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of Ontario



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Mercredi  
26 novembre 2025

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Speaker: Honourable Donna Skelly  
Clerk: Trevor Day

Présidente : L'honorable Donna Skelly  
Greffier : Trevor Day

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# LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 26 November 2025

# ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 26 novembre 2025

*The House met at 0900.*

**The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly):** Good morning, everyone. Let us pray.

*Prayers.*

## ORDERS OF THE DAY

### BUY ONTARIO ACT, 2025

### LOI DE 2025 VISANT À ENCOURAGER À ACHETER ONTARIEN

Resuming the debate adjourned on November 25, 2025, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 72, An Act to enact the Buy Ontario Act (Public Sector Procurement), 2025, to repeal the Building Ontario Businesses Initiative Act, 2022, to amend the Highway Traffic Act with respect to the installation of certain signs and to amend section 10.1 of the Legislation Act, 2006 with respect to certain provisions of the Protecting Condominium Owners Act, 2015 / Projet de loi 72, Loi visant à édicter la Loi de 2025 visant à encourager à acheter ontarien (approvisionnement du secteur public), à abroger la Loi de 2022 sur l'initiative favorisant l'essor des entreprises ontariennes, à modifier le Code de la route à l'égard de certains panneaux et à modifier l'article 10.1 de la Loi de 2006 sur la législation en ce qui concerne certaines dispositions de la Loi de 2015 sur la protection des propriétaires de condominiums.

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

**Ms. Jessica Bell:** I will be sharing my time with the member for Windsor West today.

We are starting with second reading of the bill Buy Ontario Act, 2025. What took you so long? The trade war has been going along for how long now? Since November—and only now are we starting to see the government move ahead with legislation that strengthens Ontario's procurement priorities to prioritize Ontario businesses and Canadian businesses. But if you think I'm going to spend the next hour praising the government, you're sorely mistaken, but it is certainly a step in the right direction.

I want to start off by just summarizing the bill, then I'm going to talk a little bit about the previous government's approach. I'm not going to talk about schedule 2, but I am going to talk a bit about schedule 3, which is the changes—or more accurately, the inaction on improving condo governance in Ontario, which is really important.

Let's start with schedule 1 of the bill. Schedule 1 is focusing on changing the government's approach to procurement. This is really important. It is important because

the Ontario government spends upwards of \$30 billion a year on buying services, products and investing in infrastructure like constructing transit, hospitals and schools, and it's our belief here that as much as possible, given that we're in a trade war and our goal is to come out of this trade war more resilient and sustainable, that Ontario companies and Canadian companies are prioritized when they provide competitive bids to provide these services, products and infrastructure investments.

When I look at the act, this is what I see: I see that the government is looking at giving the cabinet the power to “issue directives requiring public sector entities to comply with ... procurement policies....”

You're looking at mandating the prioritization of first Ontario and then Canadian goods and services for all public sector organizations.

The government is expanding the scope on who needs to abide by public sector procurement. In the government's previous bill, the BOBIA act, municipalities were exempt. In this bill, the government is giving themselves the power to essentially write regulation that would include the broader public service. That would include hospitals, universities, as well as municipalities. If the government actually moves ahead with doing this, that is a closure of a loophole that we were concerned about.

The government is also looking at strengthening the enforcement and compliance components of their procurement policies. In BOBIA, it was essentially—there was very little compliance, or very little enforcement, so it was basically companies self-reporting. On this side of the House, we didn't think that that was a very effective enforcement mechanism. It seems like the government could potentially be agreeing with this, because they are, including in this bill, looking at giving themselves the power to strengthen compliance and enforcement measures: “establish reporting requirements”—good—and “procedures”—good. They're also looking at bringing in penalties and consequences, including withholding funds for non-compliance, fines and barring from future procurement.

If the government goes actually goes ahead with changing the rules—because at this point, all you're doing is giving the power to change the rules. If you go ahead with that, then we see that as a positive step.

Looking at the legislation, we also see that the procurement policies could also apply to third-party supply chain managers. As well, companies that get contracts, P3s, would also be required to abide by the buy-Ontario procurement policy.

That's our read of it. I would love to get some clarity. I believe that we've got a meeting with the ministry today

at 3. These bills are getting rushed through incredibly quickly in the Legislature. It's difficult to get all the information that you need to deliberate properly, but from our initial read, that is what we see this bill as doing.

I do want to be clear, though, and I'm going to say this again: What schedule 1 essentially does at this point is it gives the cabinet the power to write regulations to move ahead with these strengthened procurement rules. Will the government do it? I don't know. I've seen legislation pass through this House many times, and the government has done tons of press releases and press conferences on it, and then the rules aren't written or they're written but they're not enacted and they're not put into force. So we're going to wait and see if the government is all bark when it comes to buy Ontario or if they are looking at getting serious about this. So we'll wait and see about that.

We have been pushing for a strong buy-Ontario, buy-Canada policy since shortly after the trade war began, and we actually introduced this as a motion fairly recently. I believe we did this about a month ago. The reason why we did this is because we looked at what other provinces were doing—Manitoba, Quebec—and we thought to ourselves, if they can do it, why can't we? So we've been pushing for this for some time.

