kory Teneycke as a lobbyist?

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

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: Thank you to the member from Don Valley East. Thank you for your remarks.

Since 2018, our government has achieved a significant milestone: We have saved nearly \$1.2 billion and freed up 1.8 million hours, reducing total red tape by nearly 6% while upholding health and safety and environmental standards. You like the red tape reduction through health care; I know you advocate for that. And we are doing an estimated almost 14,000 unnecessary regulations tasks that the previous government neglected. These results are not just numbers; they represent a real improvement in the lives of families, entrepreneurs and the job creators across the province.

Can the member from Don Valley East explain why you are not supporting the bill for the well-being of the people of Ontario and the health of our economy?

Mr. Adil Shamji: I thank my colleague and the member from across the aisle for his thoughtful question. As he correctly acknowledged, one of my primary interests here is in health care. As I reflect on red tape in health care in particular, I note the fact that family doctors in Ontario are completing about, on average, 19 hours of unnecessary administrative red tape and paperwork. They're not getting the help that they need on that.

When I think about the kinds of changes that I would like to see, the kinds of solutions that we need to be putting forward, on the one hand, I will say, I'm regrettably not seeing them. I will also say that, regrettably, I'm seeing some misguided efforts, ones that actually threaten to remove some of the accountability that is necessary to protect Ontario patients and removing some of the accountability that I think this government's previous track record has shown that we need to desperately see. And so, I share the member opposite's passion in trying to streamline things, but I don't believe, unfortunately, that this legislation is the way.

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

MPP Lise Vaugeois: To the member from Beaches—East York: I saw a lot of tittering on the other side when you were talking about the circular economy, so that really made me think perhaps they have no idea what it is. And then I thought about the perfect circular economy that was demonstrated through the recycling of beer and alcohol bottles through the Beer Store. I'm wondering if that's why that is such a disaster. Perhaps they just don't have a

concept of circular economies. Would you care to comment?

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Thank you very much to the member from Thunder Bay–Superior North, who I had the pleasure of seeing on the weekend because her beautiful mother lives in beautiful Beaches–East York and I take care of her sometimes.

Thank you for the great question. It is going to be a nightmare January 1—I hope everyone is ready for it—because the same time that extended producer responsibility comes into full effect is the same time that grocery stores and convenience stores are going to be mandated to collect booze bottles. I don't know—my neighbours are like, “Where am I taking my beer bottles? All the Beer Stores are closing.” Beer Stores had the great track record of not quite a 100% recycling rate, but they were the gold star, the role model. This is what I constantly say about these guys, this government: Why do you insist on destroying things that are working well and then the opposite, basically?

Prepare for January 1, because these guys don't have their act together with bottles and they killed my deposit return bill.

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

A very, very quick question and response.

Mr. John Fraser: Okay, it will be a very, very quick question. Why do you think the government went to the trouble of indemnifying itself in court against the decision they made not to give an 88-year-old widow her day in court? Why do you think they blocked her access to justice? Was it because the company was big and powerful?

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

Mr. John Jordan: Speaker, first let me begin by acknowledging Premier Ford for his leadership and passionate defence of our province and our country as he works relentlessly to protect Ontario during these challenging times. As the PA to health and to long-term care, I want to acknowledge that under the Premier's leadership, our government has worked tirelessly to protect our health care system, to protect workers' jobs and our patients and long-term-care residents.

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Speaker, this is a time of global uncertainty as we face the impact of President Trump's tariffs and the resulting trade war. These unjust tariffs continue to threaten our economy, our businesses and the livelihoods of Ontarians. In the face of these tremendous challenges, our government is united and steadfast in our resolve to protect Ontario and to protect Canada.

Now, more than ever, Ontario needs a world-class, highly skilled workforce to keep our province competitive. Now is the time to do everything we can to eliminate burdensome red tape and bureaucratic delays and remove the barriers to trade in all our systems and processes. This is why our government is taking bold action with the Protect Ontario by Cutting Red Tape Act, 2025. The proposed legislative changes are an innovative step our government

is taking to address these challenges and support our province's future.

This is the 16th red tape reduction package, creating an Ontario that is welcoming and engaging—an environment that is ripe for economic growth and where people want to live, work and raise a family. The bill represents the work of 20 ministries. Teamwork is something I've been impressed with since being given the privilege of representing Lanark–Frontenac–Kingston. To the credit of our Coach Ford, ministries work together.

A great example of the value of red tape reduction: Earlier this year, our government made legislative changes to enable qualified US-licensed physicians, nurse practitioners, registered nurses and registered practical nurses to begin working in Ontario health settings for up to six months while seeking registration in Ontario, removing a significant barrier to attracting American health care workers. By cutting the red tape that was delaying highly trained US-licensed doctors and nurses from being able to live and work in Ontario, we have made bold strides to ensure Ontario patients receive timely and accessible care.

Through red tape reduction, we have removed barriers to labour mobility and made it easier and faster for physicians and nurses to care for Ontario patients. Red tape reduction is a direct benefit to our businesses and economy in general, which benefits also our health and social systems and access to care.

In this bill, the Ministry of Long-Term Care is proposing a legislative amendment to the Fixing Long-Term Care Act, 2021. The amendment would introduce a three-year retention period for inspection-related reports published online. The goal is to provide the public with more relevant and up-to-date compliance information about long-term-care homes. Reports older than three years would no longer be published online, but would still be maintained by the ministry and available upon request. This change would improve clarity, align with inspection practices in other regulated sectors, support an AODA-compliant and bilingual website and reduce the cost of converting and maintaining large archives of older reports.

By reducing the number of reports from 30,000 to 6,000 across over 620 homes, this would improve efficiency, allowing for deeper engagement, enhance accessibility and have a more accurate and up-to-date picture of the homes' quality of care and compliance. There is no compliance impact on long-term-care operators as publishing is the ministry's responsibility.

These changes are proof of our government's relentless focus on putting people before paperwork. Since 2018, we have saved the people and businesses of this province nearly \$1.2 billion and 1.8 million hours. I think the average working person works about 1,825 to 1,900 hours a year, so that's about 986 people now working productively.

With this bill, if it should pass, we're adding another \$5.8 million in annual savings and eliminating over 256,000 hours in unnecessary paperwork and compliance burdens. Speaker, this is over 30 years in time savings. These are hours that can now be redirected to building

homes, hiring workers, serving customers and innovating for the future.

Every minute we save for a small business or a health care provider is a minute they can spend growing their Ontario footprint or improving their services. Every dollar we save for a family is a dollar they can spend on groceries, on housing or on their children. This is what red tape reduction means in real life. It means time and money back in people's pockets; more room for business to grow, hire and compete; and access to our health and social system. We do this work while maintaining the high standards of health, safety and environmental protection.

We are cutting red tape, not cutting corners. We are rid of what doesn't make sense. That's why we evaluate every measure through the lens of our seven principles of regulatory modernization, which include respecting international standards; avoiding duplication; focusing on performance over prescription; and ensuring clear, streamlined reporting that doesn't waste people's time. These principles, laid out in the Modernizing Ontario for People and Businesses Act, guide every policy in this bill.

Madam Speaker, we are living in a time of extraordinary global pressure. We face high inflation, rising costs, supply chain inefficiencies, rapid technological change and recurrent tariff threats from the US. Cutting red tape has never been more critical. We must be leaner and more agile if we are to protect Ontario from these new challenges.

But our government is not just reacting to this new reality; we are building a foundation to thrive despite them. That's why cutting red tape is not a side project for this government; it is our primary strategy. We know the risk of doing nothing.

Every delay in permitting, every unnecessary regulation, every duplication are barriers to investment, to jobs, to our future. This government was elected on a clear mandate to protect Ontario. We believe regulations should serve people and not delay their progress. We are focused on outcomes and not just paperwork.

The previous government's failed policies and over-regulation made it impossible for Ontario to be open for business. They drove over 300,000 good-paying manufacturing jobs out of the province and left families to fend for themselves.

When we formed government in 2018, Premier Ford was clear in his message: Ontario is open for business. I'm happy to announce that with this government's efforts, Ontario was given an A grade for reducing red tape this year from the CFIB. Ontario is now among the top two best performers for cutting red tape in Canada, and we have the lowest regulatory burden per capita in the nation. Our efforts have been working, and we have and will continue to make life easier and more affordable for the people of Ontario. That's why this bill is so important.

Let me now walk you through some of the concrete actions we're taking in this package, actions that will make a real difference in people's lives.

First, we are addressing a long-standing concern raised by those living with disabilities. Through regulatory changes that came into effect over the summer, this bill

ensured the new Canada Disability Benefit, a federal program, will not be counted as income under the Ontario Disability Support Program; Ontario Works, or OW; or assistance for children with severe disabilities. This means that individuals receiving those provincial supports did not see their benefits clawed back if they also received the federal benefit. This could amount to hundreds of dollars more per month in the pockets of some of Ontario's most vulnerable people, money that can go forward toward housing, food, mobility and health expenses.

We're doing this in response to what we heard from stakeholders, from advocates and from those with lived experience. They asked us to make this exemption, and our government is proud to say that we are listening and we are acting. This is red tape reduction at its absolute best. It improves lives, it makes the system simpler and fairer, and it protects those who really rely on it.

Second, we are taking action to protect public safety while supporting our propane industry. New national safety standards require that certain propane tanks be purged by qualified workers before being used. Under the previous rules, only one specific class of worker could do this work. But the industry told us there weren't enough of those workers to meet the deadline, and they were right. Without action, this bottleneck could have put safety and compliance at risk. So, we're stepping in, allowing other appropriately trained and certified propane workers to carry out this work. The result: broader access to skilled labour, faster compliance with safety rules, all while maintaining safety standards. This is exactly the kind of pragmatic fix that government should be delivering, and under Premier Ford we are.

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Speaker, let me continue by highlighting more of the practical and forward-looking measures we are introducing through this bill and the broader red tape reduction package. We are expanding and enhancing the strong-mayor powers framework to more municipalities across Ontario. As of May 1, 2025, this framework now applies to 216 municipalities, covering most of Ontario's population. We are strengthening this framework to give mayors the tools they need to deliver on shared provincial municipal priorities: building homes, expanding transit and delivering the infrastructure we all depend on. These changes respond directly to feedback from municipalities. Local leaders have told us they want more flexibility to deliver results without being buried in outdated processes or paralyzed by procedural gridlock. This legislation helps municipalities do exactly that. Whether it's streamlining council procedures, accelerating approvals or cutting through the local red tape, these powers help elected officials to move quickly, efficiently and transparently.

We trust our local leaders, and we're giving them the tools to act. At a time when Ontario is facing a housing crisis, speed and clarity in decision-making is not optional; it's essential. The people of this province expect government at all levels to work together and get results, and that is what this expansion of strong-mayor powers delivers.

Fourth, we are proposing thoughtful, measured updates to the Liquor Licence and Control Act to modernize alcohol consumption rules in Ontario's provincial parks. Under the current rules, alcohol can only be consumed on individual campsites or with a special event permit from the Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario. But park superintendents and visitors alike have long called for more flexibility to allow responsible alcohol consumption in designated areas such as beaches, picnic sites or open grassy areas. This legislation proposes exactly that. With clear regulations and proper oversight, superintendents will be allowed to designate specific public areas for alcohol consumption. This reflects a modern and balanced approach, one that aligns with how people responsibly enjoy our beautiful provincial parks while maintaining strong safeguards for safety enforcement and public order. More importantly, it creates a better visitor experience and brings Ontario's rules in line with other jurisdictions across Canada. We are treating people like adults, and we are empowering public servants to make local decisions and reflect the needs of their communities.

Fifth, we are tackling a challenge that has been frustrating tenants and landlords alike: delays at the Landlord and Tenant Board. We've all heard stories—cases that take months, sometimes over a year, to be resolved. This is not acceptable for tenants seeking stability and is not workable for housing providers facing uncertainty and risk. Through this package, we are exploring legislative changes to the Residential Tenancies Act, 2006, in collaboration with the Ministry of the Attorney General and the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Our goal is simple: to reduce delays, cut administrative burden and ensure that disputes are resolved quickly, fairly and consistently. When tenants and landlords are stuck in legal limbo, it impacts the entire housing system. This is why reducing delays isn't just about process; it's about restoring confidence in a critical system and encouraging more investments in rental housing across the province.

Sixth: We are accelerating timelines for critical mineral development in Ontario, a key strategic advantage in the global economy. We know that Ontario has the resources the world needs: lithium, nickel, cobalt and other minerals essential to batteries, electric vehicles and clean technology. But having the minerals is not enough. We must have a permitting and regulatory system that moves at the speed of the market. Through a new "one project, one process" model, we are coordinating permitting across the Ministry of Energy and Mines, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry and the Ministry of Public and Business Service Delivery.

This approach ensures that mining companies don't face duplicated steps, conflicting requirements or long delays in securing the rights to proceed with early work. In fact, we've already streamlined some processes, reducing what used to take over 30 days down to just five business days. But we're going further.

In cases where land tenure isn't finalized, we're enabling the issuance of temporary land use permits so projects can begin preliminary work without being held

back. This helps Ontario remain a global leader in the secure and sustainable supply of critical minerals and supports advanced manufacturing, EV production and energy innovation across the province. We're building a modern regulatory system for a modern economy, and this package is helping lead the way.

All of these actions, from disability benefit exemptions to propane workforce reforms to municipal empowerment to mining approvals, have one thing in common: They are about making government work better for workers, for families, for businesses and for communities.

We are looking at every policy, every form and every process and asking, "How does this protect Ontario? Does this make sense in 2025? Does it serve the people of Ontario? Does it add value or just add delays?" And if it no longer makes sense, it's gone.

That is how we build a province that is resilient, responsive and ready for the future. That is how we protect Ontario's economy from external shocks: by ensuring that our internal systems are efficient and effective. And that is how we make Ontario the most competitive jurisdiction in the G7 to live, work, invest and grow a business.

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

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: I think I was a little lost in that, but I'll direct my question to the member from Lanark-Frontenac-Kingston.

You've brought forward yet another bad omnibus bill here, and it slaps the words "cutting red tape" on the cover of it, as if it's a magical fixing of everything. But Ontarians remembered what happened in long-term care: more than 4,300 seniors died; inspections collapsed for weeks; families begged for help; and the Canadian Armed Forces walked into the homes and came out with PTSD because of the horrific conditions that they had to witness. And after all of that, schedule 10 in this bill—your so-called fix-it bill—doesn't increase inspections, doesn't increase or strengthen enforcement and doesn't hold bad operators accountable. It just changes how the paperwork is posted online.

My question is, how can this government pretend they are cutting red tape when schedule 10 does absolutely nothing to protect seniors and when the real red tape was the caution tape wrapped around long-term-care homes while thousands of families were grieving and still remember what this government did?

Mr. John Jordan: We always see that pink finger pointing across the aisle at the Progressive Conservative Party. We all need to remember that the long-term-care system that this government inherited in 2018 was a neglected system. And certainly, the system we have today, the long-term-care homes we have today and the staffing we have today, is not the long-term-care homes that we inherited in 2018.

I'd also like to remind the member that in 2019, a year later, this government was faced with a pandemic. And just to remind the member one more time that you were asking us to—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): Order, please.

Would the member like to finish his response?

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Mr. John Jordan: I'm finished, Speaker. Thank you.

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

Mr. John Fraser: Thank you very much. I want to thank the member for his presentation. I'm not going to talk about what the last question was about, but I do have some difference of opinion on that. But I do want to know what your opinion is on the thing I've been talking about throughout this bill, which is the government indemnifying itself because of a decision that they made—a decision that the government made, government members made—on taking away the rights of an 88-year-old widow to have her day in court—not to make the judgment for her, but to have her day in court for something that was rightfully hers, or that's what she believes. And because of a decision the government made, that was taken away from her. Do you agree that the government should be indemnifying itself and the company involved from any action that might be taken against them?

Mr. John Jordan: Something I learned working in health care: sometimes there are tough decisions to be made. The right way to make those decisions is to take a step back and see how this is going to impact the client. How is this going to impact our constituent?

I have full faith in the Attorney General and the Solicitor General. The decisions were made in the benefit and through the vision and the lens of protecting the constituent.

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

Mr. Joseph Racinsky: Thank you to the member for his incredible remarks and for the hard work that he does representing Lanark-Frontenac-Kingston.

Speaker, since day one, our government has been laser-focused on reducing costs and cutting red tape for Ontario's businesses and families. Under the previous Liberal government, as was discussed a little bit earlier, the average cost of red tape was \$33,000 annually for a business, making Ontario the most over-regulated province in the country. The Canadian Federation of Independent Business gave them a C grade, the worst in Ontario history.

Can the member please share how the Protect Ontario by Cutting Red Tape Act is going to continue our work, eliminating burdens and streamlining approvals to ensure Ontario remains the best place in the G7 to invest, grow a business and create good-paying jobs?

Mr. John Jordan: I think it's very important at this time, when we're dealing with the threats from the US, that our economy, the Canadian economy and, specifically for us, the Ontario economy, is the economy that's most welcoming to businesses with availability of energy, availability of a workforce and an environment that is conducive to doing business on a cost basis.

I think by eliminating these millions and billions of dollars of unnecessary work—and I mentioned the reduction of almost a thousand employees, if you work it out on an employee count. Those are people that can now be

productive and increase our workforce. They're not unemployed, but they are no longer doing tasks that we don't need. So when we're looking, and the Attorney General said something to the effect, we need to ask what we're doing but also why we're doing it. And I think those are the questions that come through on the red tape bill. That's why they're in an omnibus bill and there are so many of them. There's a lot of work to be done to cut red tape in this province.

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

M^{me} France Gélinas: As the member well knows, we have independent officers in this Legislature that are there to advise us, as members of provincial Parliament. One of them is the Information and Privacy Commissioner.

The member worked in health care long enough to know how important it is to protect people's privacy. In order for our health care system to function, you have to feel confident that what you tell your health care providers, nobody else will know but them.

The Information and Privacy Commissioner wrote to the government to say you have to withdraw schedule 16, Modernizing Ontario for People and Businesses Act.

Will the member respect the independent Information and Privacy Commissioner and withdraw schedule 16 of the bill?

Mr. John Jordan: Since FIPPA came out there have been many debates on either side about how much information is required, and I think the challenges of determining what information is necessary for the betterment of Ontario, for the betterment of, in my case, people's care, and in your previous career's basis people's care—what information can we share? There have been rules set around that, and certainly this government is not eliminating rules but making things more flexible for the benefit of Ontario. I think, relative to your question, that we still have FIPPA; we still have regulations. And anonymized information is, in my opinion, not harmful, but it is informative and can produce productivity in this province.

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

Mr. John Fraser: I just want to pull up my last question. I don't have the same faith that the minister has and the Attorney General, because on the face value of what we're seeing here is a person not getting access to justice and the government saying, "Do you know what? We're going to protect ourselves." That's not what government should be doing. They should be giving access to justice for people. It's not for me to decide. Maybe she's not entitled to this. I don't know. But we can't be the arbiters of that, and that's what this committee and the government has done. And it's unfair. It's unjust. It's just wrong. This has been going on for four or five years. I really didn't want to have the opportunity to speak about it, but the reason I keep speaking about it is, it is really unjust. Does the member agree?

Mr. John Jordan: I do have faith in the Attorney General. He's quite informed about legal matters, and I think it's also important that we have some kind of a filter

system for our court system so that our courts are not further clogged up with cases that we know are not in the benefit of an individual or there is no case. I think, as we move forward—I don't know the specifics of the case you're referring to, but I have faith in the system and I have faith in our Attorney General.

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

MPP Lise Vaugeois: It is an honour to speak in this House and have the opportunity to address this bill and some of the other things I think that have been taking place in this House.

We don't know whether this time allocation will be applied to this bill, but we have seen time allocation applied to some very, very serious bills that undermine, take away democratic rights from people. And certainly Bill 33 is one of those that undermines parents' ability to have direct communication with democratically elected trustees.

I'm going to focus mostly on this bill. I want to start with the Fixing Long-Term Care Act section. It's interesting listening to the member opposite speak about this because, frankly, I think the changes have exactly the opposite effect.

First of all, there are currently 15 years' worth of records of long-term-care homes available to the public online. So reducing it to three years actually requires going in there and taking away a service that already exists. It doesn't take anything to maintain. It's already there. The website is up; people can access it.

Now, this was posted online for feedback, this particular section. I will say many people wrote in opposition to this. I'm going to read from an article posted by the CBC: "Ontario Bill Will Protect Bad Actors in Long-Term Care Homes."

I do want to just come back to who has been in charge of long-term homes. Perhaps the member doesn't remember that it was the Mike Harris government that privatized long-term-care homes, and then he made millions of dollars as the chairman.

Interjection.

MPP Lise Vaugeois: Yes, but those are the owners of those homes. In fact, it was Chartwell that evicted 200 seniors just a year ago, also closely connected with the former Premier. So you need to pay attention to history and actually understand how these institutions were set up as real estate trusts, actually with very little to do with care for seniors.

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Now, this section reduces the amount of information available to the public to the last three years, and it just rotates, so that the public is no longer has easy access to see actually what happened during COVID. They don't have easy access to see that the government actually relicensed and gave 30-year licences to some of the same bad actors where the most people died during COVID.

So it's not a removal of red tape; it's actually the enforcement of new red tape, because if people want to get access to that information, they need to write to the min-

istry, which requires more labour from somebody working in the Ministry of Long-Term Care. We already know they've got a lot to do; now having to dig up the records that were available publicly, but are no longer available, is actually creating more work. I'm going to quote from this article: "It's very clear here that it's to shield the bad reputations of repeated bad actors in long-term care from having their records of non-compliance being made visible." This is a quote from Vivian Stamatopoulos, a professor at Ontario Tech University and a long-term-care advocate. She did that in an interview with CBC's *Metro Morning*.

Over 30,000 reports are currently available online, dating back 15 years, including for homes that are no longer operational according to the Ministry of Long-Term Care. But I can imagine that the owners of those homes are still around and operating other homes. This is valuable information for families considering where they might like to have their parents live, if it comes to being in long-term care. It's also important for workers to know: "Do I want to work in this place? Is this a safe place? Does it have a good record?"

And it's also important for researchers, so that they have access to that data and can make longitudinal studies to see what has actually transpired over the longer term in long-term-care homes. It's important information, and it's important information because things went very, very badly during COVID.

The ministry has tried to say that this is typical of industry inspection industry practices, such as for child care settings. But, in fact, that's a false equivalency. Children don't live in daycares, and the history of deaths, non-compliance and abuse in Ontario long-term-care homes demands a full public record. As we all should recall, 4,335 residents died in Ontario's long-term-care homes.

So why would we want to hide that information? You kind of whitewash it away, take it off the website and, lo and behold, I guess those things never happened. It is clearly a strategy to hide information from people and make it harder to access. I know that it is harder to access because I know people who have applied for information from the ministry and are still waiting, and that was six months ago. So to my mind, schedule 10 in fact increases red tape and makes it much more difficult for people to get critical information about long-term-care homes.

I want to look next at the Crown Forest Sustainability Act, which is very puzzling, because if you're going to get a licence for forestry, in order to get permits, first you explore and do assessments of the impacts on wildlife, water, soil—in other words, environmental impacts—as well as Aboriginal and treaty rights. But this section basically says, "Well, if it's aggregates, if it's the Public Lands Act, if it's the Mining Act, we can skip over all of that and simply just take the trees down. We don't need to do an environmental assessment."

How is that protecting Ontario? Frankly, how is that even protecting the forestry industry? It seems to me it's throwing the forestry industry under the bus in the sense that they have to go through those steps in order to have

the right to have a licence to take down trees, but other kinds of corporations don't have to. It's very puzzling.

It's interesting, I happened to be in Leslieville in Toronto just yesterday. I went to a lovely art gallery. It was an art gallery, actually, of fabric artists from Caledon and, interestingly, it was all in opposition to the greenbelt. They were art pieces that were a response to the threats to the greenbelt. While I was there, I picked up a brochure and it said it's actually fighting a Brazilian-owned aggregate company that is planning on a blast-aggregate process—eight baseball fields right in the middle of protected parkland, and in fact, bumping right up to the Credit River. So it looks to me like this is the perfect example of, this company can take down those trees, doesn't have to go through an environmental assessment, no concern about the Credit River—no concern, frankly, about this incredibly beautiful area that is a gorgeous tourist destination as well. I don't know how you call this reducing red tape when it is in fact increasing risks for where people live.

Red tape is supposed to be the idea of removing things that are unnecessary, but these protections are extremely important and not something that should be simply given away and slipped into an omnibus bill.

Once again, we have these bills that have, frankly, some pretty egregious elements in them. We don't know what's going to happen with this one, whether this one will be allowed to have public consultations after second reading, but we know that so many other bills are being hidden from the public by the use of time allocation, and that is so anti-democratic and really suggests that the government is trying to pull a fast one over on people, because people don't even have time to know what's actually at stake in those bills.

By denying people the opportunity to come and speak to those bills, which is their right—this is how government is supposed to work. We debate bills and then it goes out to the people so that the government can learn from the people what the impact of those bills will be. Why shouldn't it be like that?

The people on that side of the House seem to think that they know everything. They're omniscient; they know everything. They've already figured out everything. It's all written down here—"We wrote it down; it must be perfect, so there's no need to show it to anybody else. There's no need to have public consultation." Well, that's embarrassing, frankly, to have that much arrogance to think that public consultation is irrelevant, is not necessary. It's frankly a betrayal of the people who elected us to be here.

I wanted to look at a couple of other things. Certainly, the recycling—I've brought this up a couple of times, but we are waiting to see what is going to happen with the recycling of alcohol bottles. The government rushed through, spent 225 million public dollars to get booze into corner stores—a year earlier to get them into corner stores—didn't think anything through.

Now, we have communities all across northern Ontario that have lost their Beer Stores. Those stores have closed down. They're often in the middle of town, so now we've got derelict buildings in the middle of these communities,

lost jobs, and nobody knows what to do with their empties. We now know that a lot of the grocery stores and convenience stores are thinking, "Maybe this isn't such a good deal." Like, "What are we going to do with this stuff? It's smelly and it gets broken and it takes up a lot of space."

These are things that should have been thought through before that whole business was pushed out at the expense of Ontarians and so poorly thought out.

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I can tell you I get a lot of emails about the problem of empties. Communities, as I say, have got derelict buildings in the middle of town and no place to take all of these bottles. What, is the mayor of the town going to rent a truck, collect all the bottles and then bring them to recycling in Thunder Bay, three hours away or four hours away? That's what people are actually looking at now because of government policy that was so poorly thought out.

Then there's the question of the privacy commissioner. I think many people here will recall that we were talking during the last session about worries about health care records being exposed to hacking, exposed to potential abuse. I recall the member from Essex, actually, waxing poetic, saying, "No, it's never going to be a problem. What are you worried about? We trust us to protect that information."

But we actually learned from one of the members from the Liberal Party that, in fact, that data was exposed for three months. Our health care data was exposed for three months. The privacy commissioner warned everybody that this was going to be a problem, and yet the Conservative government went ahead and did it anyway.

Why? What's the point of having an independent privacy commissioner when you can't be bothered to listen to what they say? That's their level of expertise. They are there to warn us as representatives to pay attention to things we might not have noticed.

But then, when we're told, "This is really important. Protecting people's privacy is at risk if you follow through with this particular section of a bill," and then go ahead and do it anyway, then it really says, again, "We must know more. We know more than everyone. We don't have to listen to the privacy commissioner. We don't have to listen to our constituents. We don't have to take anything to committee because we know best." It's hard to fathom that level of arrogance, frankly.

The last thing I want to touch on in the time that I have is something that's coming up. Again, we've seen this with the education bill. We've seen it with Bill 60 undermining tenants' rights, which will ultimately result in more homelessness. It's unbelievable that the government would consider doing something that will cause more homelessness.

We also have a bill coming up about conservation authorities. Again, we have something that actually works very well. The Lakehead Region Conservation Authority in my area is fantastic. They do so much work to protect against flood mitigation, to look after our parks.

Now, all of a sudden, the government wants to create an entirely bureaucracy, amalgamate—what is it?—36 conservation authorities into seven. The latest rumour about

the one in my region on Lake Superior is that it's going to be amalgamated with a conservation authority on Lake Huron. Does that make sense? It's bizarre. Our regional conservation authorities know our regions, and they're also supported by local municipalities, local councils.

Nobody knows what's going to happen when all of a sudden, all the decisions are being made somewhere in southern Ontario, in some bureaucracy in Toronto that has no knowledge, no experience of the geography and geology of the individual regions in our province. It's quite disappointing. Frankly, the only rationale I can see for that happening is to open up our prized parkland to developers. This is what I believe is behind the action to consolidate conservation authorities and put them under the control of one large, controlling bureaucracy.

It's much like what is happening with education, with the Minister of Education inventing a whole new organizational category where supposedly parents can go and ask questions when we already have democratically elected trustees who work their butts off going to schools, meeting with parents, talking with students, struggling over inadequate budgets. And this minister thinks that a phone in Toronto, probably run by a bot, is going to answer questions and provide that accountability for parents and students. We need that local input into what happens in our schools.

We need that local input into what happens in our regions, in our land, in those wetlands that need to be protected in our watersheds. Taking that away is, frankly, increasing red tape, increasing barriers, removing people's ability to actually participate in democracy, participate in their communities, participate in their schools. All of these things are incredibly important. With the bills that have been coming through here, we're actually taking away those opportunities from people.

It's like, "Jam it through. Do it really, really fast. Make sure nobody notices what's going on." Because it happens so fast—there are so many bills—you can barely pick up a newspaper because it's already passed. It's already done. It's already been dealt with. And there's been no opportunity for anybody to actually notice, let alone speak to the effects of each section of these bills.

I will end there. Thank you for the opportunity to speak.

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

Mr. Matthew Rae: Thank you, colleagues. It's great to be back in this place. As we've been talking about—I'm not going to go back as far as 1990, colleagues, for my question, as the member opposite, in their remarks, did. I was zero in that year, for everyone keeping track on that. But under the leadership of Premier Ford, our government remains committed to making life more affordable for Ontarians, for Ontario families, all across Ontario.

Whether it was the \$200 rebate cheque we provided to people earlier this year, whether it was getting rid of the licence sticker rebate—which, even before I was elected, was a pet peeve of mine, a tax on drivers in Ontario—getting rid of that, finally, because it went to purely nothing. It was a pure tax from the former Liberal government, supported by the NDP. And we'll continue to examine ways to cut red tape, as this bill does, to reduce

burdens on small businesses, as my colleagues have mentioned tonight.

My question to the member opposite is, can the people and businesses in Thunder Bay count on them to stand up for them and count on them to continue to fight for more affordability in this place?

MPP Lise Vaugeois: Wow—affordability in the province, where we have more people using food banks than ever before in the history of the province, more people who are homeless than ever before in the history of the province. It's too bad the member over there actually dismisses the idea of history. If it happened before he was born, then it doesn't count, doesn't matter. That's a big problem, frankly, because maybe that's why the decisions are so weak on the other side of the House. They're made only based on your birth dates. Thank you.

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

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Okay, member of Thunder Bay—Superior North, I agree with your fire when these ridiculous questions are put to us. I want to say that you brought up the fact that this government is busy making red tape, and you talked about our conservation authorities. I want you to know that last year at estimates, I asked Minister Graydon Smith directly a number of times whether they planned to consolidate conservation authorities, and he said directly, "I think I've been very clear in my answers today.... At no point have I talked about centralization...." So he clearly then said we're not going to do this, and here we are a year later, and they've done precisely that.

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It's this kind of disingenuous answers from the government, it's this kind of obfuscation, when they're hiding their true agenda, that makes people not trust this government. So this, again, omnibus bill is a bill that makes people again realize there's no good reason to put any faith or trust in this government.

So, did you want to talk a little bit about the outrage people are feeling with a government that just doesn't get it?

MPP Lise Vaugeois: Whenever people find out what's actually going on here, they're appalled. They're shocked. They're shocked because things are shoved through and deliberately—the use of time allocation to make sure that nobody actually knows what's going on out amongst the people in our ridings. It's very difficult to get that much information out.

But frankly, I think this whole business about consolidating the conservation authorities—they've been trying to disempower them since they came into power. It's interesting that that promise was made last year—

Ms. Sandy Shaw: By the minister.

MPP Lise Vaugeois: —by the minister. It is seen as an utter betrayal by people in every single part of this province if they have had time to learn about it.

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

Mr. Ric Bresee: Speaker, I just want to remind the members around this room, but specifically the members of the opposition, that there are some very young members, people born after 2000, and some, I'll say, more

senior and more veteran members in this caucus. We have a wide range of people and ages with memories going back a long ways.

Speaker, I would really like to have this conversation, actually, about the conservation authorities and the challenges that they represented when I was in municipal government, the obstructionist nature of many of our conservation authorities. But more importantly, I know this member is from northern Ontario, and northern and rural Ontario, which is where my heart is as well, really has a challenge with its economics these days.

The opposition claims to care about small business, but this bill introduces simple, common-sense policy adjustments to boost tourism, to support local craft producers and drive visitors to our parks. Does the member not trust the people to act responsibly in our parks? Is that what the challenge is here?

MPP Lise Vaugeois: [*Inaudible*] parks, I take it. The rest of that seemed to have nothing to do with what's in this bill, and I don't think that's a particularly significant issue one way or the other.

But I must say that since you acknowledge that there are some older members of caucus, perhaps they could educate the younger members of caucus about the history of their own party.

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

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Thank you to my colleague from Thunder Bay–Superior North for your very thoughtful remarks on this piece of legislation.

Our colleague from Mushkegowuk–James Bay spoke earlier this evening about the impact of this bill on the forestry industry and particularly sustainable foresting, the fact that this will now have two standards, one for mining and industrial projects and another for the forestry industry, who does not actually want to see the sustainability of our logging impacted because that impacts their ability to sell.

I know as a northern member, you would probably hear this from your constituents as well, that there are concerns that should be taken into account. We're not just talking about, can we move these projects ahead, but what are the impacts over here for these other parts of our sector.

So I'm wondering if you would agree that this is exactly why the bill should go to committee: so that we can have experts, so we can have northern residents come and share things that perhaps those of us from the south, those of us who aren't from a resource industry, don't know, that we need to hear about.

MPP Lise Vaugeois: Thank you very much for the question. I certainly think that the proponents from the forestry industry would be surprised to see that there's going to be different standards for them than other forms of extraction. And that's pretty shocking. The forestry industry has established some very good patterns and ways of working to make forestry sustainable, and yet we are seeing a completely different set of rules for other kinds of industries. Frankly, we're also seeing the government—I

mean, Ear Falls considers itself to be abandoned. Terrace Bay, of course, is still struggling.

We want forestry to be doing really well. But, frankly, what does it say to the people working in forestry when an aggregate company can go in and wipe out an entire large swath of forest without having to ask anybody anything? Just do it; hey, rules don't matter. The rules matter for foresters, but they don't matter for anybody else.

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

Mr. Stephen Blais: Thank you for your debate tonight. I didn't hear most of it, but I'm sure it was very good. Given that we're here at quarter to 9 on a Monday night to talk about a bill that doesn't really have a whole heck of a lot in it, I was wondering if you wanted to use the last minute of time tonight just to say whatever it is you wanted to say?

MPP Lise Vaugeois: What I would like to say is that this bill needs to go to committee. The other bills that have already been shoved through the Legislature also needed to go to committee, but surely this one can. Thank you very much for the question.

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

Mr. Stephen Blais: I thought you would have used the rest of the 40 seconds to maybe say something; I'm starting a half-minute earlier than I thought.

It's great to be with everyone here tonight to talk about the Protect Ontario by Cutting Red Tape Act, 2025. Madam Speaker, despite the flashy title, which suggests that this bill might be doing something to make life easier for the people of Ontario, I think the reality is that, at least in parts of the bill, it tells a very different story.

For tonight's proceedings, I'm going to limit my remarks to schedule 5, because I think schedule 5 actually works to weaken, not strengthen, consumer protections in our province. Schedule 5 proposes changes to the Consumer Protection Act, 2002, specifically around the rules governing loyalty points for reward programs. I think many Ontarians participate in reward programs. It might be with their credit card. It might be Optimum points at Shoppers Drug Mart and Loblaws. It might be points at Petro-Canada or one of the other gas stations. But I think a lot of us, if we were to open up our wallets or our purses, probably have a couple of reward cards in there—maybe a couple of dozen reward cards in there, depending on how voracious of a saver and a spender you might be.

Loyalty reward programs play a pretty big part in our lives. They are very important programs that nearly every Ontarian engages with, as I said, whether that's at the grocery store, the gas station, the local pharmacy or online. For many families across Ontario, the points they accumulate actually help stretch their already tight household budgets, something that matters now, more than ever, as we see the cost of living continue to go up. People redeem their points to cover a portion of their grocery bill or a portion of their bill at the pharmacy. It might be to help buy school supplies for their kids or it might even be to help purchase holiday or Christmas gifts, Madam Speaker.

So, these programs are vital and play an important role in the lives of Ontario families.