The reason why we were pushing for a stronger buy Ontario, buy Canada policy is because when we look at what the government has been doing over the last seven years, including in the last eight months, we have consistently seen this government choose to give very large contracts to foreign companies when there are companies—Ontario companies, Canadian companies—who are putting forward competitive bids, who are qualified to do the job and who are being passed over. And when that happens, it means that we lose the opportunity to make our sector, our industry more resilient, give them contracts, create more job opportunities, make Ontario more prosperous and keep government taxpayer dollars here in Ontario. It all makes a lot of sense.

**0910**

I want to give you some examples of what we have seen over the last—gosh—long time. We have the example of the Ontario Line subway cars. Remember that? They are being produced in the United States after the Conservative government reduced Canadian content requirements for transit projects from 25% to 10%. It could have gone to a Canadian company. We could have given more contracts to Thunder Bay. It only took a lot of pressure for this government to eventually turn around and say, "Hey, this is a good idea."

We've got the situation in June 2025—so this is well after the trade war had begun—when we learned that the Garden City Skyway contracts were awarded to a consortium of foreign-owned companies.

We have got July 2025—and this is when this issue really became front and centre. In July 2025, we were contacted by an industry association who told us that a \$140-million contract was being awarded to a US-owned firm to build the facade of a Mississauga hospital. What was so frustrating to this industry association is that they

knew there were companies that were qualified to do that work who had put in a competitive bid who had been passed over. I thought, "How could this be happening in July 2025 when we have a trade war? How could this be happening?" It didn't make sense. This is government money to build a public hospital.

Then we've also got the example—this is July 2025, so well into the trade war here. We've got an example of the Conservative government eliminating jobs within the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board, the WSIB, and handing that contract over to Iron Mountain, a private company headquartered in Boston, Massachusetts—July 2025.

I've heard the minister opposite, and I've also heard the Premier talk about how they are showing leadership on this, that they've acted decisively, that they're moving quicker than other provinces. Well, these examples tell us very clearly you have not. This government has not moved quickly. They've not moved quickly.

Then we've got October 2025, so just last month: Korean-made steel is being used in the E.C. Row Expressway and Banwell Road overpass project in Windsor while steel jobs are leaving the province. You'd think we'd be doing everything we can to leverage government dollars to buy forestry products, steel, aluminum, everything we can, given the situation that we're in and the fact that over 700,000 people in Ontario are unemployed right now and looking for work—and we're seeing job losses most significantly within the manufacturing sector, the construction sector, the forest industry sector. It's very concerning.

So it's good you're moving forward, hopefully, with doing the right thing on this procurement policy.

I want to talk about some of the loopholes that we have identified in the government's current procurement policy, with the hope that you are going to close them or look at them moving forward with this new policy that, hopefully, you'll be writing. One is that municipalities previously weren't covered. We see in this law that you're looking at covering them. Let's make sure that you do it.

We also see that US firms with 250 or more Canadian employees can apply for contracts. It would be good to know the consequences of this.

We see that companies with existing supply contracts are exempt from these new rules, meaning that if a US-controlled company already has an agreement in place to provide goods and services, it can continue doing so. I'll be very curious to see if that loophole is closed in the regulation, which any day now could be forthcoming.

Then the issue around the enforcement piece: Another reason why this is so important is that many stakeholders have been calling for this for some time. We've had the Ontario Federation of Agriculture explicitly ask for clear procurement guidelines for Ontario to purchase Ontario-grown food. It makes a lot of sense for our hospitals, our schools, correctional facilities to be prioritizing fruit, vegetables, meat, processed products from Ontario farmers. I've seen this government give lip service to the wine industry on this issue. But when the OFA has called for a



more comprehensive policy, we haven't seen this government take action on that. I'd like to see some changes on this, and I believe the agriculture industry would as well.

The Council of Canadian Innovators has also urged the province to modernize procurement to better support domestic companies.

The Canadian Labour Congress, CLC, has called for local and domestic public procurement to drive innovation and sustain good jobs following the shutdown of the Stellantis Windsor assembly plant, which I believe my colleague will be talking about later.

Unifor for a long time now has been calling on governments to expand investment in public transit so municipalities and the province are buying Canadian-made trains, streetcars and buses from Canadian companies or, at the very least, just increase the Canadian content requirement so jobs in Thunder Bay and Kingston, towns and cities that have the capacity to make transit vehicles, are given these jobs.

We are also hearing from Unifor that more needs to be done from this government when we're talking about procurement to prioritize using forestry products from Ontario to build modular housing and housing in areas that are really suffering from a housing shortage. It makes a lot of sense. And we're already hearing about innovative modular housing projects that are going up in Ontario. Well, I think this government should be doing everything possible to make sure Ontario wood is prioritized, with setting up factories where there are good unionized jobs to build modular housing that is in dire need in Ontario. And in fact, that's part of our Homes Ontario plan to build non-market housing and affordable housing on public land to deal with the really serious housing shortages we're seeing, especially when it comes to affordable housing. When we're talking about the housing crisis we need to be talking about affordability first.

So that's who is calling for it. There are some pretty heavy hitters.

Another reason why this is incredibly important is because our economy, under this government's watch, isn't doing very well. Every month, the numbers come out from Statistics Canada showing that unemployment continues to rise, and right now we are at unemployment levels that we have not seen in a generation. We have over 700,000 people unemployed, and it's particularly acute among youth. So youth unemployment is close to 22%, which is terrifying.