And that's why the protections that we currently offer consumers as it relates to those points are so very important. Right now, the law in Ontario, as I understand it, clearly states that reward points cannot expire due to the passage of time. That means if you earn a reward point, you don't lose it simply because you haven't used it for a period of time.

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Some of these reward programs are more lucrative than others. Some of them, in order to accumulate enough points to buy something of meaning or to get good consumer value back from it, you need to save them up over a period of time to get to that magic number, and so the thought of losing those points because you haven't used them is challenging.

That's why the previous government actually brought in that regulation—or that law; it's not a regulation, excuse me—that legislation to say that your reward points cannot expire simply because it's been a while. In fact, I would argue, Madam Speaker, that if the passage of time allows for you to lose your reward points, if you lose your points simply because you haven't used them, that's almost like a tax. So basically, the government is proposing to increase taxes on consumers by having them lose their reward points if they haven't used them over a period of time.

Considering how many reward points we all might have, it could be one of the biggest tax increases in Ontario history. I know currently I'm sitting on something like 350,000 Optimum points, which I've been accumulating over the course of three, four, five years with my wife. That's like \$350 or \$400 at Shoppers Drug Mart. That's a pretty big tax increase from this government if, all of a sudden, I were to lose those points. So I think it's important for us to protect the value of those points and to protect consumers, if only so the government can maintain the false premise that they've never raised taxes, which we all know is not true. But we want to allow them at least the optics of being able to protect that particular message.

Madam Speaker, if a company wants to change its loyalty program or restructure it, that's one thing. And certainly we see that happen. Air Canada is about to change the Aeroplan structure, as we know. But those companies shouldn't be able to simply wipe out the value that you've accumulated in your points program simply because the calendar has flipped the next page.

The law that was achieved and introduced by the previous government was a hard-fought victory for consumers. We can thank Bill 47, the Protecting Rewards Points Act, which was a consumer protection amendment, for this protection. It was Bill 47, put forward by former Liberal member of provincial Parliament Arthur Potts in 2016, and it passed unanimously.

Can you imagine, Madam Speaker? Some very insightful Conservatives, who were in the opposition benches at the time, understood that if we allowed reward points to go away with time, that was actually a tax on consumers. And those Conservatives, the Conservatives of 2016, were

true to the mantra of not wanting to raise taxes on consumers. If only they could see a mere nine years into the future and the high-tax Tories that the Premier currently leads in the Legislature.

And I might just point out that unanimous consent and royal assent was achieved two months later, at the end of 2016, just in time for the holidays, so Conservatives nine years ago understood that protecting consumers right before the holidays, right before Christmas, was a gift. It was, "Hey, look at what we're helping you achieve for Christmas."

Mr. Matthew Rae: A Christmas miracle.

Mr. Stephen Blais: A Christmas miracle, as my friend over on the far side mentioned. And this Christmas, Madam Speaker, instead of getting Santa Claus coming down the chimney, the Grinch is showing up, but he's trying to walk right through the front door.

Let me just read the section of that previous legislation—the Christmas miracle, as it were—Madam Speaker: "Subject to the other provisions of this section, no supplier shall enter into or amend a consumer agreement under which rewards points are provided to provide for the expiry of rewards points due to the passage of time alone"—i.e., your points are protected.

Now, imagine if a bank came to us and said, "Look, you haven't spent any money in your savings account recently. You're saving money, but you haven't spent any money in your savings account. We're just going to close your account and take all the money." What do you think the people of Ontario would say if that were to come to be? I think there would be a revolt, Madam Speaker. And the people of Ontario would be right to revolt under that circumstance. Allowing a company to say, "You've been diligent at saving your points. You've been so diligent, you haven't actually used them yet. But you know what? It's been too long, sayonara, there you go." Again, I think that would be amongst the biggest tax increases Ontarians have ever seen.

Now, Madam Speaker, in 2016, Ontarians witnessed exactly what happens when companies are allowed to make their reward points expire. Air Miles attempted to wipe out millions of dollars worth of points unless consumers redeemed them by a rushed, artificial deadline. People were furious, not just because they felt entitled to something for free, but because they had already earned those points. They had purchased groceries, they had purchased gas, different household items to help them accumulate those points over time. They played by the rules and consumers expected companies to do the same.

After massive—absolutely massive—enormous public backlash and legal pressure, the company did reverse their decision. And then, Ontario Liberals stepped up to the plate, like the good consumer protection advocates we are, and introduced the legislation to ensure that points would never expire due to the passage of time. When confronted with a blatant attack on consumer protection, it was the Ontario Liberal government, under previous leadership, that quickly responded by passing strong consumer protection legislation in Bill 47. At the time, the Liberals made it clear that the expiry of reward points was not

acceptable and would not be permitted. We created this legislation for the first time, so that Ontarians could trust that the rewards that they earned would be there tomorrow.

Unfortunately, Madam Speaker, schedule 5 in this bill wipes that off the map—takes it away. It would allow Shoppers Drug Mart, Air Miles, Esso, Petro Canada—whatever, whatever loyalty program, you name it—to say, “You know what, Blais? You haven’t spent your points quickly enough. Too bad, so sad, it’s too expensive for us to maintain the program”—or whatever their reason—“we want to take that liability off the books, wiping out that balance.” Just like the other analogy, Madam Speaker, it would be like a bank saying, “You haven’t spent the money in your savings account quickly enough and so we’re going to take it back from you. Thank you very much, sorry to see you go.” I don’t think that is the kind of consumer protection Ontarians expect or want from their government.

So, Madam Speaker, there was an opportunity to strengthen this provision, to strengthen the value that rewards programs do provide to Ontarians, to ensure that Ontarians benefit from the programs that they sign up for in good faith and participate in in good faith. But the government is choosing to go in completely the opposite direction. Rather than strengthen the protection, the government is, in fairness, getting rid of it altogether.

So, with Bill 46, what was once a straightforward rule in legislation—it was the law—may now become an uncertain regulatory framework, to be decided at the whim of the government, basically, whenever something comes about. That something could be a phone call to the Premier’s 24/7 1-800 number that he gives out. It could be an encounter at a social event, which may or may not have had a price tag of a certain value tapped onto it. It may have been the chat on the dance floor at a wedding reception. Who knows how these ideas come into the mind of certain members of the government, Madam Speaker. And it’s not for me to say what may or may not influence those decisions, but it becomes a decision of the cabinet, as opposed to the law of the land.

Madam Speaker, consumer protection should be on our minds every single day. We should never be intentionally creating loopholes to weaken consumer protections in our province. So this is not red tape reduction. This is not modernization. This is a step backward for consumer rights.

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The government argues that this change creates a sense of flexibility. But consumers need predictability when it comes to counting on their loyalty programs and their reward points. They want to know that when they spend money and accumulate points, those points are theirs, that they are not a temporary status symbol that can disappear whenever the company decides to wave its magic wand and start over.

Again, Madam Speaker, this uncertainty that the government is about to bring to the marketplace comes at the worst possible time. Families are struggling with the rising cost of food. They’re struggling with high interest rates. They’re struggling with more expensive housing, more

expensive mortgage payments, more expensive rents. Many more people are relying on loyalty points to help offset some of these pressures.

When you go to Loblaws and you buy groceries for your family, you can use your accumulated reward points to take part of the price off or, in some cases, pay the entire bill. You can do it to offset the cost to put gas in your tank so you can drive to and from work, because the generational transit project that the government still hasn’t enabled to get off the ground—and is taking longer than it took to build the St. Lawrence Seaway—isn’t helping you commute to work or back.

You have to ask yourself why, in the middle of an affordability crisis, would the government decide that this was the best way forward; why they would give big corporations more power to devalue the rewards that they’re offering to their customers, while at the same time offering very few actual consumer protections to Ontario families.

If the goal of Bill 46 is truly to reduce red tape, then the government should strengthen, not weaken, the clear protections that are already in place. Don’t allow a company to change the value of points, to make my 300,000 points worth less. They should maintain their value. Keep the rules simple. Points are earned by consumers; they can’t expire because of time. And they should maintain the value that they earned at the time of the earning.

There’s no deflation of the value of the points. There’s no inflation of the value of the points. The value of the points is the value of the points. That should be the rule. That’s a rule that works. It’s fair and it protects consumers. That’s a rule that people understand. And that’s the rule that should remain in legislation, not be subject to the unpredictable whims of a government who likes to go to fancy parties and speak to fancy people and charge admission to family weddings.

If the government seriously believes in protecting consumers, they should do so directly. They have an opportunity. They have an opportunity a month and a bit before Christmas to say, “No. We’re not going to let the value of your loyalty points go out the window. We’re not going to allow Father Time to undo the value of those points. We are going to ensure that the points you earn today are the points you’re going to have tomorrow,” so you can use them to pay for Christmas dinner; so you can use them to buy your daughter or your son that extra gift under the tree; so you can use them to put gas in your car so you can get to work and back in the cold winter months.

That’s what we should do to protect consumers to ensure that they have a good Christmas. Unfortunately, Madam Speaker, as I said before, Mr. Grinch is walking through the door and is about to take all our points away, and that’s how the government wants it.

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

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: Thank you, member from Orléans, for your remarks.

While our government is modernizing services so people can apply online instead of waiting in line, the opposition seems to be determined to keep Ontario stuck in the past.

They call modernization reckless, but what is reckless about saving taxpayers time and money? What is reckless about putting government service where people are actually online and not in line?

This upgrade means less time wasted for the residents of Ontario, fewer headaches and more convenience for families, workers and business owners to thrive in Ontario. My question to the member: Why does the opposition prefer delays, duplication and paper forms over digital delivery? Do they really think people should have to take a day off to work just to get their forms stamped, or are they simply more comfortable defending outdated system than embracing the progress?

Mr. Stephen Blais: What I'm trying to do is protect Ontario consumers from spending eight hours on a 1-800 number wondering why all their loyalty points have gone away. I'm trying to stop them from wasting a day at work on the phone with Shoppers Drug Mart, wondering why their 300,000 points have gone away, simply because they haven't used them in time for whoever's liking.

Protecting consumers by ensuring the value that they've earned is the value that they can maintain and the value they can then spend I think is at the heart of what consumer protection is about. That's what I believe. I'm not sure why they believe that eroding savings and taking valuable, hard-earned points away from everyday Ontarians is the path forward or even can be considered cutting red tape. It's cutting something; it's not red tape. I think we should be protecting the value those consumers have earned.

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

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I want to thank the member for pointing out yet again in this bill another instance where it purports to be protecting Ontarians, but in fact, if you go through every schedule, who does it protect? It primarily protects business interests. Your colleague the member from Ottawa South has been reminding us, time and time again today, that schedule 9 of this bill has the government taking sides with a huge corporation, Iamgold, over an 88-year-old widow.

And now what you're showing us here is that the government is more concerned about taking a liability off the books of huge corporations like Shoppers Drug Mart than they are protecting the net worth, if you will, of individual citizens. I mean, I have a family member who saved points for years just so that he could then pass them to family members so that we could afford trips to go visit one another. This family member would be rolling over in his grave if he knew that, after years and years of saving those points, they were going to be taken away like that from this government.

Can you just, again, highlight why this bill has got nothing to do with protecting Ontarians? It's all about protecting business interests, and their friends and business interests.

Mr. Stephen Blais: I remember when my wife and I bought our house. We moved in in the summer of 2005. Like a lot of young couples, getting a house was a stretch. We were stretched every two weeks on payday—or the

day before payday, I should say—to buy groceries, to put gas in the tank, to get those things that we thought a middle-class family should be working towards. I know that that Christmas was particularly really difficult because we had put a big down payment down, so we had used a lot of our savings for the down payment. We were young professionals and we were making our way, but money was tight. We used Air Miles to buy each other gifts that Christmas, and we used, I think it was, Petro-Points to buy gifts for our fathers that Christmas. That was an asset that we had accumulated through our everyday spending. And that's an asset unfortunately that this government wants to erode simply because the calendar switched from one month to the next.

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

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Thank you very much to the member for Orléans for delving deeply into this bill to discover the schedule and what it's going to do. I represent a riding, as you know, beautiful Beaches–East York, which was held previously by the former member that my colleague mentioned, Arthur Potts. And I'll tell you, to this day, he is still railing on and bragging because he's so proud of that bill, Protecting Rewards Points Act, that he passed in 2016—

Interjection: Unanimously.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: —unanimously, yes; thank you for the reminder—as an early Christmas gift.

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My question to my colleague: What do you think? The Conservative members at the time got it, and they voted unanimously. What is wrong with these Conservatives? What's going through their heads that they don't get this?

Mr. Stephen Blais: Well, I think there might be one or two of those Conservatives in the House with us tonight. They might want to stand up and explain to the House what's changed in the last nine years. Better yet, they're going to need to explain to their constituents right after Christmas what's changed and why they think the reward points should be able to go out the window simply because you haven't used them fast enough.

I think what is common sense—what common-sense Conservatives used to understand—is that if you earned something, the value of that thing that you've earned should maintain itself over time. Time should not be the reason that the value erodes. You shouldn't be allowed to erode the money out of your bank account because of time. You shouldn't be allowed to erode the value of your reward points because of time.

Unfortunately, the current regime, who are quickly earning the nickname “high-tax Tories,” are in favour of this massive tax on consumers that will only benefit certain larger private sector corporations.

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

Mme France Gélinas: I appreciate the comments that have been made by the member. Really, at the first reading of the bill, I had not realized some of the changes that the government is putting forward, as you describe very well,

that basically would allow points that have been accumulated, that people count on, to more or less disappear. That's not something that I would support.

I was interested to know: Would the member support and think that it would be important to have this bill go into committee after second reading, so that the people of Ontario have an opportunity to have their say on the 22 schedules that go all over the map, from forestry to gaming to children to courts and everything else in between?

Mr. Stephen Blais: I think that's the point. You have an omnibus piece of legislation with nearly two dozen schedules, some of which are, I think, for most people, really difficult to get behind publicly. I even think for those guys, going home at Christmas and saying, "Your reward points are going out the window because you haven't spent them fast enough," is going to be a really tough sell.

Like good magicians, they're trying to distract from what's going on in the background over here with the pretty girl in the bikini over on the left-hand side, the elephant dancing on a ball or whatever the distraction is. That magicians movie is actually in the theatre this weekend; it was number two at the box office. I think if they could only learn from the Ford government, they would have made it number one in the box office.

They're hoping that Ontarians don't hear about this. They're hoping that they get distracted by the forestry measures, the measures about this or the measures about that, so that they don't learn that their hard-earned loyalty points in gas and grocery stores, at pharmacies and everywhere else you earn loyalty points are potentially going out the window. The Grinch is about to steal Christmas, and his name is Doug Ford.

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

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: I'm delighted this evening to rise and speak on Bill 46, the Protect Ontario by Cutting Red Tape Act, 2025.

I really want to thank the Minister of Red Tape Reduction. The minister reminded us today that we have come here before the Legislature 15 times with an effort to reduce government red tape. That's important. The members who spoke on the government side reminded us that over \$1 billion a year in savings takes place. That's a lot of money.

We are a province, as I've said many times before here, of innovation, of imagination, of understanding that we are a province of the future. We're proud of that, and our PC government, led by Premier Ford, will never stop in believing in our province and what we can do, not only for this generation but for the future.

And that's why I'm here and proud to speak tonight. We know that the times that find us in a competitive global landscape are complicated. Never before have we seen the rise of a protectionist environment driven by the President of the United States that's taken direct aim on our Canadian economy and our Ontarian economy. And as much as we wake up and say this is not fair, and we know that, because the Americans have historically and are the best

friends we've ever had, we must find ourselves understanding that we have to be competitive; we have to understand now more than ever that the seeds that are sown must align with the times that we're in.

A billion dollars in savings is material. A billion dollars in savings a year and growing—and you know why this is happening? Because this was a priority set by our Premier Doug Ford, to put the seeds in the ground that will allow the trees to grow, that will allow people to come forward and open up businesses. What this does, amongst other things, is it reminds us that we have to believe in our province and in our future. Now more than ever—and I said this, Madam Speaker, just the other night, in Cambridge, Ontario, when I attended the Serving with Pride dinner, hosted by the Waterloo Regional Police Service, and represented by many police officers: We are a government that will always have their backs.

But do you know what, Madam Speaker? When you become a police officer or a firefighter, when you become a corrections, probation and parole officer, these decisions do not come lightly. Many of them come from families that are small business owners. Many of them come from families that are farmers, that are people that want to plant their flag like everybody else.

Madame la Présidente, tous nos drapeaux—le canadien, l'ontarien et le franco-ontarien—ont de la signification. Ils représentent la fierté, la valeur de notre diversité et tout ce qu'il y a de bien en nous.

It means, Madam Speaker, that we have to take pride in who we are, and the changes in Bill 46 that were made by the minister are very important.

I want to talk for a minute about one of the things that is specifically important to me, and that has to do with the Ministry of the Solicitor General and the things that we brought forward to be part of this bill. Amongst the changes that are in this bill—and while we heard the opposition nitpick on things that are significantly important to perhaps their caucus, we look at the macro picture of what we have to do to make sure we have an Ontario where people want to invest, people want to build homes, people to want set up factories. That's what we want to do on this side of the House.

And what we did in this bill with regard to the measures from the Ministry of the Solicitor General is, amongst other things, updating our animal welfare page to make it clear how a person can submit a complaint about an inspector or file a complaint to the chief animal inspector, and by making these changes to reduce red tape, we're clearly explaining the steps to take on what documentation may be needed.

As Premier Ford said today in his news conference, we take the welfare of all Ontarians very, very seriously. Among the changes we're making in this bill is authorizing the disclosure of information from the Ontario sex offender and trafficker registry to approved law enforcement agencies in the United States to help with cross-border investigations and the monitoring of sex offenders. This is very, very important.

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Our hearts go out, especially when we go back to the changes that our government made last fall. I want to thank so many people on the government side that helped enhance Christopher's Law. Christopher's Law in 2000 was brought in by Premier Mike Harris, who saw the fact that Ontario had to lead. Ontario was ahead of the government of Canada even at that time, coming together and putting a registry in place so that the police would have the investigative tools to keep communities safe. Even this element in this bill goes forward boldly to make sure that the most vulnerable are our greatest concern, and nothing will change that.

Also, in this bill, we're exploring how to fast-track security guard licensing for veterans. Veterans gave their lives for our country. We must be there for them after, in their next chapter of life. We're also going to streamline community safety grant programs to make it easier for police services, especially small and medium-sized services, to access the support of our government that's provided.

Madam Speaker, this is not new. This bill today is new in that we are taking it to the next step, but the concept of our government understanding that we have to cut red tape is not new. We're going to continue to work amazingly hard every single day, understanding that this government believes in Ontario and in its future. That's why we will continue to contribute ideas. We will be innovative. We will be imaginative. We will be bold when others are not. We will be relentless when others are silent. We will be courageous when others are afraid to bring even one idea forward. This government is a government not only of today, but of the future. We will do whatever we can to come forward like we are today, and that's why I'm proud to debate this bill tonight.