And we have found this too when we've done round tables. We've heard from young people who have told us that they cannot find a job, and they're looking. When we did an unemployment round table—I believe it was about a month ago—we had high school students, we had undergraduates, we had graduates from engineering degrees, from degrees in the health sector, from tech, and they all spoke about how their difficulty in finding a job is unique and that it has gotten worse. They're very concerned about it, and they want to see this government do more to create job opportunities and to protect the jobs that we have so that they can have a career in this province and they can see

hope and a future here in the province. That's what they are asking for. Some of the things they talked about included job creation opportunities within the public sector, which would apply to this procurement policy that we have here, and also job guarantees so that there are more options for people who are willing, able and ready to work.

**0920**

Another issue that we also see with the economy right now is the issue of affordability, and I'm sure you're hearing this as well. It's a huge issue. When I go door-to-door or people stop me in the street, as I'm sure they stop you in the street as well, the big issue that comes up is the high cost of everything.

There are 1.7 million Ontarians who rent, and many of them get to the end of the month and they're wondering how they're going to be able to afford the rent and pay their bills and afford food at the supermarket. Every Ontarian I speak to is having difficulty going to the supermarket and stomaching the high cost of everything from butter to milk. We all know that food prices are going up much faster than the rate of inflation.

One of the busiest food banks in the country is in my riding. It's the Fort York Food Bank. When you go by there, most mornings, you'll see a line that's easily 80 metres long, sometimes 100 metres long in the morning, because there are so many people who just simply cannot afford food. We recently went to the food bank and spoke to the executive director there, and we asked her, "Who's coming into the food bank right now?" She told us that it's people who are on social assistance. It is newcomers. It is refugee claimants. It's also workers, people aged 18 to 49 who cannot afford, on the salaries that they get, to buy food that they need to feed their family. She said that's new, and it's getting worse. When we're talking about fixing the affordability issues that we see, it speaks to the need to provide support and care to people. It also speaks to the need to deal with wages and employment because wages are too low, and a lot of people don't have jobs. They just don't have jobs.

There is this undercurrent within Ontario right now of fear and anxiety because things have gotten too expensive for people, and they don't know how they're going to continue to afford to live here. I'm sure you hear that as well. This is why it is especially important when we're talking about this procurement policy that it is as strong as it possibly can be, given the situations that we face today. It's very concerning.

What I think a lot of people talk about—so we've got this situation; we've got this procurement policy. The government has had a long time to fix it. Maybe they will; maybe they won't. Let's see. They're certainly giving them themselves the power to do it. And then we also have this issue where the government has basically got a jobs disaster on their hands, and the economy is really struggling. One thing that I find very frustrating, and I think a lot of people find very frustrating, is that the government is simply not doing enough to address the many issues that

they see. Instead, they're using a lot of their resources to help their friends.

One thing that we've been hearing a lot about right now is the Skills Development Fund. The Skills Development Fund is a \$2.5-billion program that should be going to helping people, workers, get the training they need to find a new job. It is meant to focus on unemployed people. That's the whole purpose of the program.

The program in itself could be a good thing. It is concerning that at the same time as you've allocated \$2.5 billion to this program, you've let the public college system and the university system struggle and be chronically underfunded to the point where departments are closing, classes are closing, entire campuses are closing, and people are having difficulty getting into the program that suits them so that they can build a career here in Ontario. You're underfunding that, and then you're funding this.

But people's greatest concern—certainly our greatest concern—is that the funding doesn't seem to be going to the right companies who are most qualified to provide training to unemployed workers. We have \$17 million going to Scale Hospitality, a client of the Premier's favourite former staff person, Amin Massoudi. We had \$10 million go to the government's favourite nightclub owner. We had \$7.5 million go to Keel Digital Solutions, even though this company was subjected to an audit and then, after that audit, that company was referred to the OPP. Shortly after, this very company got \$7.5 million from the Ministry of Labour to provide training. I don't know. It's very concerning. One million dollars went to a baker, FGF foods, that was originally rejected and then got funding after it gave \$32,000 in funding to Conservatives—no coincidence—and \$17 million to Bayshore, a home care supplier; this company was called out for failing to deliver medical supplies to their patients just a year before.

What's so concerning about these examples is that many of these companies were given a low ranking by impartial public servants, whose job it was to assess these applications to see if they were best qualified to provide training to unemployed workers. They received a low ranking. And then many of these companies gave a ton of money to PC Party candidates, including the Minister of Labour's own riding. Now, what we're hearing is that many of these low-scoring companies that gave money to these Conservatives actually got more money—more money—than high-scoring applications. If it looks like corruption and it smells like corruption, it probably is corruption.

I have a lot of questions about that. What I find very frustrating, and I think a lot of people find very frustrating, is that we expect government to do the right thing and do everything it can—

**The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell):** I ask the member to withdraw.

**Ms. Jessica Bell:** Withdraw—to do everything it can to fix the economy, get people a job and train them. That's what people expect the government to do.

I want to talk a little bit about what some stakeholders have said about this bill. The one stakeholder that's given comment within the extremely short period of time we have had to digest this bill and analyze it before we were asked to vote on it and speak to it is the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. Their assessment is pretty similar to ours. Like us, the CCPA agrees that buying local makes a lot of sense—makes a lot of sense for job creation, makes a lot of sense for our economy. It's a strategic thing to do. It also argues that the buy-Ontario changes are a little too little and a little too cautious. That's their assessment.

They also have some questions about the measure of origin, what company is identified as Canadian and what company is not. Some places have a very open-minded attitude, so you can have foreign companies come in, say they're Canadian if they have employed a certain percentage of people in Ontario, and then they can get government contracts. They've got some questions about that. They also want to make sure that there is proper enforcement with the legislation, which is something that we also agree with.

For the last chunk of my time, I'm going to miss schedule 2, because it's been debated in other bills, and I'm going to go to the final schedule, which is schedule 3. Schedule 3 hasn't gotten a lot of attention, but I also think it's pretty important. What schedule 3 is about is that it essentially delays and kills legislation that would give condo owners greater protections.

I'm just going to give you a lay of the land here. Right now in Ontario, we have about 1.3 million condo residents. There's a lot in my riding because we've got a lot of condos. That number is growing, and the reason why it's growing is because about 1,000 people a day are moving into Ontario. We are increasing density, so we're building more condos in towns and cities to house people. It makes a lot of sense. It's a good option for people. These buildings—some of them are the size of small towns, housing upwards of 2,000 people.

**0930**

In my view, and in a condo resident's view, every single condo resident deserves to live in a safe and well-maintained condo home. And they deserve to have recourse if they've got issues with the developer that built the building or the condo board or a neighbour. Because when you put 1,000 people or 2,000 people in a building, you want to make sure everyone gets along and you want to make sure the building is properly maintained and you want to have recourse and rules. That makes a lot of sense.

Unfortunately, what we are finding is that it's a little bit of a Wild West out there when it comes to condo rules. We regularly get calls from condo residents who have issues that are causing stress and havoc in their lives, and I want to give you some examples.

We once got a call where we worked with someone called Rani Pooran. She's a condo owner. She had to take her property manager and her board of directors to court because a flood that started in another part of the condo damaged her home. You can see that happening. It happens.

Pipes break. We need to have rules in place so that condo owners can get recourse in situation like this.

We also have a situation—this is a really egregious one. We had an individual called Michael Cohen who is living with his male partner in Toronto Centre, and he was told by the condo's management that they need to get married—him and his partner need to get married—or have one of them move out of the unit because the condo had rules restricting occupants of one unit to people who were married. That's a clear human rights violation right there, but that's currently allowed. It's currently allowed, which is very concerning.

We had a situation where we were dealing with Kerri Fulton and Daniel Werther, living at 1 Yorkville Avenue. They bought their property, and what they found is that amenities that were promised to them when they bought their property were not there when they moved in. There was a promise of a pool, of a common room, a party room of a certain size, and they were not delivered. And they were like, "Where do we go? What recourse do we have? How can we challenge this? We were promised one thing and didn't get it."

These are just examples of the whole litany of issues that condo residents face, and, unfortunately, the rules around condo governance are just not strong enough. They're just, quite frankly, not strong enough.

We've been advocating for improvements to these rules. We've been pushing for strengthening of the condo tribunal, which is a cheap and fast tribunal that people can go to to get their disputes resolved. I'll give the government credit here. They have made some steps towards expanding the jurisdiction of the condo tribunal so that more complaints can be heard, but so much more needs to be done. For some of the biggest issues that residents face, they cannot go to the tribunal to have those cases heard. A lot of issues they might have with the board—maybe the board is imposing dodgy rules or running fraudulent elections or allowing 24/7 short-term party rentals in the building. There is very little that condo residents can do, and they should be able to go to that tribunal and have their issues or concerns addressed.

What I see here, unfortunately, with this act is that it kills and delays some of the most important amendments that members from this House, from all parties, have decided make a lot of sense. This was done in 2015. Some condo rules were approved, passed, but were not put in force. And it was also done recently in the Standing Committee on Public Accounts when there was a report written to strengthen condo rules in Ontario. Members opposite supported these rules, including the member who is the lead on this bill, the Minister of Public and Business Service Delivery and Procurement, the member for Oakville. So I know the minister opposite knows about these issues because he sat in committee with me and other colleagues to review condo rules with the eye of strengthening them, but, unfortunately, what we're seeing here is we're seeing some of these rules are going to be repealed, and I want to explain them to you so that people understand what's going on.

To be clear, this bill—when was it introduced? Was it introduced Monday, Tuesday? Very recently. It took our researchers dozens of calls and hours of going through this legislation as quickly as we could so that we could explain it in a practical way to people. This isn't how legislation should be debated. It just shouldn't be. We should be given ample time to do outreach to constituents to explain these issues to them so that they can be informed and give us feedback. That's just not what's happening right now, so I do want to explain this in more detail so people understand what's being repealed.

There are five big ones that we see, and I'm going to summarize them. One law that is essentially being killed is a law that would—how do I explain this? Essentially, developers have the discretion to decide how much each individual in a condo pays in maintenance fees. They have that discretion. We had instances—some of them went to court—that showed that some developers were not being fair with deciding who gets to pay what maintenance fee amount. In some cases, owners of a smaller unit were paying more than an owner of a bigger unit in the same building. You've got to wonder why.