Madam Speaker, we are in challenging times, but we are also not giving up hope for one minute.

Hon. Greg Rickford: Never surrender.

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: The member says we're never going to surrender, and, boy, that is absolutely the case. We will continue to march on because we know where we stand. We know exactly how we stand. We stand in support of the people of Ontario and what they expect the government to do: to lead us forward, to lead us forward even in times that look absolutely impossible. But you know what, Madam Speaker? We're never going to stop. We're going to keep going. We are going to not stop one day, and this bill will be succeeded down the road by another red tape reduction bill so that we will continue to evolve the fact that we need to save people money. We have to save businesses money. We have to save the entrepreneur who has a little idea, who wants to call Ontario home, money. We want to cut red tape because that's the right thing to do. Even when others say it's not, we say it is. We're going to continue to do everything we can to get the job done, and I'm really proud of that.

There's a lot in this bill, and what I can tell you is that this is an example of leadership. This is an example of when other people say, "You're not meeting the moment,"

I say, "You are." And when I've said it to the police officers that I've had the privilege of marching past—now 6,000 of our newest police officers—it's because we believe in them. We say we will always have their backs. It's not just our words; it's our actions too, and I'm really proud of that.

Madam Speaker, I'm hoping everyone—everyone—will support this bill in understanding that we are going to be creative, we will be innovative, we will be imaginative, and we will be courageous in understanding that when we are there for every Ontarian, we will protect Ontario.

And that's why, Madam Speaker, just this past February, when we had a general election, Ontarians had an opportunity to say yes—yes to a government that's positive, yes to a government that believes in them, yes to a government that believes in our future. *Parce que nous croyons en notre province et en notre avenir, et ensemble, nous bâtissons l'Ontario.* We're always going to be positive as to who we are, and that's how we build Ontario.

I'm absolutely delighted to stand here tonight to say we will come forward. We will come forward with good ideas, and the Minister of Red Tape Reduction consolidated her colleagues' counsel and her caucus's counsel to make sure that every ministry in our government had an opportunity to contribute to ways to reduce the red tape burden.

And I want to thank the Premier for having the vision not only to create this ministry that allows the cost of red tape to be reduced but to acknowledge the savings that will be passed on to every Ontarian through the actions that we take.

Hon. Greg Rickford: How much, again?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Over \$1 billion.

Hon. Mike Harris: It's \$1.8 billion.

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: The Minister of Natural Resources says it's \$1.8 billion, and the number will grow. The number will continue to grow. We will continue to be bold. We will continue to be relentless. We will continue to be courageous when others won't, and we'll continue to come forward with understanding that "protect Ontario" doesn't mean anything; it means absolutely everything. That's why we're here tonight. That's why that's we're going to continue to debate it. That's why we're going to hope they support it, because their actions will speak louder than their words. That's why we always have to stand up and acknowledge this is our province; this is our country. We're proud of it.

I hope they'll join with us. I hope they will support this bill. We're not going to stop. We're going to absolutely keep going, and we're very, very proud of the Minister of Red Tape Reduction. I want to thank her for her leadership in saying that our province matters; it matters to everyone, and that's why we will continue to do what we're doing. We're going to stay the course; we're going to continue to be bold. We're going to continue to make sure that the cost savings that are passed on—as I said this before, Madam Speaker, this is the 15th time that we have come here—

Hon. Greg Rickford: Fifteenth?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: The 15th time—it's unbelievable.

And the competitiveness that we must have in Ontario will help us globally as we look to reinvent our economy and we look to trade with other nations in the world that will recognize what we have in Canada. We have the minerals. We have the technology. We have the energy. We are transforming our economy. We have the talent. We have one of the best jurisdictions to do business in, and we're not going to stop believing in what we as Ontarians can accomplish when we work together. That's why I'm speaking on this matter tonight, Madam Speaker, and that's why I'm standing up, as Premier Ford is—we're standing up for every single Ontarian believing in what we can do together to build the best province we can.

Madam Speaker, there's a lot of really good pieces of this legislation that I think we also have to talk about—

Hon. Greg Rickford: We should call it the goodness bill.

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: My friend the minister from Kenora–Rainy River says it's a good bill. I think he's underestimating, and, actually, I think it's a great bill.

Hon. Greg Rickford: I said it was full of goodness.

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: He said it's full of goodness, because we understand—and I'll give you one other—

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): Pursuant to standing order 50(c), I am now required to interrupt the proceedings and announce that there have been six and a half hours of debate on the motion for second reading of this bill. This debate will therefore be deemed adjourned unless the government House leader directs the debate to continue.

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Hon. Steve Clark: Speaker, please adjourn the debate.
Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

PLAN TO PROTECT ONTARIO ACT (BUDGET MEASURES), 2025 (NO. 2)

LOI DE 2025 SUR LE PLAN POUR PROTÉGER L'ONTARIO (MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES) (NO 2)

Mr. Harris, on behalf of Mr. Bethlenfalvy, moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 68, An Act to implement Budget measures and to enact and amend various statutes / Projet de loi 68, Loi visant à mettre en oeuvre les mesures budgétaires et à édicter et à modifier diverses lois.

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

Mr. Dave Smith: I'm pleased to rise tonight at 9:30 to speak to Bill 68, Plan to Protect Ontario Act (Budget Measures)—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): I stand corrected. The minister has the floor.

Hon. Mike Harris: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I will be letting you know that I am sharing my time with the member from Peterborough–Kawartha and

the member from Eglinton–Lawrence tonight. Thank you very much.

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

Mr. Dave Smith: Thank you, Madam Speaker. We've all heard of the Peterborough Petes; well, this is the Peterborough repeat tonight.

I'm pleased to rise tonight to speak to Bill 68, Plan to Protect Ontario Act—our budget measures, 2025.

Let's take a little step backwards in time. I've referred to this before. The fall economic statement is an update on the budget. Our budget was released in May 2025, and it was the plan for what we're going to do in Ontario, how we're going to move forward. I'm happy to say that in the fall economic statement, the update that we're doing is just that—an update on how Ontario is progressing and an update on what our actual plan is.

We have been laser-focused on protecting Ontario workers, businesses and communities in every corner of our province. It doesn't matter where you are in the province, there is something in the fall economic statement that is there to help, and it's because this government has been building like no other government has before. We're laying the foundation for the future of our growing province, because this government has a plan—it's a plan for Ontario, it's a plan for the people of Ontario and it's a plan that's working.

As we continue to navigate the impact of US tariffs and global economic uncertainty, it's never been more important for the government to deliver on its plan to protect Ontario. For too long, past governments didn't prioritize Ontario's competitiveness or its ability to attract investment that creates jobs. Instead, previous governments let red tape pile up, driving away jobs and investment, even as they refused to invest in the infrastructure and services our province needs to keep growing.

I've said this many times and I will stand by this statement: It's government's job to regulate to the point of integrity but not to the point of interference, and previous governments had gotten to the point where it was no longer interference, it was obstruction. And we saw that with previous governments. We saw a move away from the industrial manufacturing base and comments that were made that we'll move to more of a service industry instead. But that industrial manufacturing base has been the heartbeat of this province for multiple generations, and the failure to act by previous governments left Ontario vulnerable and exposed to the impact of US tariffs. And they continue to threaten our workers and our communities in every corner of the province.

It has been interesting to listen to some of the opposition members talking about this and what we should do and what we shouldn't do. I want to touch on one in particular. We've come out with a buy-Ontario, buy-Canada initiative. We believe that industry in Ontario drives this country and can produce some of the highest-quality products, but we also recognize that our economy and our companies are tightly connected with other jurisdictions. We welcome a lot of that foreign investment because we

know that when a foreign company is coming into Ontario, investing in Ontario, they're creating jobs in Ontario.

One of the things that we have in that, as part of the buy-Ontario process, is that if a company is foreign-owned but has more than 250 employees in Ontario, this is a company that is employing people in Ontario and should be supported. And yet, at one of our committee meetings, it was brought up by another member that we should not do that.

I was really surprised by it because there are a lot of things that the Ontario government procures, and I'm going to touch on one—just one. The Ontario government, all of the broader public service, has vehicles. There are cars, there are trucks, snowplows that clean highways. Those trucks, graders, heavy equipment—

Mr. Stéphane Sarrazin: Backhoes.

Mr. Dave Smith: Backhoes—many of those are made in Ontario by companies that are foreign-owned. In fact, there is not a single vehicle manufacturer in Ontario that is 100% an Ontario-owned company. If we followed the process that the member from the NDP suggested, we would never be able to replace a single vehicle that the Ontario government uses. We would never be able to replace a snowplow to clean the highways, because those are companies that have invested in Canada, invested in Ontario.

We should just go to the member from Oshawa and tell her that we're going to shut down your city because your party doesn't believe we should support General Motors. Can you imagine if we were to do something like that because we followed the advice of the NDP?

This government is taking a vastly different approach. We are cutting red tape. We are investing in infrastructure. We're protecting workers, we're improving services and we're making life more affordable for everyone. And we're doing all of this so we can unleash our economy and make Ontario the most competitive place in the G7 to invest, create jobs and do business. Because we know that making the province more competitive is the best way to protect Ontario, not just from tariffs but from anything that may come our way in the decades to come.

It's illustrated in the 2025 fall economic statement and the measures proposed in this bill. We're making great progress on that plan. This bill reflects the very essence of our plan. It's about delivering critical funding for workers and businesses; creating a stronger, more self-reliant economy; getting shovels in the ground on infrastructure across the province; making life more affordable and putting money back into people's pockets. Imagine that: a government that wants to put money back into people's pockets. The joke is that you know it's cold in Canada when the politician puts his hand in his own pockets, and not in your pockets. Well, we are coming to that point where it is cold in Ontario again, but we have been doing things to put money back into people's pockets—and we continue to deliver on world-class service while we do that.

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The measures in our fall economic statement are proof that we can continue to create the right economic condi-

tions for businesses to thrive and create more good-paying jobs for hard-working Ontarians. Measures, like increasing support for the Ontario manufacturers and processors with the proposed temporary enhancement of the Ontario Made Manufacturing Investment Tax Credit—we're raising that tax credit from 10% to 15% for qualified Canadian-controlled private companies—and the proposed temporary expansion of the tax credit through a 15% non-refundable version for corporations that are not Canadian-controlled private corporations.

Our proposed new temporary Ontario Shortline Railway Investment Tax Credit will provide a 50% refundable tax credit to support Ontario's shortline railway industry. Now, some of you might be saying, "What is that?" If we don't have those shortline railways functioning very, very well, we don't have the supply chain that we need to bring product from northern Ontario into southern Ontario.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: The Essex Terminal Railway.

Mr. Dave Smith: The Essex Terminal Railway is one of those.

This is a way that we can ensure we're playing an essential role in connecting shippers to the national rail system and providing critical "first and last mile" service to rail customers.

We're setting the stage for more made-in-Ontario success stories.

Interruption.

Mr. Dave Smith: I'd like to thank the member from Bay of Quinte for that. Thank you.

I am proud to say that we've been able to do all of this thanks to our fiscally responsible plan to balance the budget and restore Ontario's credit ratings. In fact, thanks to the success of this plan, today our government is in a position to do more, to build more and to give more back to the people of this province.

Due to our prudent fiscal management, Ontario recently received two—not one, but two—credit rating upgrades for the first time in nearly two decades.

Interjections.

Mr. Dave Smith: I know, that is absolutely something worth applauding.

We have maintained a AA credit rating with all four major credit rating agencies this year. Some of you might be saying, "Why does that matter?"

Mr. Anthony Leardi: Why does that matter, Dave?

Mr. Dave Smith: Well, think of it in terms of your own personal finance. That credit rating that you have defines your ability to borrow; it also defines the interest rate that you borrow at. What this means is that the higher credit rating gives us the ability to borrow at a lower rate. And when you borrow at a lower rate, you're paying less interest on every dollar that you borrow and that enables more investment in the province for our provincial growth.

As detailed in the 2025 fall economic statement, the province's 2025-26 deficit in the budget was projected to be \$14.5 billion. In the fall economic statement, we've brought that down to \$13.5 billion. That's an improvement of \$1.1 billion from what was published in the 2025 budget. That's about prudent fiscal management, and it

has given us room to allow us to act, to protect our workers, to protect our communities. And that is exactly what we've done, from immediate support and relief to help workers and businesses weather the tariffs, to attracting investment that will create more good-paying jobs for the people of Ontario.

I want to point something out: On those jobs that we're out there bringing into Ontario and that investment that we're bringing into Ontario—we talk about jobs, but it's not just a job. We've done a lot of work with skilled trades; and if you have a skilled trade, you have a career, you have a job for life.

I will quote another minister on something: "There's always going to be a need for plumbers—doesn't matter what's happening—and we all know why there's going to be a need for plumbers." He had another statement that I'm not going to throw out there tonight.

We are building the infrastructure for a growing province, and we're leaving no stone unturned. When the US imposed tariffs on key sectors of our economy, we acted immediately. We didn't wait. We knew that Ontario workers and communities would feel the impact of tariffs as they undermined our key industries. They slowed our growth and they shook business confidence.

It doesn't matter what era it is; business needs a stable, predictable environment to thrive. We had that before the orange-coloured guy in the US implemented tariffs; we had that stable, predictable environment.

We had to act immediately. We knew that Ontario workers and communities would feel that impact. We knew that it was going to shake our business confidence, and we had to give businesses confidence that the government of Ontario was going to have their back. That's why we stepped up to protect Ontario in our response to tariffs, by deploying immediate strategies to make investing here more attractive and to strengthen the province's supply chains for long-term growth. We took, and we're continuing to take, every necessary step to defend the interests of the people of Ontario, and protect the economy and jobs.

As an immediate response, we announced in April nearly \$30 billion in supports for workers and businesses. This provided immediate relief and support to help businesses and keep workers on the job and help them weather the storm, as well as measures to build long-term resiliency and prosperity.

We deferred select provincial taxes for about 80,000 businesses for up to six months; that is liquidity for those businesses. The expression in business is that cash is king. If you have cash, you can do things. Regardless of what your balance sheet says, if you have cash-flow problems, you will have problems. By deferring those business taxes for up to six months, we made \$9 billion in liquidity relief available for business in Ontario. That keeps workers on payroll, and that helped business get through the immediate months after the tariffs came into effect, when there was a great deal of uncertainty.

We saw different industries have to take a step back because of that uncertainty. We had US customers who wanted to buy Canadian product hold off because of that

uncertainty. This deferral meant those Ontario businesses had the cash to weather that storm.

In the summer, we launched a \$1-billion Protect Ontario Financing Program, the first phase of our \$5-billion Protect Ontario account. It provides support to Ontario-based businesses that have been affected by higher tariff rates in the steel, aluminum, copper and auto sectors.

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Madam Speaker, I'm pleased to tell you that funding through the Protect Ontario Financing Program has already begun to flow to tariff-impacted businesses. In partnership with the federal government, we announced an investment of \$500 million to help Algoma Steel navigate the challenging market conditions and the impact the tariffs targeted at the Canadian steel sector. Through the Protect Ontario Financing Program, I'm proud that the province is providing a loan of \$100 million—

Interjection: He had to adjust his glasses.

Mr. Dave Smith: Yes, I looked down, and my glasses fell off of the ledge that's on my forehead here that keeps them up. I'm glad that my colleagues noticed that.

Mr. Tyler Allsopp: It happens to the best of us.

Mr. Dave Smith: It does, yes.

Interjections.

Mr. Dave Smith: Rest assured, Madam Speaker, that even the heckling that's going on from my own members about my glasses won't take me away from my express purpose tonight to protect the people of Ontario.

When we're creating new opportunities for Ontario steel workers—one, an opportunity that will keep them on their job for years to come—we are now developing the second and the third streams of the Protect Ontario account. Madam Speaker, we will focus on helping businesses transition away from an overreliance on US trade relationships, increase productivity and invest in domestic supply chains and in high-growth industries.

There are a number of things that we've done, and I'm going to touch on one of those things in particular. That is interprovincial free trade, something that Ontario pioneered. We were the first province to lower those restrictions and work out memorandums of understanding with all of the other provinces. Ontario led that to build not just Ontario's economy but the economy of Canada. And we will continue to focus on helping Ontario-based companies move away from their reliance on the US. We're going to do it through things like artificial intelligence, defence, advanced manufacturing, life sciences, and research and development in the critical minerals sector.

Now, I know for a lot of people, when we talk about critical minerals, they truly don't understand what it is that we're talking about. And if I was allowed to have props, Speaker, I would be holding them up to show you. Every one of us has something that requires critical minerals. It could be your cellphone. It could be your computer, your television, your microwave. It could be—

Mr. Deepak Anand: My pacemaker.

Mr. Dave Smith: —the member from Malton's pacemaker. It could be—when you need to go to the hospital

for something and you need an MRI done, that is all possible because of critical minerals.

This strategy is going to increase Ontario's economic resilience, increase and fuel our innovation, and help fast-track high-growth firms to sharpen Ontario's global edge. In short, it's about building the economy of tomorrow today.

Madam Speaker, we know that time is of the essence. That's why we're also investing \$20 million in the Protect Ontario Workers Employment Response Centres, also known as POWER. These centres are providing access to training and upskilling to workers affected by, or at risk of, layoffs.

In the face of US economic and trade aggression, we're doing so much more than simply helping businesses and workers navigate today's uncertain economy. We have a plan to make Ontario the most competitive economy in the G7. We're making strategic investments to unleash our economy and protect Ontario for generations. We're increasing the competitiveness and resiliency of our economy while unlocking new opportunities for prosperity.

There are so many opportunities that are being presented. I look down the aisle at the Minister of Colleges, Universities, Research Excellence and Security and the work that he's doing there. Because we recognize that if you're going to have a resilient economy, you need to have the economy of today and tomorrow, not the economy of yesterday.

The measures that we're taking will help reduce barriers and expand labour mobility to support economic immigration across all of Canada and increase opportunities for Ontario businesses and their workers.

We're also working to capture the enormous, untapped economic potential of the Ring of Fire. We're supporting a made-in-Ontario critical minerals supply chain through an investment of \$500 million to create the Critical Minerals Processing Fund.

When you think about it, there have been conversations, many conversations, about transitioning away from internal combustion engines. The electric vehicle: All of those critical minerals in Ontario's north are used in electric vehicles. When you look at solar panels, when you look at wind turbines and battery storage—the energy of the future—it's all coming because of critical minerals.

The support that we're providing for these projects will accelerate the province's critical mineral processing capacity. We're cutting government review times in half. For advanced exploration and mine development projects, we're launching a wholesale permitting reform through the one project, one process framework. This will ensure we can reduce delays and attract more investment into Ontario's mining sector.

We've also made historic investments in health care, in transit, in roads and highways, and in our communities, helping us build for a stronger, growing province. In fact, Madam Speaker, we're delivering on our 10-year, more than \$200-billion capital plan, the largest and most ambitious plan of its kind in Ontario's history. It includes historic investments to unlock infrastructure to address Ontario's current needs while laying the foundation for

long-term growth and prosperity for communities across the province and creating more good-paying jobs. When you invest in infrastructure, you're investing for your future.

Again, I'm going to pull this back to something that most people truly understand. Think of the province as your house and you're doing a renovation to your home to improve the value, to make it more accessible, to have the home be what you need. If you think of it in those terms, the investment in your home is an investment in you. It's an investment in your future. It's an investment in your family's future. That is the type of investment that this government is making for the province of Ontario.

Mr. Deepak Anand: For generations to come.

Mr. Dave Smith: For generations to come.

We've strengthened it by an additional \$5 billion announced in the 2025 budget. The Building Ontario Fund has begun to deliver on its priority investments, like long-term care, energy infrastructure, affordable housing and municipal and community projects. As detailed in the 2025 fall economic statement, a new area of focus—critical minerals—has been added to the BOF's priority sectors to support Ontario's clean economy transition and the supply chain security. Protecting Ontario means building this great province up. It means making investments today that will create a better tomorrow for everyone in Ontario.

Madam Speaker, we have done this while keeping costs down. We've done it for the hard-working families that are counting on us to make life more affordable in these uncertain times. We've cut taxes and fees and put more money back into people's pockets. In the fall economic statement alone, we're delivering nearly \$12 billion in savings for Ontario families, meaningful financial relief for families and individuals, saving commuters money by removing tolls, making public transit more affordable through the One Fare Program and permanently cutting the gas tax. We're lowering costs and making life more affordable when it's more important than ever.

2200

Madam Speaker, through our taxpayer rebate cheques, we delivered about \$3 billion in timely support to almost 15 million eligible people in Ontario. Let me say that again: \$3 billion to go right back into the pockets of the people of Ontario. I know it's an interesting concept: The government is giving you back your money. Because the only money that the government has is what it takes from you, and we're giving it back to you.

Just last month, the Minister of Finance announced we're working with the federal government to mirror their proposal for a federal GST/HST first-time homebuyers' rebate.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Huge.

Mr. Dave Smith: Huge.

Of course, it's subject to the passage of the federal legislation, but Ontario's new rebate would remove the full 8% of the provincial portion of HST for first-time homebuyers of qualified new homes valued up to a million dollars. That's \$130,000 saving for the first-time homebuyer when you combine the federal portion and the provincial portion; \$130,000 that they're not going to have

to mortgage; \$130,000 that they're not going to have to pay as an additional monthly payment. And it makes life more affordable for that entire generation who have stepped back and said, "I'm never going to be able to afford to buy my own home because it's too expensive." This is real relief for the young people in Ontario, for those renters who have decided to make that jump and they're going to buy their own place.

Madam Speaker, time and time again, our province has confronted adversity. And time and time again, we've emerged stronger and more united than ever. Today is no different. Thanks to prudent management and strategic investments, we're well positioned to continue protecting our province and building for tomorrow.

Even with so much uncertainty, investors around the world have confidence in Ontario's ability to deliver. We have a strong foundation in key strategic sectors such as steel production, mining, energy, advanced manufacturing, and their well-established supply chains.

In short, we're making Ontario's economy more competitive, more resilient and more self-reliant. We're building future growth through strategic investment in infrastructure, in skills development and innovation. We're doing things that raise our productivity as an economy and our prosperity as a province. By promoting innovation, reducing business costs, and cutting red tape and regulatory burdens, we will unleash the full potential of Ontario's economy.

Working alongside our world-class workers, industry, municipal leaders, unions, Indigenous communities and even the federal government, we will tap into Ontario's full potential and rise to meet any challenge. We'll continue to invest in stronger, safer communities, and help our health and education sectors continue to deliver for the people of this province, ensuring Ontario remains the greatest place on Earth to live. I refer to my riding as God's country; all of Ontario is God's backyard.

Madam Speaker, our government will never stop standing up for the people of Ontario, and together we will protect Ontario and build a great future for our province. As I'm standing here, I'm reminded of the strength and determination of the people of this province: the small business owners who open their doors before sunrise; the families who balance work and caring for loved ones; the health care workers, educators, skilled tradespeople who keep our communities thriving; the municipalities that play a vital role in making our communities strong. These are the people that this plan is for.

Around the world, all around us, we're seeing uncertainty. Global markets are shifting. Interest rates remain high. This international shifting of financial and money markets—and all of those considerations have echoes and impacts right here at home.

It's our job as a provincial government to help Ontario small business owners, families, professionals, tradespeople to weather these times. That is why our government is not standing still. We are facing these challenges head-on with a plan rooted in prudence, discipline and optimism—because our fiscal plan and the measures proposed

in this bill will help drive it forward. It's all about balance: balance between investing in the public services Ontario depends on and maintaining the fiscal flexibility needed to respond to a changing world. It's about protecting the progress we've made while ensuring our province can adapt, grow and lead in the years ahead.

Mr. Speaker, this plan recognizes that Ontario's future depends on empowering our people and our businesses to compete, to grow and, very importantly, to lead, not just in Ontario but on a global stage. Ontario has never been a province that waits for opportunity. I've said this so many times. It doesn't matter what we're talking about, this statement fits. There is no such thing as good luck. Good luck is simply when preparation and opportunity intersect. We're making sure that Ontario is prepared so that when that opportunity presents itself, we can jump on it. We're building that opportunity through this plan, through targeted investments, responsible fiscal management and an unwavering focus on growth. We're positioning Ontario to be the most competitive place in the entire G7 to invest, to create and to do business. That is what this bill represents: a clear, confident path forward, one that protects workers, families and businesses today while building a stronger tomorrow for every region in our province.

Mr. Speaker, the foundation of this plan is a continued and unwavering commitment to the public services that matter the most to the people of Ontario such as health care, education and making our communities safer. These public services are not just line items on the balance sheet; they're pillars that support strong communities and our growing economy. In a time of global uncertainty, we know maintaining those pillars while staying fiscally responsible is how we protect both our progress and our future.

Over the past year, our government has continued to make historic investments to strengthen our health care system. We're building new hospitals. We're expanding existing ones in every corner of this province, from the new Windsor-Essex acute-care hospital redevelopment to redevelopments in Ottawa and Bowmanville. These investments would add approximately 3,000 hospital beds over the next decade, significantly increasing access to health care.

At the same time, we're investing in the people who form the backbone of our health care system by expanding training, improving recruitment and recognizing international credentials. We're not just filling vacant job postings; we're putting people in places to help. We're strengthening the resilience of Ontario's health care system for the future, creating rewarding, good-paying professional careers.

As the Minister of Finance announced last month, we're also investing \$1.1 billion in home care services and hospital-to-home programs, because those who want to age at home should be able to age at home. Ontarians deserve the right care at the right place even when that's at their home.

Mr. Speaker, we're doing the same in education, ensuring students have the supports and opportunities they need

to succeed in a changing world. We're building new schools, expanding access to skilled trades and supporting the delivery of science, technology, engineering and math programs, also referred to as STEM programs. These program investments alone will fund 20,500 STEM seats per year at our post-secondary institutions.

And that's not all, Speaker. Just as it's important that we ensure our students are set up to succeed, so too are we helping to ensure the pillar of every community is set up for success. Municipalities are key partners in keeping our communities strong, and we're committed to supporting them so they can continue to serve their communities effectively.

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Through this plan and a measure proposed in this bill, our government is taking steps to strengthen and simplify the administration of education property taxes. We're proposing updates to the Education Act that would streamline and reduce the administrative workload on municipalities and school boards. These are practical good-governance changes to support municipal and school board administration processes.

And just as we're simplifying the process for our municipal partners, we're also investing in the infrastructure that keeps our province moving. We're continuing to invest in the infrastructure that connects our province: new highways and building public transit projects. From the Bradford Bypass and Highway 413 to the Ontario Line and GO Transit expansions, these projects aren't just about moving people faster; it's about improving the lives of the people of Ontario. These projects are unlocking economic growth, improving productivity and connecting workers to opportunity.

And when we speak about opportunities for workers, we're making opportunities for those first-time homebuyers in the province as well. We're making life easier for families to get into that first-time home. Through our plan, the first-time homebuyer will receive an 8% HST rebate on the provincial portion, helping them keep money in their pockets so they can take that important step.

Through it all, our government remains guided by the same principles that have defined our approach since day one: responsible stewardship of public dollars, strategic investment in what matters most and flexibility to adapt as situations change. Looking ahead, these investments are not just about the short-term growth; they're about the long-term growth of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): I recognize the member from Eglinton–Lawrence.

Mrs. Michelle Cooper: Today I have the privilege to rise before you to speak as part of the second reading of Bill 68, the Plan to Protect Ontario Act (Budget Measures), 2025.

Thank you to my colleague for his words on this important bill that furthers our government's work to protect our province and its people.

I am proud of being able to share with you, and all Ontarians, some of the actions our government is taking to navigate the impact of US tariffs and global economic

uncertainty; actions that inform and are moved forward by the proposals in this bill; actions that build a more competitive, more resilient and more self-reliant economy for Ontario, not only to protect our province and its people from tariffs but from anything that comes our way for decades to come. We are building the foundations of our future growth.

As Minister Bethlenfalvy said when introducing the 2025 fall economic statement, it has never been more important for the government to deliver on its plan to protect Ontario.

Speaker, before getting into some of the details of the measures proposed in this fall budget bill, I want to take a moment. I want to highlight that we are able to take our bold actions to protect our economy, our workers and our communities, thanks to our government's unwavering commitment to fiscal prudence.

Under the leadership of Minister Bethlenfalvy, Ontario's finances are now in the strongest position they have been in over a decade. The 2024-25 public accounts of Ontario confirmed that the province is on the right track. In that document, Ontario reported a \$1.1-billion deficit in 2024-25, a significant improvement compared to a forecasted deficit of \$9.8 billion in the 2024 budget. The AA credit rating Ontario retained this year with all four major credit rating agencies is proof of Ontario's financial health. This means less interest on every dollar borrowed and more investments in Ontario's economy, less money towards servicing debt and more money to protect our workers and communities. The 2025 fall economic statement reaffirms that the best way to protect Ontario is by maintaining a path to a balanced budget in 2027-28.

Speaker, we are living through a period of profound change the likes of which Canada has not seen in many generations. This government is stepping up to protect Ontario, and we are taking a very different approach from the one taken by the preceding government, which left Ontario vulnerable and exposed.

We have a plan to make Ontario the most competitive place in the G7 to invest, create jobs and do business. Our plan to protect Ontario is cutting red tape. Our plan to protect Ontario is unleashing our economy and delivering critical funding. Our plan to protect Ontario is getting shovels in the ground, supporting workers and protecting communities—all this, while continuing to deliver world-class public services and making life more affordable. That is precisely what the 2025 fall economic statement presents and the proposed measures presented in this bill.

The path to a stronger Ontario runs through competitiveness, resilience and self-reliance. To make Ontario the most competitive economy in the G7, we must unleash our province's full economic potential, Speaker. Our government is taking bold action to increase the competitiveness and resiliency of the economy while unlocking new opportunities for prosperity. By supporting investments in manufacturing, the auto sector, critical minerals, nuclear energy and other high-growth industries, we are fortifying Ontario's economic resilience.

The province is empowering the manufacturing sector to compete and thrive in the economy of tomorrow by supporting the growth of the manufacturing sector's workforce and production capacity. A stronger, more resilient Ontario means raising our economic potential so that every worker can make more and better products, service clients faster and more efficiently, earn bigger paycheques and enjoy a higher standard of living.

We are looking forward and making investments in infrastructure and innovation in coordination with Ontario businesses so that we can help shape the future, public sector and private sector combined. Together, government and industry have the opportunity to unlock Ontario's full economic potential and secure long-lasting prosperity for workers, families and communities across our province.

One of the many programs the province offers to help companies invest in technology, attract high-quality jobs, scale up operations and drive innovation is the Ontario Made Manufacturing Investment Tax Credit, or OMMITC for short. The OMMITC helps businesses lower their costs, innovate and become more competitive by supporting investments in buildings, machinery and equipment for use in manufacturing or processing in Ontario.

I am pleased that Bill 68 proposes to implement the enhancement and expansion of the credit the government has committed to.

2220

In the 2025 budget, the government proposed to temporarily enhance the OMMITC rate from 10% to 15% for qualifying Canadian-controlled private corporations, for eligible expenditures made in Ontario.

In addition, the government also proposed to temporarily expand access to the tax credit through a 15% non-refundable version of the tax credit to corporations that are not Canadian-controlled private corporations for eligible expenditures. Furthermore—and also part of Bill 68—our government is now proposing to amend the eligibility criteria to allow more flexibility for expenditures of machinery and equipment.

Interjections.

Mrs. Michelle Cooper: Thank you. Through these proposed changes to the OMMITC, the credit would provide an estimated \$2.7 billion in Ontario income tax support from 2023-24 to 2027-28 to help increase the competitiveness and resilience of our province's manufacturing sector.

When discussing Ontario's manufacturing sector, we must take some time to talk about our provincial auto sector. We all know how much Ontario's auto sector is being harmed by US tariffs, and we hear the concerns of businesses, workers and families whose paycheques rely on it. But they can rest assured that this government is and will continue to be there for them.

That is why the government is maintaining its strategic investments in support of the automotive sector to further enhance its competitiveness. We are investing \$73 million over four years, starting in 2025-26, to continue the Ontario Vehicle Innovation Network to help cement Ontario's leadership in advanced automotive technology

and smart mobility solutions. This program has had fantastic results, having supported over 700 of Ontario's small and medium-sized enterprises in the automotive and mobility sectors, creating or retaining over 7,000 jobs and leveraging over \$900 million in private-sector investments.

The government is also committing \$12 million over the next three years to continue the Ontario Automotive Modernization Program. This program is helping provincial automotive part suppliers upgrade and adopt new tools and technologies to innovate their product lines and modernize their processes, enhancing their competitiveness and resilience. Since its inception in 2019, this program has supported 215 projects which created over 1,000 jobs, retained approximately another 16,000 and leveraged more than \$59 million in private-sector investment. These are only some of the programs Ontario has available to attract investments that support and create manufacturing jobs, while capitalizing on emerging opportunities as global producers look for reliable supply chains.

Speaker, in order to be able to support the economic growth our government envisions, it is of utmost importance to continue making record investments in energy infrastructure to build a more self-reliant economy. Early this year, Ontario released Energy for Generations, the province's first-ever integrated energy plan, bringing electricity, natural gas, hydrogen and other energy sources together under one coordinated strategy to meet future demand.

In addition, we are leveraging our undisputed nuclear leadership to advance opportunities here in Ontario but also globally. Ontario is leading the G7 by building the first of four small modular reactors at the Darlington nuclear site, which will produce enough clean, reliable and affordable electricity to power the equivalent of 300,000 homes. Construction of the four units is expected to create up to 18,000 Canadian jobs and inject on average \$500 million annually into Ontario's economy during construction. Further to that, the construction, operation and maintenance of the four units is estimated to add \$38.5 billion to Canada's GDP over the next 65 years.

In addition, as part of the government's ambitious plan to expand nuclear energy, we're also advancing early-stage planning for new large-scale nuclear energy generation, both at Bruce nuclear site in Bruce county and at the Wesleyville site in Port Hope.

Interjection: Good news.

Mrs. Michelle Cooper: Good news.

But energy infrastructure is not limited to nuclear generation. Once energy is generated, it is also important to distribute it swiftly and efficiently. That is why the government is making one of the largest electricity transmission expansions in Ontario's modern history. Ontario is building two new electricity transmission lines from Bowmanville to the greater Toronto area and from Windsor to Lakeshore, while also upgrading two major lines: one between Orangeville and Barrie and another in Toronto. This is the foundation to building a self-reliant economy: clean and dependable power that attracts invest-

ment, supports domestic manufacturing and protects families by keeping costs down.

Speaker, to fully unleash Ontario's economic potential, we must unlock Ontario's vast critical mineral resources. Our great province is one of the most mineral-rich areas in the world, and there is a growing demand for critical minerals in strategic industries, including the defence, aerospace, automotive and energy sectors. Nickel, copper, lithium, cobalt, graphite and rare earth elements are only some of the critical minerals at the heart of modern technology.

Ontario must take bold action to leverage our advantage and seize the opportunity for our province and our people. To do so, the government is working to attract historic investment to support a made-in-Ontario critical mineral supply chain to help ensure the minerals mined in Ontario are processed in Ontario by Ontario workers. Our plan to protect Ontario includes \$500 million to create the Critical Minerals Processing Fund and accelerate the province's critical minerals processing capacity by helping strengthen Ontario's existing mineral processing facilities and supporting the construction of new ones.

To fully unlock the opportunities and the economic potential of the Ring of Fire, one of the most promising mineral opportunities in the world, our government continues to support the development of key infrastructure in the region, such as all-season, dependable road access and connections to provincial highways.

In September, Ontario announced a \$61.8-million investment for the Geraldton Main Street Rehabilitation Project, a critical road link that will serve as a gateway to the Ring of Fire, strengthening regional logistics and opening pathways to jobs, education, health care and housing.

The government's strategy to unlock the economic potential of the Ring of Fire region includes working in partnership with First Nations to ensure First Nations and northern communities benefit from critical mineral development through partnerships that offer economic opportunities spanning generations.

Speaker, red tape and burdensome bureaucratic duplication have held back major infrastructure, mining and resource development projects for too long in Ontario. To address this in relation to critical minerals, the government launched the "one project, one process" framework for advanced exploration and mine development projects. This initiative will streamline government approvals into one process and reduce review times by at least 50%, while maintaining robust environmental standards and Ontario's duty to consult with Indigenous communities.

2230

To further support job-creating investments across the entire economy, our government is taking decisive action to reduce business costs, cut red tape and speed up approvals for investment projects. Since 2018, our government has taken over 650 actions to reduce regulatory burdens and save Ontarians more than \$1.2 billion in annual compliance costs, freeing up 1.8 million hours every year. These are real results that make it easier to build, hire, invest and grow.

Earlier this year, we introduced the Protect Ontario by Cutting Red Tape Act, 2025, part of the spring 2025 red tape reduction package that includes over 50 new measures to improve services, lower costs and protect Ontario's economy.