So the amendment that is being killed in this bill would have required the developer to provide fee information so condo owners know they're being charged a fair amount and that they're not being taken advantage of. Why would you not want to allow that to be a law? Who is calling you up and asking you, "Hey, we don't want maintenance fees to be fairly allocated within a condo building"? Which developer, honestly, is calling you up and asking you not to do that? It boggles my mind.

The other schedule that's being repealed is one that bans developers from unfairly imposing fines on owners that breach governing documents—okay, an owner has done something wrong; I get that. A fine should be imposed. This bans developers from unfairly imposing fees on owners that breach governing documents over and above what is needed to compensate the corporation for the expenses due to the breach. What that means is that a developer can impose a massive fine on a condo owner that has nothing to do with how much it actually costs the condo board or the developer to impose the change. It just doesn't make sense.

Another one—and this is a big one—is that we passed a piece of law here that would stop developers from using methods to keep maintenance fees artificially low for the first year to sell homes. This is a common practice. What developers do is they'll do some magical tricks of creative accounting so that when first-time homebuyers or investors are coming in, they look at the maintenance fees for a new building and they go, "Oh, they're really cheap. That's great." Unfortunately, those maintenance fees aren't actually that cheap. The developer is not being honest about it. What it means is that people are buying a home and the maintenance fees go up pretty quickly in years three, four and five to cover the cost of maintaining the building, and that homeowner realizes that they can't actually afford the home they built. So the amendment that was going to be passed—should have been passed—was

going to stop that creative accounting practice and require developers to be honest about how much the homeowner was going to pay in maintenance fees. Why on earth would you not approve that? Once again, who is calling you? It doesn't make a lot of sense.

This is also related. This is another one. This would require developers to set aside an accurate amount of money for maintenance in a reserve fund. When a condo is built, the developer, once it's built, has to put aside a chunk of money in a reserve fund that's used to pay for maintenance like HVAC, windows. Buildings are expensive to maintain, and there is a certain amount that needs to go in a reserve fund to cover that. Unfortunately, what developers routinely do—this is what the Auditor General has said—is that they underfund this reserve fund. What that means is that when homeowners come in, a few years pass, they get a very nasty surprise bill to pay for maintenance that they assumed was going to be covered with a reserve fund, and it puts people in financial shock. They're like, "Oh my gosh. I was not expecting this. I thought my maintenance fees would be this much. And now they've gone up."

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Given that you want to build 1.5 million homes in Ontario—you know a lot of them are going to be condos. We need to make condo living attractive, safe and affordable. Wouldn't you want to make sure that condo owners are not getting ripped off by developers? And wouldn't you want to make sure that condo owners are buying a home that they can afford, which means the cost of maintenance is transparent and they know it before they buy? Wouldn't you want that? Well, with the decision by this government to kill these schedules in this act, it means that condo residents are going to continue to be taken advantage of, and some of them are going to be ripped off. Some of them are going to be in a situation where they're going to have to sell their property. Maybe they're underwater because they took on more than they can afford—and part of it is not their fault, because they were not being given the true facts of how much things were going to cost.

So I urge this government to look seriously at schedule 3—I really do—and do everything you can to strengthen these rules and bring in stronger protections for condo residents. I think that's really important. The Auditor General already has some recommendations. Legislation has already been debated and went to committee and approved it. We don't need to wait any longer. I'm going to hand this over to the minister opposite after this speech so that he is fully aware of the sensible recommendations that have already been debated so that condo residents can have the protections that they need.

That's essentially the summary of this bill: We have a Buy Ontario Act which could be good in theory, but we don't know if it's going to be good in practice. And then we also have this government's move to, I'd say, essentially take the side of developers over consumer protections for condo residents, and it's going to make condo living just not as good as it should be.

That's my summary for today. I look forward to hearing the member for Windsor West speak about this bill as well.

**The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell):** I recognize the member for Windsor West.

**MPP Lisa Gretzky:** It's always a pleasure to get up and speak on behalf of my constituents in Windsor West. Right now, we are debating Bill 72, the Buy Ontario Act, 2025, that the government has tabled.

I just want to start by pointing out that on November 3, 2025, we tabled a motion, New Democrats tabled a motion, for basically the same thing that this government is saying will happen with this bill—on November 3, which was three weeks ago, but with the constituency week in there for Remembrance Day, it was actually 10 sitting days ago that we debated the NDP motion around using Ontario and Canadian products and procurement. I want to read that motion out, because the government side actually voted against it just 10 days ago—voted against the very thing they are now saying that they are championing.

The motion read, "Whereas Ontario's unemployment is at its highest level in a decade; and

"Whereas there is an ongoing trade war with the United States that continues to escalate; and

"Whereas the government of Ontario does not require the consideration of local job creation and local training opportunities when awarding public contracts; and

"Whereas the government of Ontario awarded a \$140-million contract for supply and installation of glass and aluminum at the Trillium Health Partners hospital project in Mississauga to a United States-owned company; and

"Whereas the government of Ontario continues to allow funding and contracts to go to foreign-owned companies for major publicly funded projects, including the Ottawa Hospital-Civic Campus redevelopment, the E.C. Row Expressway" in Windsor "and the Garden City Skyway" in the Niagara area;

"Therefore, in the opinion of this House, the government of Ontario must implement Ontario-first procurement criteria that prioritizes contracts for Ontario and Canadian businesses that can offer local jobs for all public spending contracts issued by the Ontario government, ministries, agencies, municipalities, and other provincially funded institutions, as well as ban US companies from receiving public contracts until the trade war is over."