Last month, the government introduced the Building a More Competitive Economy Act, 2025, along with a suite of related initiatives designed to create the conditions for long-term stability, resilience and prosperity. The act and related measures include 11 targeted initiatives to improve labour mobility and streamline government processes for permits and approvals. These reforms will cut red tape and get rid of unnecessary and burdensome bureaucratic steps to help Ontario become the best economy in the G7 to invest, do business and create jobs in.

Our plan to protect Ontario is building future growth through raising our productivity as an economy and our prosperity as a province. Now, more than ever, we need to move forward towards the future, Speaker. So I call on all members here—everyone—to vote in favour of Bill 68.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Questions?

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: My question is to the member from Peterborough–Kawartha. I listen and I hear this government strut around, bragging about buying local and economic resilience. Yet when it comes to twinning the skyway in Niagara, suddenly Ontario steel is nowhere to be found. Not a single beam will be made in Ontario while you're busy outsourcing Ontario jobs and bringing steel from overseas. What's that all about?

Oh, wait, Speaker; it doesn't stop there. This government would rather rely on out-of-province chemo drugs than buy Biolyse, an Ontario company that hires hundreds of people right in my riding of St. Catharines. You used them during the pandemic.

So, my question is, can the member explain why "Buy Local" is just a slogan for press conferences but never ever will we see a beam in the twinning of the skyway that's from Ontario or—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): I recognize the member from Peterborough–Kawartha.

Mr. Dave Smith: I want to thank the member opposite for that question and opening up the opportunity to talk about the fact that the NDP has said that companies that employ 250 people from Ontario should not be considered part of "Buy Ontario." The NDP are basically saying, "We need to shut down Oshawa General Motors. We need to shut down Ford. We need to shut down Toyota." That is the absolute insanity of what the NDP are proposing with how they are doing things. We're building Ontario. We're making sure Ontario workers are working. We're making sure that our economy is resilient.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Further questions? I recognize the member from Ajax.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Not one beam will be from Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): The member for St. Catharines will come to order.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: This evening, I listened with intent to the member from Peterborough–Kawartha talking about

the HST rebate on new homes. It's something that the government has now proposed to do for first-time homebuyers, but just first-time homebuyers only.

Today, we heard the Premier somewhat contradict the Minister of Finance. He doesn't necessarily agree with the approach that the Minister of Finance is taking. The Premier was suggesting that it should be for all homebuyers on a new home, something that Ontario Liberals had proposed just a couple of months ago and myself proposed back in the spring. So my question to the member from Peterborough-Kawartha is, does the member agree with the Premier that the HST should be off of all new homes, not just first-time homebuyers?

Mr. Dave Smith: Thank you very much for that question, because we are right now entering the pre-budget consultation period, so this is an opportunity for people to come forward and talk about what we need to have in our next budget. This could be one of those things that gets brought up by people, because we are listening to the people of Ontario and what the people of Ontario are looking for.

If we take a step back and look at our previous budget, the one that we released in May 2025, we had said in that that we would match the federal government if they removed the federal portion of the HST on first-time homebuyers, and we're waiting for the federal government to do that. We had said that we would do that. We made that promise to the people of Ontario. We've kept that promise to the people of Ontario.

Now, if they'd like to modify that, that is something that, absolutely, we'll take into consideration as part of the pre-budget consultation leading into our next budget.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Further questions?

Mr. Brian Saunderson: I listened with great interest to my colleagues' comments about the budget—both colleagues—and I want to thank them for their insights into the budget process. We were talking on a global basis, but I want to talk a little bit about my riding of Simcoe-Grey, because in the fall economic statement, as in the 2025 budget about protecting Ontario, they mention the destination Wasaga Beach. It has been a huge issue of support from my riding.

However, I know that the MPP from Spadina-Fort York came up and paid a visit to my riding over the summer to complain about the transfer to Wasaga Beach of a small portion—three hectares—of beach 1 on the Wasaga Beach development, the longest freshwater beach in the world, to help them develop their destination of Wasaga Beach and the Nancy Island. I'm wondering if the member from Peterborough-Kawartha can talk about the important initiatives that are going on there to develop tourism in the area of Wasaga Beach.

Mr. Dave Smith: I would first like to point out some inaccuracies in what the member said. He said he was listening intently to my speech. He was sitting beside me. I know, because he was heckling me, that he wasn't listening intently.

But when we take a look at Wasaga Beach, this is one of those things I spoke about in my speech itself, and that is reducing red tape, that is getting out of the way.

Government should be there to regulate to integrity but not to interfere.

This is one of these cases where you have a section of the beach that was annexed by the province a long time ago, and you've put it in a position, then, where you have multiple levels of government that would be looking after the governance of this, and it doesn't make sense to do this. We know that the vast majority of Wasaga Beach is a part of the municipality, so all we've done is we've said that to make it simple and easy again, let's move it all back under that municipal government so that it is one set of rules and we don't have to go through multiple layers to do what needs to be done.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Further questions?

MPP Lise Vaugeois: We hear about how much money is being given to universities and colleges, and we hear that the fact that colleges and universities are struggling is all because of the federal government's removal of international students. But the reality is that Ontario's colleges and universities have been underfunded by the province for a very long time. So my question is, because I don't see any improvements in this budget, what has the government got against the important work done at colleges and universities?

Mr. Dave Smith: More than a billion dollars has been invested into our post-secondary system in the last year alone—a billion dollars. And yet, the member opposite is saying that we don't value colleges and universities.

Let me tell you something, Mr. Speaker: We have been investing in students. We've held the line on tuition fees the entire time that we've been in government, when the opposition members have been standing up and saying, "Raise tuition. Make it more unaffordable for students to go." We're not taking that approach. We're investing in colleges and universities. We're investing in education because we know that we can have the best trained workforce in the entire world here in this province with the supports that we're doing.

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The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): I recognize the Solicitor General.

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: I want to direct my question to the member from Eglinton-Lawrence, who gave a passionate speech about how much she believes in our province and why she feels that the debate that we're having tonight is really about meeting the moment of Ontario. It's understanding that we have a lot of challenges that are driven to us by external factors and an existential threat that we've never confronted.

Perhaps the member from Eglinton-Lawrence could tell us why this fall economic statement meets the moment.

Mrs. Michelle Cooper: Thank you to the member from York Centre for your question. President Trump's harmful tariffs are disrupting cross-border supply chains, hurting businesses and workers on both sides of the border. We need the federal government to join us in getting job-creating projects built faster, from the Ring of Fire to large-scale nuclear facilities. These are huge opportunities to power Canada's economic growth. We know these are uncertain times, which is why we are taking decisive

action to help businesses weather US tariffs, with over \$30 billion in tariff relief supports and measures.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Further questions? Further questions?

Mr. Matthew Rae: Right here.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): The member from Perth—Wellington for a further question.

Mr. Matthew Rae: I'm still paying attention, Speaker.

Interjection: Ask a dad question.

Mr. Matthew Rae: Great. Yes, a dad question—I could do a dad question. I've got 30 seconds, though.

My question to the member from God's country of Peterborough—Kawartha is, can you talk about the important work we have done—as I'm sure some of my colleagues have partaken this evening—for our micro-breweries and craft breweries in Ontario through the fall economic statement?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): I recognize the member from Peterborough—Kawartha, quickly.

Mr. Dave Smith: In nine seconds: Craft breweries make up 11% of the breweries in Ontario, 11% of the beer sales, but they make up 80% of the employees in the beer industry. Strengthening our craft brewing industry means strengthening jobs and our economy.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Further debate?

Ms. Chandra Pasma: I'm rising tonight to speak to the bill that the government has tabled to implement measures in their fall economic statement. I have to say that the fall economic statement was a tremendous disappointment, because people in Ottawa West—Nepean and across the province are really struggling. We are seeing real challenges in being able to afford the basic necessities of life: over a million people in the province—a million people in the province out of a province of 15 million—who are forced to use a food bank; people who cannot afford homes; record homelessness in the province. There are 800,000 people without a job and more jobs are being lost every single day. And this government didn't have a plan to deal with any of it.

In fact, they doubled down on their failed budget that did nothing to address any of these challenges, and in fact, created new challenges for people in Ontario. It's like they just don't get it. I don't know what province they're living in. I don't think they get out and talk to very many people. They certainly don't allow people to come here to talk to us at Queen's Park. They've done their very best to make sure that they do not have to listen to the people of Ontario; they don't care about them. That's how they can live in their own little reality where none of these problems exist, where it's not a problem if jobs are being lost every single day and the only people who are fighting for them are the workers and the opposition. The government and the Premier can't even bother to meet with these workers.

We have significant challenges for unemployment, none more so than for youth—a 17.8% unemployment rate for youth aged 15 to 24 in the province right now. That is our next generation, Speaker. That is students who need to pay for tuition, who need to pay for rent, who need to pay for food, who need a job in order to pay for all of that, and they can't find one. That is recent graduates who have

invested in developing the skills that we need—the skills to build things, the skills to care for people—and they can't find a job. How are they supposed to build a life in the province? How are they supposed to afford our unaffordable housing when they can't even find a job?

But the government has no plan to address any of that. There are no changes to support workers who have lost jobs. There's no change in direction on the Skills Development Fund, which is taking money that should be going to support workers and giving it to Conservative donors, to friends of the Premier, to strip clubs. There is no plan here to actually support people who need to put food on the table, who need to pay rent—and who need to pay rent on time because this government is making it easier for landlords to evict them, even if they miss the rent because the paycheck didn't come on time because their employer stole wages from them, because there's no crackdown on wage theft here either.

This is a government that fundamentally does not care about working people. We are seeing massive job losses in the public sector—10,000 jobs in the college sector alone—and these are good jobs, Speaker. These are jobs that allow families to put food on the table, but they're also jobs that we need because now, when we're in a trade war, when we're in a situation where we need to stimulate our economy, create jobs, build things and care for people, we need people to have the skills to do that.

When we are closing college programs and when we are losing 10,000 jobs in the college sector, that is not happening. Algonquin College in my riding of Ottawa West—Nepean has to cut a deficit of \$60 million. They've closed 35 programs. They've closed the Perth campus entirely, which means that people in that region of eastern Ontario don't have access to post-secondary education in their community anymore.

We should be doing more to provide opportunities for young people, but what the fall economic statement does is it fails to reverse the \$1.2 billion in cuts that the budget is making to post-secondary education. We have a post-secondary education system that is already teetering on the brink—job losses, closure of programs, difficulty making ends meet—and instead of actually resolving that challenge by investing in post-secondary education, the fall economic statement maintains the status quo. It's completely abandoned our young people.

I just want to mention, Speaker, that I will be sharing my time with the member from Nickel Belt.

The fall economic statement equally abandons the hope that young people have of building a future in Ontario with a home that they can afford. It abandons the families who can't find a place that they can afford to live in.

In my riding, I routinely knock on the doors of rental homes that are one or two bedrooms and find out that there are families of six or eight who are living in these places. They simply can't afford anything that would actually fit their family. They're struggling as it is to pay the rent and to make ends meet. There is no affordable option for them.

I speak to people who are paying 80%, 90%, even 100% of their income on rent. There was a report just this month that at the average rate of rent in Ottawa for a one-bedroom apartment, which is \$2,100 a month, somebody would

need to work full-time at a job that pays more than twice the minimum wage in order to meet the threshold for affordable housing, which is 30% of their income going towards rent.

How many people in Ottawa do you think who are renting homes are actually earning more than twice the minimum wage? It's certainly not these young people who can't find a job or who are underemployed, it's not seniors who are living on fixed incomes, and it's not workers in the service and hospitality sector.

It means that affordable housing is out of the reach of many, many people in Ottawa, but the government doesn't have a housing plan. Housing starts are at the lowest level they've been since the 1950s. I don't know how many of us here were alive in the 1950s—I won't speculate—but it's incredible that we are talking about more than 70 years. That's how long it's been since housing starts were as low as they are now and yet the government has no plan to change that.

2250

We keep seeing them take away environmental protections, protections for tenants, taking away the power of communities to have a say over development. None of it moves the needle because they're not doing what we actually need to do to get housing built in the province, which is for the government to get back in the business of building housing; to invest in the creation of not-for-profit, co-op and social housing that builds the deeply affordable homes that people can actually afford. That is what is actually going to move the needle on housing and make sure that everybody in our province has a home that they can afford, instead of what we're seeing now, which is homelessness going up to record rates.

In Ottawa, homelessness levels are the highest that they've ever been. There was a projection earlier this year from the city's 2024 housing needs assessment that says if additional funding isn't put into building affordable homes, shelters and transitional housing in Ottawa, then homelessness in Ottawa is projected to increase by 58% over the next decade—which is incredibly shocking, because there's over 3,000 people who were homeless at the point-in-time count last year. Imagine that increasing 58%, and that was already 58% over the previous count. We're seeing this exponential rise in the number of people who are homeless in Ottawa, with absolutely no plan as to how we're going to put a stop to that and address it.

The Ottawa Food Bank put out their 2025 statistics on Friday, and they reported that there's been a more than 100% increase in food bank use in Ottawa just in the last six years. That's all under this government's watch—a 100% increase in food bank use. What I've heard from food banks in my riding, like the Caldwell Family Centre, is that they're seeing people who were at the food bank previously coming back, and it's not because these people lost their jobs. They still have their jobs. It's because the job is not enough to pay for the rising cost of groceries and the rising cost of rent. These are people who are fully employed who have to use food banks in the province of Ontario because the government is doing nothing to make sure that they can afford basic essentials like groceries and like a home. There's nothing here in the fall economic

statement that actually addresses the cost of groceries, the fact that people can't afford the basic necessities of life.

And then, I want to talk about health care, which is another priority for people in Ontario, because far too many people don't have access. It's actually the number one thing that I hear about in my office and that has remained consistent over the three years I've been elected, Speaker. People do not have family doctors. They are waiting far too long at the ER.

What was incredibly disappointing to see was that again in this fall economic statement, there was no funding to rightsize the Queensway Carleton Hospital. The Queensway Carleton is far too small for the population that it serves. We're not even talking about being half the size of the population it serves; we're talking about one fifth. It was built to serve 100,000 people 40 years ago. Now it's serving half a million people, with no significant increase in size.

The Queensway Carleton has half the number of beds that the Civic hospital and the General hospital have, and I don't mean the Civic and the General combined. It has half the number of beds of the Civic and half the number of beds of the General. The Civic and the General together serve half the population of Ottawa; the Queensway Carleton serves the other half. But we don't have the same capacity. We don't have the same number of beds. We don't have the same resources.

The Queensway Carleton has been incredibly innovative. They have a plan to rightsize the hospital that could be implemented immediately if the funding was there. They've thought this through so that there would be different contracts that could happen simultaneously, which would mean that they could allow for smaller contractors to bid. This would allow for more local contractors to bid on the construction of the hospital, which means more local jobs. We're talking about very many local jobs that would go into the construction and development of the expansion of the Queensway Carleton Hospital.

They've built the hospital, to date, in a way that they can build up. The emergency room expansion would take up a little bit more ground, but the rest would just be taking the floors that they already have and duplicating them on top of the existing structure. So, we are talking actually about a very straightforward construction project, that could happen immediately, that would have significant job-creating effects for the city of Ottawa. It would provide people in the west end of Ottawa the access to emergency health care that we deserve. And the government has offered crickets.

It is clear that they are not concerned about the access of people in the west end of Ottawa to hospital care, even though that includes the riding of Carleton, which is represented by a member of their own government. We've also seen in this a great member who can't deliver for his own community.

We also saw in this fall economic statement that there was nothing to address the sustainability and the wage parity for community and home care, which is another challenge that I hear about frequently. We know that hospital care is actually the most expensive form of care.

It's over \$700 a day for someone in a hospital bed, whereas home and community care is \$35 a day, but many of the home and community care agencies are struggling to retain staff, are struggling to pay the bills because their funding is not going up. So, they are losing staff to the hospital sector. We had community health care partners here at Queen's Park today who were asking for investments for wage parity that would allow them to keep the trained, dedicated staff they need to actually provide supports to people.

This is a good investment for the province because every person who can receive home and community care is a person that we can keep out of the hospital. As I mentioned, that's a savings of more than \$600 per day, but there was nothing in the fall economic statement to address that. There was nothing to expand the amazing care that's provided by community health centres, like Carlington and the Pinecrest-Queensway, and so that's incredibly disappointing.

There was also nothing in the fall economic statement to address the incredible challenges that we are seeing in education, starting with the fact that the government took more than \$6 billion out of the education system over the past seven years with their funding cuts. I want to talk a little bit specifically about what that means in concrete terms. Yes, there are the large class sizes because there are 5,000 fewer educators who are being funded because of the government's cuts.

Yes, we have inadequate mental health supports—only one in 10 schools has regularly scheduled access to a mental health professional—because the government is paying mere pennies per day for mental health care. It's only 23 cents per student per day, and we only have 0.29 regulated mental health professionals per school. We have a school violence crisis because we don't have the caring adults in schools that we need to actually meet the needs of children. They're dysregulated and frustrated, and so they are lashing out; and the government's paying only 15.4 cents per student per day to address that.

But what we're also seeing is structural deficits in the funding that is being provided, Speaker, and I'm going to give you an outline of what that looks like. In special education, 71 out of 72 school boards in the province are paying more for special education than what they're getting from this government, and that's for a system that is basically being held together with shoestring and tape.

We know it's badly failing our kids who have disabilities and special needs, that far too many of them are not having a meaningful education, that far too many of them are not having their safety plans actually enacted, that some of them are being kept in restraints or being put in isolation or seclusion rooms as a result of that. We know that 6% of students with disabilities aren't able to attend school at all—at all—because the supports aren't there, and that means about 20,000, 21,000 kids in Ontario are being excluded.

But for all of this, we know that for the English public school boards alone they are paying \$582 million on special education more than what they're getting from the

province. I've read one analysis that says that for all of the school boards in Ontario, the shortfall is more like \$850 million. When I asked the Minister of Education two weeks ago in estimates, he refused to say, which makes me think that the \$850-million figure is probably correct. So, that's \$850 million that the government should, at the bare minimum, be providing for special education, just so that school boards don't have to take those funds out of any other part of the education funding envelope. They're not doing that, so that's a structural deficit.

2300

Then we know that there's a large repair backlog. Again, I asked the Minister of Education for the total amount of the school repair backlog because the government has refused to report on that for the last four years. The last we knew, it was \$16 billion. I'm pretty sure that if it was going down instead of up, the government would be reporting on it. The Minister of Education once again refused to say—in fact, he tried to claim that he didn't know, as if he doesn't have an entire ministry at his disposal to analyze the information that school boards are required to send to him every single year.

But what we do know is that the Financial Accountability Officer says that over the next 10 years, the cost to bring and keep all schools in a state of good repair and to build the new schools that we need in order to meet population growth is \$31.4 billion. But in the budget, the government only committed \$18.7 billion, which means that they are underfunding safe school infrastructure by \$12.7 billion—\$12.7 billion. That's the shortfall, according to the Financial Accountability Officer, that we need just to keep schools in a state of good repair and make sure that every child has a school to go to.

The FAO said that if the government doesn't increase their rate of funding, then by 2034, 75% of school buildings in the province would be below a state of good repair—three quarters of school buildings below a state of good repair. Did the government listen to the Financial Accountability Officer? Did the government increase funding for school repairs and school construction? No. There's no new money in here. So now we're talking about an \$850-million shortfall for special education and a \$12-billion shortfall for the school repair backlog.

Then there's student transportation. Two years ago, the former, former, former Minister of Education disastrously changed the student transportation funding formula. In fact, he allowed Deloitte to create a new funding formula, and they did not understand transportation any better than the Minister of Education did. That led to four out of every five boards in the province running deficits for student transportation, which meant that they had to take money out of classrooms in order to pay for students to be able to get to schools in the first place.

This year, it's still three out of every five school boards that are running a deficit in student transportation. Cumulatively, we know those deficits are at least \$50 million, although, again, the Minister of Education would not say what the real deficit amount is.

So \$50 million is needed just to get kids to school, and otherwise that money is coming out of classrooms again. That's \$850 million for special education, \$12 billion for school repairs, and now \$50 million just to get kids to school that's missing.

Then there's the funding that the government isn't providing for mandatory staffing costs. It's the federal government that controls the rate of EI and CPP premiums, not the provincial government—definitely not the school boards who are required to pay it. But the provincial government doesn't provide the full cost of those premiums to school boards, so once again, school boards are forced to take resources from elsewhere in order to cover these statutory costs that are set by the federal government, not by school boards.

What is the amount that school boards have to find that the government isn't paying? It's \$100 million, Speaker—\$100 million. Imagine how many EAs we could hire if that funding was being provided.

The government also doesn't fully cover the cost of sick leave. Again, it's not set by the school boards; it's bargained centrally by the government. But the school boards have to cover it, whether the money is provided by the provincial government or not. When that money is not provided by the provincial government, then they have to take money out of somewhere else in order to cover the sick leave.

What is the gap there? It's \$253 million. So we're talking about \$353 million that the government is falling short for statutory benefits, \$50 million for student transportation, \$850 million for special education and \$12 billion for safe schools.

That would be just to eliminate the deficits that school boards are facing, Speaker. That is not even investing in ensuring that every child has the resources and supports that they need to succeed at school. That's not even asking what we would need to invest in our schools to make sure that we have small class sizes, to ensure that every child gets mental health care when they ask for it, to ensure that we're cracking down on violence and making sure that kids and workers are safe at school.

Je dois dire un mot sur l'éducation francophone aussi parce que nos enfants francophones ont un droit constitutionnel à une éducation équitable en Ontario. Et je pense que nos enseignants et enseignantes, nos travailleurs et nos travailleuses en éducation, la gestion, la direction, et les conseillers et conseillères scolaires sont des magiciens, parce que le financement pour l'éducation francophone n'est pas adéquat, mais ils prennent le montant insuffisant et ils nous offrent une éducation de haute qualité.

En fait, les enfants francophones ont de très bons résultats. Mais le système franco-ontarien a besoin de plus d'investissements pour pouvoir offrir une éducation équitable, pour pouvoir offrir des écoles de condition équivalente aux écoles d'habitude toutes neuves des conseils scolaires anglophones, tandis que les conseils scolaires francophones doivent prendre les bâtiments que les conseils scolaires anglophones ne veulent plus.

Nous avons une pénurie d'enseignants et enseignantes, et le gouvernement n'a pas commis plus de 10 % du montant nécessaire pour combler la pénurie. Pendant les

trois premières années du plan du gouvernement pour combler la pénurie, l'écart a augmenté par plus de 1 000 enseignants. Ce n'est pas comme ça qu'on respecte le droit constitutionnel des Franco-Ontariens à une éducation équitable à celle de la majorité anglophone, madame la Présidente.

These are all of the challenges that we are facing right now that the government has failed to address with their budget and with their fall economic statement and with this budget bill.

But what did they manage to find time for in this fall economic statement? Well, incredibly important priorities like a massive hike in the donation limit to political parties. We know that the government is rewarding donors to the government with lucrative contracts through the Skills Development Fund. Perhaps they felt that they could make this scheme even more lucrative if they were able to get more from each donor, because it's hard to understand otherwise why a donation limit of \$3,400 wasn't enough if we are talking about limiting the influence of big money in politics.

This is certainly not about ensuring that every person in Ontario has the equal right to participate in politics, to have their voice heard and their perspective respected. What it does seem to do is ensure that there is better access to government programs that are meant to reward Conservative donors, which, now that Bill 33 is going to apparently be passed without any consultation by this government, could mean more \$350,000-a-year positions across the province for Conservative donors who have no experience whatsoever in education, not to mention the \$40,000 expense account. So I guess we are creating jobs for some people in the province, just not the workers in the forestry and automotive sectors who are losing their jobs. Because I am sure, unless they donate \$5,000 a year for repeated years, they are not going to be named supervisors for school boards, even though they have just as much experience and education as the four supervisors that the Minister of Education has already appointed.

Another super-urgent priority for this government is collapsing the number of conservation authorities, even though nobody is asking for this and even though it means that there will be less oversight of watersheds by local communities and local experts who actually have experience with these watersheds.

This would mean that Ottawa would be included in the St. Lawrence Regional Conservation Authority, which goes all the way down to Lake Ontario. Now, the Ottawa and Rideau Rivers are nothing like Lake Ontario. They're also nothing like the St. Lawrence River, but it would mean that one authority would be overseeing all of them, with no respect for the fact that conditions are different.

This is incredibly important because conservation authorities play a role in ensuring protections against flooding for homeowners. They prevent development on flood plains. We can see repeatedly in Ottawa the risks of not respecting our natural environment, of thinking that we can just ignore natural conditions and that we can build on wetlands and flood plains, because we have had in the past 10 years multiple once-in-a-century floods that have

flooded people's homes repeatedly. There are parts of Ottawa now where homeowners cannot get flood insurance because of the number of floods that have happened.

2310

So why would we take authority, regulatory power over our flood plains, over our watershed in the Ottawa area, and give it to an authority that oversees Lake Ontario and the St. Lawrence River? Nobody is asking for this. It doesn't actually address any challenges or concerns that people are actually facing.

It's hard to say where this came from. It's hard to say why this is the government's priority right now. But it's certainly not a priority of the people of Ontario, who want to see investments in housing, who want to see investments in health care, who want to see investments in education and who, above all, want to see that the government has an actual plan that would mean that they can get a job, that they can get a college diploma or a university degree, that there will be a job available for them, that they will be able to buy a home and that they will be able to have a good life in Ontario.

That's what people want. That's what this government has failed to deliver and shame on them for not recognizing the urgency of the moment.

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

M^{me} France Gélinas: I wouldn't say that I'm happy to be here at 10 after 11 on a Monday night. I really don't understand why it has to take place. I mean, the fall economic statement is something that we had all been waiting for. I think it would be worth having this discussion when people are not in bed, where we should all be, but actually have an opportunity to hear what we have to say. But this is their choice, and I don't agree with it.

L'énoncé économique d'automne nous a été présenté juste avant la semaine pour s'occuper du jour du Souvenir. The fall economic statement was tabled just before we left for Remembrance Day week, and here we are, at 10 after 11 on a Monday night, going through second reading.

I can tell you that there is a lot of anxiety in many parts of Ontario. Things are tough. There's over 800,000 people that don't have a job anymore. They don't know how they're going to pay rent, how they're going to feed their kids, how they're going to pay their debts, car payments, etc. There's a lot of people who have a lot of anxiety right now.

The fall economic statement was an opportunity for the government to reassure Ontarians that they understand the level of the crisis that people are facing and come forward with meaningful ways to help Ontarians.

Unfortunately, the fall economic statement failed to deliver for working people and for people looking for work. We need a plan to protect jobs, a plan to lower costs, a plan to build affordable housing. Instead, the fall economic statement delivered what I would call very tiny little tweaks at a moment that demanded large changes.

What's missing from the fall economic statement are real job plans that uplift families, that give workers hope that they will have a job, that they will be able to feed their kids, feed their family and pay the rent. But none of that is there. It's as if the government is deaf to what is hap-

pening. You can go to any area of Ontario and you will hear that people have a hard time making ends meet.

But what we see from the fall economic statement and what we see from this government is that they are very in tune with what the CEOs, millionaires and the billionaires have to say. The wealthiest within Ontario sure have the ears of the Ford government. They will benefit from the fall economic statement, but they are the only ones who will benefit.

What is missing from the fall economic statement is a government that cares about Ontarians. We get elected as MPPs to represent our communities to try to make Ontario better for all of us. This is why we're here. We are the leadership of this entire province and as leadership, we should show that we care about the people that we represent, that we care about our neighbours, our friends, our fellow Ontarians.

But the fall economic statement has no heart. There is no job plan in there. The government continues to rely on the scandal-ridden SDF, Skills Development Fund, instead of a real strategy to keep workers working and to train workers in Ontario. There is no real buy-Ontario-first procurement strategy. Public money and taxpayer dollars should create Ontario jobs, not subsidize companies from outside of our province and even outside of our country.

We tabled opposition day motions to do just that. We debated in this house a couple of Mondays ago—actually, I think it was a Tuesday—about the value of “buy Ontario.” The government, through the transfer payment agencies of the provincial government, spend a lot of money. If all of that money is given to companies who are from our province, who employ people from Ontario, we could have a huge impact, but the government voted that down. They are not interested in a real buy-Ontario-first procurement strategy.

There is no real measure to make life more affordable. When we talk about making life more affordable, we talk about the cost of everything that is skyrocketing. Nothing in the fall economic statement does anything to help lower rent, to help lower the price of groceries, to help lower the price of utilities, to help lower the cost of transportation for the people of this province. All of those have increased exponentially.

We were actually joking that since the federal government took away the gas tax—remember “Axe the Tax” and all of this? I can tell you that in my riding, the price of gas is more expensive than what it was when the tax was actually on. None of that money is coming back to Ontario or to Canada; that money goes directly to profit for the big oil companies. It has made very low change; the cost of gas is still \$1.60 all over my riding.

What's the reality for Ontario? Ontario is seeing the highest unemployment rate in decades. We sit at 7.8% of Ontarians that are unemployed. We see the lowest housing starts in decades and decades. We're talking the lowest housing starts since 70 years ago. Did we ever see housing starts as low as we have it now? We see families being priced out.

There is nothing in the fall economic statement that gives Ontarians the hope and relief that they need as our province faces high unemployment, sky-high cost of

living and unprecedented economic threats. For many people, stability, whether it be a steady job, a comfortable place to live, food on the table, child care, is slipping further and further away. This is not the Ontario I know. This is not the Ontario that any of us have grown up in. The changes have been drastic and have been for the worse. I would say that Mr. Ford and his government missed the mark on this one.

2320

The fall economic statement makes it clear that \$91.5 billion of the budget will be spent on health care. Let me go into a little bit more detail about that.

If you start with health promotion and disease prevention, the big players are the health units. Public health has been treated with disrespect by this government. Did you know, Speaker, that Ontario is the only province or territory in Canada where the Chief Medical Officer of Health is both an independent officer of the Legislative Assembly and an employee of the Ministry of Health? That makes no sense. That's why myself and my MPP colleague from Hamilton Centre have put forward a bill to make the Chief Medical Officer of Health an independent officer of the Legislative Assembly. We need to rebuild the confidence of Ontarians in our public health system. When you look at the vaccination rates—we look at a lot of people getting false information, making decisions based on false information when it comes to vaccinations, when it comes to health promotion, disease prevention. All of this could change if we could give our Chief Medical Officer of Health complete independence from the ministry. It's really hard to believe that you're an independent officer of the Legislative Assembly and an employee of the Ministry of Health. This makes no sense. It has to change. I've tabled this bill a number of times; it is time that the government act upon it.

Talking a little bit about vaccination, any of you who have tried to get a COVID vaccine—for reasons unknown, Shoppers Drug Mart now does the distribution of vaccines to the pharmacies. Well, I can tell you that in my riding, it doesn't matter if you go to Pharmaprix or you go to Guardian or you go to any pharmacy—they don't have the COVID vaccine. They will put your name on the list and, "We will call you back when we get a delivery." But if you go to Shoppers Drug Mart, they have a supply of vaccines. What's with this? Most of the people I represent live in areas that are too small for a Shoppers Drug Mart. They ignore us. There's not enough money to be made in the little areas in Nickel Belt for them to come. But we do have independent pharmacies. We do have Guardian, we do have Pharmaprix, we do have smaller—but they do not have the vaccine. As I said, you put your name on a wait-list, and hopefully on—the deliveries are made on Wednesday—Thursday morning they will call you and let you know how many there are, but I guarantee you that by Friday morning there won't be any left. What's that? How could that be? There is a vaccine available; it's just that the distribution of it seems to be in favour of one pharmacy—Shoppers Drug Mart—that has a very good relationship with the Ford government, at the expense of all the other ones.

I want to talk a little bit about primary health care. You know that over 2.5 million Ontarians—40,000 of them living in Nickel Belt—do not have access to primary care. They don't have a family physician. They do not have a nurse practitioner.

Speaking of nurse practitioners, it was Nurse Practitioner Week last week, from November 10 to November 16. That was a private member's bill that I brought forward in 2016. It got royal assent in December 2016, so the first Nurse Practitioner Week, which is the second full week of November, was celebrated in 2017.

I have quite a few nurse-practitioner-led clinics in my riding. The very first nurse-practitioner-led clinic was actually opened in Sudbury by two very dedicated nurse practitioners, Roberta Heale and Marilyn Butcher, who worked really, really hard to open up the very first nurse-practitioner-led clinic in Sudbury. I had the pleasure to work with them and help them along the way. I'm very proud of what they've done and what we see right now.

But did you know, Speaker, that since the Ford government has been in power, they have received, for seven years in a row, no increase to salaries for nurse practitioners. This July was the first time where they got a 2.7% salary increase.

Think about it: We're talking about seven years where you have nurse practitioners whose scope of practice has expanded for the good, but they have a lot of responsibility. And yet their salaries did not move for seven years in a row, until July of this year. Even when you read the letter that comes from the minister, it's not exactly clear if the 2.7% is one time or if it's ongoing. All I can tell you, Speaker, is that it better be ongoing. Nobody goes to work for seven years in a row without a pay increase, but nurse practitioners working in nurse-practitioner-led clinics in Ontario have faced just that. This is wrong.

We had Ontario-leading community health associations that were at Queen's Park this morning. They had a breakfast for us in the dining room. That was the Alliance for Healthier Communities—that's community health centres—the association of family health teams; the Canadian Mental Health Association; children's mental health and family support services. We had Indigenous primary health care—I'm forgetting some. There were 10 associations that were there. They were there with one clear message. They represent over 200,000 health care workers throughout Ontario, and all of them came with one message: Close the wage gap. It makes no sense that a nurse practitioner, a nurse, a physiotherapist, an occupational therapist, a PSW, you name it, makes—the highest was \$47,000 less and the lowest was \$10,000 less. They do the same work. They have the same responsibility, but if you do it in a community setting versus a hospital setting, there is this huge gap. And that gap keeps getting bigger and bigger.

They all got together. They came to Queen's Park. They made it really clear that if you want the community health sector to be there, they need to be able to recruit and retain a stable workforce. If you're not able to pay your employee a competitive salary, they don't stay. They will get the new graduate to come. They will spend a lot of time, effort and energy to train them to make sure that they are ready for

the job and all of this. They stay one or two years and then they realize, “I could do the same work, do the same amount of hours in a hospital setting and be making tens of thousands of dollars more. Plus, I would have a defined benefit pension plan. Plus, I would have better benefits.”

You have to realize that if we don’t fund our community health centres or Indigenous primary health care teams or family health teams, if we don’t fund our nurse practitioner-led clinics, our community mental health, our children’s mental health, our family services—if we don’t support them, then the people who need their services will continue—the needs will continue to be there. Their services are not going to be there. They will end up in the emergency room of our hospitals.

Consider our hospital as kind of the net of last resort, the net that catches it all. If any part of our health care system fails, we end up—if you’re sick, you end up at the hospital. The hospital looks after us all, but that net of last resort is becoming very, very stretched. We see long, long wait times in our hospitals. It is not unusual to see 18-hour-long waits, families going to the hospital with a young child, and you will run out of diapers before you have an opportunity to be seen. This is not normal.

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In the hospital in Sudbury called Health Sciences North, we have a minimum of 120 patients admitted, more than the number of beds. Think about it, Speaker: This is 120 people sick enough to be admitted into a hospital that do not have a hospital bed. They are in hallways, they are in bathrooms, shower rooms, TV rooms. They are downstairs. They are everywhere in the hospital. It’s really hard to provide quality care when you don’t have a bathroom, you don’t have a call bell, you don’t have anything to make the patients safe.

And what we see is a lot of violence in our hospitals. People get tired of waiting, people are sick, people are not feeling good, and then we ask them to wait for hours and hours and hours. When help finally comes, they reach out.

I was at the Ontario Nurses’ Association’s biennial convention here in Toronto about two weeks ago. They were over 1,000 registered nurses attending the conference. They were from all over the province. It was really nice to be with all of those good-hearted people. The president of the association was giving a speech, and then she stopped and asked, “How many of you have faced violence at work? How many of you have been in a position where violence was done against you?” Out of the thousand nurses in the room, I would say 99% of them put their hands up. The few that didn’t, good for them. But in what other work setting would you think that violence at work was tolerable, was tolerated, was blamed upon you? In health care, we see this. Nurses see this every single day.

All of this, we know how to change. We tabled the bill for nurse-to-patient ratios. Nurse-to-patient ratios has existed in many parts of the world. They work. British Columbia was the latest province to bring it forward. They make a huge difference. When nurses have a workload that they can handle, the quality of care increases, readmission

rates go down, medical errors go down. It’s a win-win. It’s good for the patient, it’s good for the nursing staff and it’s good for the budget of the hospital because you have way less readmissions, way fewer errors etc. But the government shows no interest in nurse-to-patient ratios, yet the problems continue.

I see that time is going by quite quickly.

Talking about hospitals: Just to maintain what we have—that is, long wait times in our emergency rooms; that is, overcrowding in our hospitals; that is, nurses handling way too many patients to be able to do the quality of care that they are trained to do, that they want to do—hospitals said that they needed a minimum 4% increase in their budget. Well, the fall economic statement put that increase at 0.7%. They need 4%; they’re getting 0.7%. It’s not going to work.