We brought forward that motion on November 3, and the government voted against it. Here we are, 10 sitting days later, with a government bill before us, the Buy Ontario Act, which is talking about public procurement, prioritizing Ontario- and Canadian-made products. One has to ask, Speaker, what game is this government playing that 10 days ago they would vote down this very idea, and here we are today debating their bill that does basically the same thing?

Speaker, I want to talk about the government's record and why those of us on this side of the House and why the public is always—I'm going to say cautious, or suspicious, about what the government is really doing, because often-times the government members will get up, and they say something that sounds fantastic. For the Premier to stand

there and say, “That’s it. I’m Captain Canada. We’re going to buy Ontario; we’re going to buy Canada. We’re going to build Ontario; we’re going to build Canada”—but then we look at their record. I just raised a few examples, but I’m going to mention a few more.

It was this government, not too long ago, that took independently owned ServiceOntario—so these are small businesses owned by individuals in our communities. For no apparent reason—not a transparent reason, anyway—they decided that they were moving ServiceOntario locations into Staples.

Now, Staples is an American company. They have a Canadian subsidiary, but they’re an American company that is owned by an American equity firm. This government just arbitrarily decided to hand over government contracts and taxpayer money to an American corporation—an American equity firm—and put small business owners in my community and communities all over this province out of business.

They also did the same thing by moving them into Walmart.

*Interjection.*

**MPP Lisa Gretzky:** That member across can shake his head all he wants.

**Mr. Andrew Dowie:** Same owner.

**MPP Lisa Gretzky:** Pull it up. You can see there are communities where they’ve been moved into Walmart—an American company traded on the stock market.

They put Ontario small business owners out of business. Some of them lost everything. They were losing their homes. They didn’t just lose their business; they lost their homes. Any investments that they put into renovating the space to make it more accessible to our constituents, to the public—gone. They lost the money, with very little notice from the government.

Employment services for social assistance recipients: This government has given big contracts to foreign companies, one of whom has a terrible track record and was actually sued by New York for failing to meet their obligations and properly support people that were accessing those employment programs.

That’s this government’s track record, while they’re talking about supporting Ontario business, Ontario procurement, Canadian businesses, Canadian procurement.

**0950**

In February 2022, under this government, the Ontario Line subway cars were being produced—are being produced—in the United States, after this government reduced Canadian content requirements for transit projects from 25% to 10%. That was this government.

June 2025: The Garden City Skyway contracts were awarded to a consortium of foreign-owned companies. That’s this government.

July 2025: \$140 million went to a Mississauga hospital façade contract being awarded to a US-owned firm. That’s this Conservative government.

July 2025: The Workplace Safety and Insurance Board—the Ford government confirmed that 26 jobs will be elim-

inated and handed to Iron Mountain, which is a private company headquartered in Boston, Massachusetts.

The Premier always talks about how much he loves the United States; it’s very clear, because they’re taking taxpayer money and constantly shovelling it to American companies—very wealthy companies, many publicly traded, with the largest shares owned by very, very wealthy billionaires in the United States with no real ties to Canada.

September 2025: Two American contractors are among the pre-qualified bidders for the Ottawa Civic hospital project. That’s the province. That’s this government.

October 2025: Korean-made steel is being used in the E.C. Row Expressway and Banwell Road overpass project in Windsor. And steelworkers were out protesting that project.

That brings me to some of the nuances of the bill that’s before us—because we don’t really know the government’s true intention through this bill; we don’t really know how they’re going to enforce it.

When you’re talking about requiring municipalities to procure Ontario-made-or-produced or Canadian-made-or-produced—we know that this government has downloaded a ton of financial responsibility to municipalities. On that side of the House, they are constantly saying, “Yay, us, we haven’t raised taxes,” which is nonsense, because what they’ve done is downloaded the responsibility to municipalities that are now increasing property taxes in order to be able to fund projects that should be the province’s responsibility.

We in Windsor have long called for the provincial government to re-upload the E.C. Row Expressway, just like they did with the Gardiner Expressway here, rather than putting all the cost onto the municipality. And now we’re finding out that they’re giving money to a project and not ensuring that that project is using Canadian steel and Canadian workers. And those workers came out and protested.

If municipalities or other public entities that are receiving government funding without it being clear what the responsibility is—what if they think that they are actually supporting Ontario products or Canadian products because they’re using a Canadian company?

Some would consider Staples a Canadian company. It’s American-owned, but they have Canadian subsidiaries here.

Some might think Walmart is a Canadian company. They’re an American company with Canadian subsidiaries here. They’re an American company, American-owned.

What if, in the process of trying to follow this legislation—which is not entirely clear about the expectations—they go to a Canadian company to procure product, only to find out that that product is actually not made in Canada, not made in Ontario, but is made in another country? Are they now in contradiction of the laws? And what’s the recourse for that?

When you have legislation, which this government does, frequently, where they pack in a whole bunch of stuff and then they time allocate, they don’t take it to

committee, they don't travel it across the province—and "just trust us; we will do the right thing," which we hear from this government a lot—we get into situations where maybe municipalities or other publicly funded institutions think that they're following the law, only to find out that they're in contravention of the law. That's the government's problem. That's the government's mistake, for not being clear.

Speaker, I want to talk about schedule 2, which is the Highway Traffic Act, and the government's recent decision to arbitrarily eliminate speed cameras—no consultation with municipalities; no consultation with the public. I want to point out that it was this government that brought in speed cameras. It was their legislation that brought in speed cameras. They touted it and said, "We need to crack down on people breaking the law and speeding. We need to crack down on the number of accidents caused by people speeding. We're going to be tough on crime," which we're hearing again.

Then they turn around and say—because they've got people whispering in their ear, their donors and their insiders—"We don't like this." So without consultation, and by vilifying the municipalities by saying it's just a cash grab, they arbitrarily did away with speed cameras. And now they're talking about road safety in this bill. It is absolutely mind-boggling.

Every member on the government side of the House must regularly go to a chiropractor or to physiotherapy for the pretzel that they twist themselves into, bringing in legislation that they say is fantastic, and then all of a sudden, because someone is whispering in their ear, they're twisting themselves into knots and spinning it out saying, "We're getting rid of it because we are the good guys. Everybody forget that we're the ones that brought it in in the first place."

The amount of backtracking this government does because it doesn't consult and it doesn't think things through before it brings legislation forward: What I listed were just a few instances of this government being contradictory—because the other word I would use, you would call me out for being unparliamentary—to their own actions. These are just a few examples where they say one thing and they do another. There are far too many instances with this government where that happens.

I talked about the cost of this legislation, and look, I fully support supporting Ontario businesses; having Ontario procurement, Canadian procurement; using Canadian- and Ontario-made products and resources; using Canadian and Ontario workers to do those jobs—100%. But there are a lot of questions and ambiguity in this bill, and, frankly, loopholes for the government so that they don't even have to follow their own law. They can impose it on others, but they don't have to follow it themselves.

I want to go back to the social assistance piece because the contracting out to foreign-owned companies with proven bad track records, being sued by other countries they were operating in—we are seeing increasing numbers of people who are accessing the employment services through those companies that the government has chosen,

taking them out of the hands of local people who know the communities that they work in the best. They've moved them into these foreign-owned companies to run. And we are seeing worse and worse outcomes, with people being placed in jobs that they are not qualified to do, that they are not physically able to do. We are seeing a constant cycling through that program, and it's costing a heck of a lot of money—not very fiscally responsible when it comes to this government. It's certainly not supporting buying and building local. It's contradictory to what is in this bill.

**1000**

With the little bit of time that I have left, I just want to talk about something—maybe it's a little bit of inside baseball, and I am certainly not defending the Liberals. But prior to the last election, before the Liberals had official party status, before they had enough members to qualify for official party status, we heard the Premier on numerous occasions—ad nauseam, I would say—and the government members, point fingers at the Liberal side and dismiss them by saying, "You're the minivan party. You're the minivan party." It was true: They had enough members they could fit in a minivan.

But as someone who represents a community, who represents the auto sector and Windsor Assembly Plant, where they build award-winning minivans in Canada—award-winning—and employ thousands and thousands of people in our community—for the Premier to get up and make jokes like that and the government to make jokes like that shows, really, what they think of people that work in the auto sector. Every single job at Windsor Assembly Plant not only feeds a family; it supports community.

And while we watch manufacturing jobs leave under this government—I know they like to point at the previous government; I'm not going to argue that didn't happen. But we are seeing hundreds of thousands of manufacturing jobs leave under this government. And then they want to take credit for what the workers do and for the investments that the union has bargained for and secured. So instead of making fun of Ontario-made products, I would suggest that the Premier find perhaps a more mature way to voice his displeasure, we'll say, for lack of a better word, with other parties in this House.

**The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell):** Question?

**Ms. Laura Smith:** I listened to the member intently and she, I think like everybody in this room, agrees that now more than ever we need to buy Ontario. One of the things that this policy does is track and publish data on how much procurement goes to Ontario-based suppliers and the value of those contracts. It has been carefully crafted with threshold rules and safeguards so Ontario can act now in favour of local businesses.

Through you, Speaker, I'm asking, will the member opposite support this bill, support Ontario and come on board?

**MPP Lisa Gretzky:** To the member opposite: I do appreciate the question. I just want to remind the member opposite that in February 2022, your government dropped the Canadian content requirements for transit projects

from 25% to 10%—from 25% to 10%. So yes, we fully support transparency. We'd like transparency when it comes to the Skills Development Fund, frankly. The government is not offering that. But it's one thing get up and say, "Do you support this?" when, in fact, your government has been doing everything possible not to be transparent. And what we do know is that when they have the opportunity, they award contracts and Ontario taxpayer money to foreign corporations rather than local businesses and Ontario workers.

**The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell):** Question?

**MPP Wayne Gates:** It's always a pleasure to rise because I've been fighting to buy local my entire adult life, when I was president of a local union, because we had a thing, "Buy the car your neighbour used to build."

But today I'm looking at these young people up here, where we have 20% unemployment in the province of Ontario; 800,000 people don't have a job today.

We should be buying local. We should have been buying local for years. This isn't something new. When the NDP brought this forward three weeks ago, they turned it down. That's the reality.