Hospitals are not allowed to make deficits. But if you look in northern Ontario, it’s 72% of all the hospitals in northern Ontario that have gone to the minister last year to tell her, “We will be facing a deficit. We have to be excused from the law because we will have a deficit.” This year, hospitals are going back and the government is saying, “No, you have to balance your budget.” How are they balancing their budget? Well, I can tell you that the hospital in North Bay just gave layoff notices to 40 of their staff. Of the 40 staff, there were 13 registered nurses, there were four registered practical nurses, there is an occupational therapist—I forgot the list; I’m going by memory right now, but they are all patient-facing positions and 40 of them have received layoff notices. This is the only way that North Bay regional hospital can balance their budget. There’s already long wait-lists at North Bay hospital. There’s already—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): Order, please.

Continue.

M^{me} France Gélinas: There’s already a long wait-list. There’s already a shortage of staff. But in order for North Bay to balance their budget, they have issued 40 layoff notices, and we are expecting many, many other hospitals to be in the exact same position.

When the government talks about red tape, it makes me laugh a little bit, because to build a new hospital—they will announce it and reannounce it—it takes about 10 steps between the planning and the first shovel in the ground and every step will take a minimum of two years. Why does it take two years to review a 20-page document? I have no idea.

Talking about red tape, we could build hospitals and expand our hospitals. The one at Health Sciences North in Sudbury was built too small. It needs to be expanded. They have been working at it for, I would say, at least eight years and they’re expecting another 10 years before construction begins. When talking about cutting red tape, I would like the red tape to be cut when it comes to building and expansions of hospitals.

It’s the same thing when you look at the fall economic statement. Hospice Palliative Care Ontario was at Queen’s Park. They came. They do important work helping people

in their last days, making sure that there is as much life in those days before the end. Did you know, Speaker, that hospices, although they look after some of the sickest patients in their last days on Earth, are not paid for cleaning? They're not paid for food. They're paid for hands-on care; everything else, they have to fundraise. Do you really think that a patient in palliative care can clean their own bathroom? Do you really think that they can go to the kitchen and start cooking for themselves? That's why they are in a hospice palliative care, because they are not able to do this anymore and they need the support, but the government won't fund them. I can tell you that in the fall economic statement, there is no new money for our hospices, although they really need it.

I've talked a bit about the private member's bill I introduced about patient-to-nurse ratios. I also introduced a private member's bill for rare disease. The previous Minister of Health, Christine—her last name escapes me right now—

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): Elliott.

Mme France Gélinas: Thank you. When Christine Elliott was Minister of Health, she asked for a study to be done about rare disease. The study was done. A series of recommendations were put forward as to how Ontario should handle people with rare disease and what we can do to make access to the services that exist for rare disease more available—anyway, the study was done, good recommendations were put forward and none of them were ever implemented.

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We have, right now, a brand new treatment for hemophilia B. There are very few people in Ontario with that disease—maybe 80 of them, max. But they need to come for treatment at least twice a week. It's a drip that takes about an hour and it costs hundreds of thousands of dollars, and Ontario pays for all of this.

There is a new treatment that exists that would mean you get that treatment once. You don't need to come to the hospital twice a week anymore and you don't need hundreds of thousands of dollars of medications anymore. It has been approved by Health Canada. It has been approved by the pCPA—the pan-Canadian Pharmaceutical Alliance—and it sits with the Ministry of Health, who still has not signed off that this treatment will become available. This treatment would help people who are at very high risk.

I'm giving this example, but there are many other examples where a treatment for a rare disease exists, but people don't even know that they exist in Ontario because they will be in one hospital but not available in the other because they are just that rare of a disease.

I also was hoping to see 911 everywhere in Ontario. Again, Ontario is the only province that does not have 911 everywhere. You dial 911 in my riding, and you get, "This number is not in service." You dial again; you get, "This number is not in service." You dial zero, and she will answer, "No, no, you need to dial 911." So 911 needs to work everywhere.

Every year people die because they don't know the 1-800 numbers. I have them in my car; I have them in the

house—I have them everywhere. But people who come to visit, people who are not from this area, and I would say a lot of workers—I have a lot of mines in my riding where workers come from outside of Nickel Belt to come to the mines—none of them know those 1-800 numbers.

I realize that I only have a few seconds left.

Basically, the fall economic statement was an opportunity to change the tone, to listen to people, make life more affordable, make sure that people have jobs and make sure that we, the government, act in a way that is in line with the threats that so many Ontarians are facing. The fall economic statement missed the mark completely.

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

Mr. Andrew Dowie: I want to thank the member from Nickel Belt for her remarks. Madam Speaker, I know that Ontario leads the G7 with the development of four modular reactors at the Darlington site, delivering 1,200 megawatts of clean electricity, enough to power 12 million new homes.

Our investment of \$1 billion to the Building Ontario Fund is also helping keep Ontario and Canada more self-reliant while supporting good-paying, long-term jobs—predominantly union jobs—for Ontario workers and building the energy infrastructure that we need. This project is a major milestone in our clean energy future and a testament to Ontario's leadership in nuclear innovation.

In addition to this, our government is also refurbishing the existing units at Darlington, Bruce and Pickering, ensuring that we extend the life of our current fleet of nuclear plants and continue to deliver reliable, affordable power for decades to come.

My question to the member opposite is this: whether her party supports the development of nuclear energy when it creates thousands of good-paying jobs, reduces emissions and secures Ontario's long-term energy needs.

Mme France Gélinas: Yes.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): I recognize the member for Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Thank you to both the members here from Thunder Bay—Superior North and from Nickel Belt.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: No, Ottawa West—Nepean.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Oh, pardon me. Okay, there you go. Well, thank you. I know we've all spoken quite a bit tonight.

I want to go back to the member from Nickel Belt. This government has the lowest spending per person on health care in all of Canada. They have the lowest spending per person on hospitals. So it's absolutely no wonder that our health care system continues to be in crisis.

And of all the things that the government could address, all the crises that the government could address that Ontarians are facing—health care, 800,000 people without work—the one thing you think that they might care about is people's health and well-being when it comes to access to hospital care. How in goodness' name can North Bay Regional Health Centre be laying off health care workers in the midst of the longest wait times in Canada, in the midst of people having no primary care physician? The

government is underfunding health care, and it's showing up in a small hospital like North Bay Regional Health Centre.

M^{me} France G  linas: It is really hard to understand what motivates a government to act the way they are acting. Medicare is a program that defines us as Ontarians, as Canadians. We get care based on our needs, not on our ability to pay. But all of this is at risk right now. Although hospitals saw a 0.7% increase in the fall economic statement, which is not enough to maintain what they have, the private, for-profit clinics saw a 350% increase in the amount of money that is going to the private, for-profit. They started with private MRI and CT scans. Now they are giving long-term contracts to hip and knee surgery done in the private, for-profit. They are getting a lot of money. The not-for-profit: 0.7%.

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

Mr. John Fraser: I thank the members for their presentations. Here, our job is all about choices, right? I think when we take a look at the fall economic statement, it's what kind of choices the government made, to prioritize—and I'll have seven minutes later on.

But when you were talking about health care, I was thinking about take-home cancer drugs. We've been talking about them for a long time now. It's not a huge budget item in the grand scheme of things. Why do you think the government didn't make that choice that really would have benefited and got us on par with most of the other provinces in Canada?

M^{me} France G  linas: Those are decisions that the Ford government has made that are completely against all data and evidence that we have. How could it be that a province as poor as Manitoba has take-home cancer drugs? How could it be that most provinces in Canada have take-home cancer drugs but the richest province in our country does not? Those are choices that are made by a government who does not see caring for Ontarians as a priority for them.

Caring for pharmaceutical? Yes, absolutely. Are there some pharmaceuticals who push back against take-home cancer drugs being covered? Yes, because Ontario negotiates a way better price for pharmaceutical products than one-on-one with a company. But the right thing to do is still to make sure that people with cancer get to go home, sleep in their own beds, spend time with their family, and that happens through take-home cancer drugs.

To be admitted in the hospital in order to gain access to drugs is completely counterproductive. It doesn't help the patient. It doesn't help the Ontario budget. But this is what the Ford government chooses to do.

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

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I want to say, I find it extraordinary that the government has chosen for us to sit here to midnight, but they don't have, really, the common decency to listen to the debate that they called for in this Legislature.

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My question would be to the member from Ottawa West–Nepean. You've done such an excellent job pointing out how families are struggling to keep kids in school, to

access the kind of education that they deserve for their children. This government is spending money—the scandal of the Skills Development Fund; it seems that the money is just flowing when it comes to their priorities. But this bill could have gone a long way to address the fact that our kids, all of our kids, are going to school where there is lead in the water, in the pipes that they're drinking from, and there isn't a penny in this bill to address that health care crisis.

Can you explain why the government would not prioritize the health and well-being of our kids in schools, when they're spending all kinds of money, like drunken sailors, on their friends and their connected insiders?

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Thank you to the member for Hamilton West–Ancaster–Dundas for that excellent question. The answer is, I don't know. I do not know why a government would choose not to protect our children against the effects of lead when we know the lead has life-long, chronic health impacts, that it can have cognitive and neurological impacts. It can affect every part of the human body. It can mean that we are diminishing people's capacity to participate fully in life, to be fully employed. It's also going to have costs for our health care system. We know that half of schools in the province have failed a lead test in the last five years—that's half of schools that have failed a lead test, and that's with not-very-stringent lead testing.

What we need to be doing is actually taking this seriously and protecting the health of every child in the province of Ontario. The government doesn't even want to know. They won't even update their guidelines to align with the latest science, which the federal government has done. They would rather stick their heads in the sand than actually protect our children against this very serious issue.

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

Mr. John Fraser: Again, on the theme of choices: I know the member is very concerned about this as well. Our schools are not safe places to learn or to work. That's basically for three reasons: class sizes have grown; the government underfunds education by about \$850 million a year, so boards have to find that money somewhere else; and on top of that, we have a mental health crisis in our schools that's not really being addressed.

Given how important that is—it's of economic importance, because we've got to make sure the next generation is ready—why do think the government chose not to do something for education in this fall economic statement?

Ms. Chandra Pasma: I can only speculate that it's because children are not donors to this government. They have restrictions in place—which, I guess, they could have removed, along with the increase to the donation limit—which means that our kids can't donate to the government, so apparently, that means that they can't get any money from the government.

They're busy giving hundreds of millions of dollars to donors, lobbyists and former members of the Conservative government's staff team, but they have nothing when it comes to helping a child who is sitting at home because they can't get the education supports they need. They have

nothing for a kid who is struggling with mental health and can't get support at school. There is nothing to provide further EAs.

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

Mr. John Fraser: I will be sharing my time with the member from Don Valley West, Don Valley East, Beaches–East York, Orléans, Etobicoke–Lakeshore and Ottawa–Vanier.

Thank you very much. I have got folks at home. It's 11:55 or thereabouts, and unfortunately, the other side is going to have to endure five minutes of me, as if it hasn't been a long day already.

I'm not going to talk about what I talked about during question period, which is kind of refreshing. I really don't like to have to do it every day, but until I get an answer, I'll keep doing it. But we're not going to talk about those things tonight, out of respect. I respect the fact that people are here and they're working, and hopefully listening.

What I was saying earlier on is that it's all about choices. When I came here, I didn't come here to talk about what I'm talking about in question period all the time, I came here to talk about, really, three important things—not only, but take care of your schools and take care of education; take care of health care, make sure it works; and make sure young people can get jobs. If you take care of those three things, you're doing what most Ontarians want you to do. There's other stuff that we have to do, but those are three pillars, right? They're three pillars of Ontario politics, what the people who elect us expect.

I heard this earlier in my questions—I'm trying to figure out why in the fall economic statement, and I'll start with this, the government doesn't have a plan for the 200,000 young Ontarians who are looking for work. We have the highest rate of youth unemployment of any of the large provinces here in Canada. That's incredible and there's nothing in this fall economic statement that addresses it—nothing.

You would think that the government, because they're spending tens of millions of dollars on the "Protect Ontario" ads—you know, "Protect Ontario, we're developing the Ring of Fire"—

Interjections.

Mr. John Fraser: Okay. You haven't even built a road yet and it's not going to create a lot of jobs that people need right now, and it's not going to help young people. You got to clap for it. I know you all love the ad—I don't want to talk about what I talked about this morning, so I'm not going to say what Linda said. I don't want to talk about that, because, rest assured for everybody here, the same thing I talked about this morning in question period is the same thing that we're going to keep talking about, and it won't end. I'm not going to talk about that right now, but you all know what I'm talking about, right?

Why did this government not actually do something for small business and young people? Invest in them, instead

of investing in the things you've been investing in that I'm not going to talk about right now, because I'm doing it out of respect for somebody. Why would you not invest in—I can't figure it out. We all have young people in our riding who are looking for work—guys, it's almost over, don't worry. We know young people who are looking for work, but the government is not doing anything except slapping an ad 20 times during a game; that's doing nothing. It's not getting anybody a job, not helping anyone and not protecting anybody other than some people, which I mentioned this morning, that I'm not going to mention right now because I said I wasn't.

I don't understand why you chose to do that and why you chose to do nothing for youth jobs in the fall economic statement.

The other thing I don't understand is—our hospitals told you, "We're a billion dollars short. We've got emergency room closures. We need this money." Years of not giving just enough or enough has led us to a thing where they have what's called working capital deficits—and I won't go into the details because it's late at night and I don't want to explain it, but some people understand what a working capital deficit is, right? Okay. Well, that's a problem with our hospitals. They need a billion dollars. Can I find it in the fall economic statement? Did anybody find it? No. It's not there, so there you go—not to use a baseball analogy, but youth jobs, strike one; health care, strike two.

I was just asking my colleague from Ottawa West–Nepean—and I remembered that and it's almost midnight, so that's pretty good—about education. Why, when our schools are not safe places to learn or work because of growing class sizes, special-education needs underfunded by \$850 million and a mental health crisis—why is that not in the fall economic statement? It just makes economic sense. The reason we have a good education system—and we want to have a great education system—is we want to prepare our young people for our economic future. The most valuable commodity in the global economy is a highly skilled, highly trained worker. It's not just because we're nice that we want to educate people; it's because it's smart economics.

And so, youth jobs, strike one—I'm trying to time this, work with me here—health care, strike two; education, strike three. We're out.

Interjections.

Mr. John Fraser: We're not there yet? I tried, guys. I tried. I was there. I thought I had it. I don't know—look at that, it's midnight. It was all right.

Interjection.

Mr. John Fraser: That was a foul ball. There we go. Work with me here, folks. Work with me. Thank you.

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 0000.

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Kerzner, Hon. / L'hon. Michael S. (PC)	York Centre / York-Centre	Solicitor General / Solliciteur général
Khanjin, Hon. / L'hon. Andrea (PC)	Barrie—Innisfil	Minister of Red Tape Reduction / Ministre de la Réduction des formalités administratives
Kusendova-Bashta, Hon. / L'hon. Natalia (PC)	Mississauga Centre / Mississauga- Centre	Minister of Long-Term Care / Ministre des Soins de longue durée
Leardi, Anthony (PC)	Essex	Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint du gouvernement
Lecce, Hon. / L'hon. Stephen (PC)	King—Vaughan	Minister of Energy and Mines / Ministre de l'Énergie et des Mines
Lennox, Robin (NDP)	Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	
Lumsden, Hon. / L'hon. Neil (PC)	Hamilton East—Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est—Stoney Creek	Minister of Sport / Ministre du Sport
Mamakwa, Sol (NDP)	Kiiwetinoong	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjoint de l'opposition officielle
McCarthy, Hon. / L'hon. Todd J. (PC)	Durham	Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks / Ministre de l'Environnement, de la Protection de la nature et des Parcs
McCrimmon, Karen (LIB)	Kanata—Carleton	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
McGregor, Hon. / L'hon. Graham (PC)	Brampton North / Brampton-Nord	Minister of Citizenship and Multiculturalism / Ministre des Affaires civiques et du Multiculturalisme
McKenney, Catherine (NDP)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	
McMahon, Mary-Margaret (LIB)	Beaches—East York	
Mulroney, Hon. / L'hon. Caroline (PC)	York—Simcoe	President of the Treasury Board / Présidente du Conseil du Trésor
Oosterhoff, Hon. / L'hon. Sam (PC)	Niagara West / Niagara-Ouest	Minister of Francophone Affairs / Ministre des Affaires francophones Associate Minister of Energy-Intensive Industries / Ministre associé des Industries à forte consommation d'énergie
Pang, Billy (PC)	Markham—Unionville	
Parsa, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (PC)	Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill	Minister of Children, Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et des Services sociaux et communautaires
Pasma, Chandra (NDP)	Ottawa West—Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest—Nepean	Deputy House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjointe de l'opposition officielle
Piccini, Hon. / L'hon. David (PC)	Northumberland—Peterborough South / Northumberland—Peterborough-Sud	Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development / Ministre du Travail, de l'Immigration, de la Formation et du Développement des compétences
Pierre, Natalie (PC)	Burlington	
Pinsonneault, Steve (PC)	Lambton—Kent—Middlesex	
Pirie, Hon. / L'hon. George (PC)	Timmins	Minister of Northern Economic Development and Growth / Ministre du Développement et de la croissance économique du Nord
Quinn, Hon. / L'hon. Nolan (PC)	Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry	Minister of Colleges, Universities, Research Excellence and Security / Ministre des Collèges et Universités, de l'Excellence en recherche et de la Sécurité
Racinsky, Joseph (PC)	Wellington—Halton Hills	
Rae, Matthew (PC)	Perth—Wellington	
Rakocevic, Tom (NDP)	Humber River—Black Creek	
Rickford, Hon. / L'hon. Greg (PC)	Kenora—Rainy River	Minister of Indigenous Affairs and First Nations Economic Reconciliation / Ministre des Affaires autochtones et de la Réconciliation économique avec les Premières Nations Minister Responsible for Ring of Fire Economic and Community Partnerships / Ministre responsable des Partenariats économiques et communautaires pour le développement du Cercle de feu
Riddell, Brian (PC)	Cambridge	
Rosenberg, Bill (PC)	Algoma—Manitoulin	
Sabawy, Sheref (PC)	Mississauga—Erin Mills	
Sandhu, Amarjot (PC)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Sarkaria, Hon. / L'hon. Prabmeet Singh (PC)	Brampton South / Brampton-Sud	Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports
Sarrazin, Stéphane (PC)	Glengarry—Prescott—Russell	
Sattler, Peggy (NDP)	London West / London-Ouest	
Saunderson, Brian (PC)	Simcoe—Grey	
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	