We shouldn't have to bring a bill to this House. We should be out there buying, supporting our farmers, our agriculture, auto industry, buying local products, because if we don't, the same thing that's going on in the province of Ontario today is going to continue. Young people aren't going to have an opportunity. Young people aren't going to get a job. Young people aren't going to buy a house. Young people aren't pay for their rent. That's why we should buy local. That's why we should always be supporting local businesses, local companies, not making sure that it's shipped off to foreign products. Thank you very much.

*Interjection.*

**MPP Wayne Gates:** Oh, I need a question [*inaudible*]. Do you agree with me that we need jobs for young people?

**The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell):** I recognize the member from Windsor West.

**MPP Lisa Gretzky:** Absolutely, we need jobs for Ontario's youth. We are seeing a record high number of youth, 18% unemployed in this province. Windsor has the highest unemployment rate in the province and in the country, a shameful statistic. We have more and more youth that are putting in—and for the Premier's response to be, "Just get off your ass and try harder" is insulting to the young people in this province because it is this government that is making it impossible for people to find jobs in this province. Their policies are the ones that are making it impossible for the young folks up in the gallery to even dream about owning a home or rent an apartment or start a family or go to post-secondary school without starting out their lives with a huge amount of debt. So yes, we should be investing in local procurement, but this province should also be investing in the people of this province like the young folks sitting up there in the gallery today.

**The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell):** Question?

**Ms. Aislinn Clancy:** I do think there are good things in this bill, and I think there were good things in the motion put forward by the NDP. I want to ask about energy.

This government is expanding gas power, and we rely on American natural gas for that, so we're dependent on Americans for our energy, and our new nuclear is an American company, GE, with American-enriched uranium, which makes us dependent on American-enriched uranium for decades to come. Can you comment on how we should include our energy planning in buy Ontario so we can have more dependence on Canadian and Ontario resources and Ontario companies?

**The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell):** Response? I recognize the member from University–Rosedale.

**Ms. Jessica Bell:** That is an excellent question. We've got a lot of concerns about the government's move to double down on gas expansion when all the signs are telling us very clearly that that is not the way to go.

I also recall the member for Sudbury recently talking about how the contract this government is looking at moving forward on with a US company is four times more expensive than what a Canadian company bid. That makes no sense, no sense at all.

**The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell):** Question?

**Mr. Andrew Dowie:** I want to thank both members across for their comments. The member from Windsor West mentioned the United Steelworkers and Barry Zekelman and the protest of the Banwell interchange. I was happy to join steelworkers, show my support for their cause. I know the member opposite wasn't able to go. I'm wondering if the member will be joining for the next one.

1010

**MPP Lisa Gretzky:** As you know, there are various things that go on in MPP's lives: meetings with constituents, events, personal—medical things, that kind of thing. So that's an interesting question coming from the member from Windsor–Tecumseh.

When I'm able to join the steelworkers on that picket line to protest the fact that the government is allowing Korean steel to be used in a local project, you bet your ass I'll be there.

But what I ask the member from Windsor–Tecumseh is: Where have you been on the Titan Tool and Die picket line? Where have you been for those—

**The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell):** The member will withdraw.

**MPP Lisa Gretzky:** Withdraw, Speaker.

It's easy for the member to throw things like that out there, but there have been numerous occasions for government members to join workers all over this province when they're locked out, when they're on strike, and yet we don't see them show up. I think that maybe the government members, before asking questions like that, should think of their own record before asking a question like that.

**The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell):** Question?

**Mr. Matthew Rae:** My question is to either member of the opposition who spoke this morning.

I heard about how they want to see buy Ontario, which we agree with, and we brought forward this legislation.

But in what we passed just yesterday, the fall economic statement, there was a provision to expand the manufacturing tax credit to businesses that are American owned and operated but employ Canadians.

Many of those operations are in my riding. I'm talking about Viking, which makes all the snowplows—I know it's going to snow in some parts of the province this week—in the entire country. They make them all in my riding. It's an American-owned company.

Do they not support those good-paying jobs? That's my question.

**Ms. Jessica Bell:** Just to be clear, you mentioned the manufacturing tax credit, right? On this side of the House, we've been calling for an expansion of the manufacturing tax credit for some time, and we're pleased to see that the government has finally listened to us.

When we're talking about the Ontario government's procurement policy, when we look at how it's currently written, what we also see is that companies like Walmart and Staples can get contracts to provide Ontario government services when we've got Canadian and Ontario-owned companies—like ServiceOntario—companies that are being turned aside. So we've got a lot of concerns about that too.

**The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell):** Question?

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** I'd like to thank my colleagues for an excellent presentation.

In the past, there were agreements such as the auto pact, whereby multinational corporations who wanted to sell here and wanted access to our economy had to build here. Yet this government has had no strings attached with any agreements that they've had. We've seen the closure of CAMI in Ingersoll.

Would you like to see a government that prioritizes workers over multinational corporations when it comes to dispensing corporate welfare?

**Ms. Jessica Bell:** I think what the member is referring to is the government's Building Ontario Fund. It's a big \$5-billion fund. It's very opaque. We don't know who's getting the money. We don't know what the criteria are. When we go online, all we see is a survey that someone can fill out. It makes me wonder if this is going to go down the track of the scandalous Skills Development Fund.

And we've got a lot of questions about this fund. If a company is going to be getting a loan or a grant, where is the ironclad agreement that they're not just going to take that money and go down south? Where is the agreement that they won't just channel that into executive bonuses like they did with the Skills Development—

**The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell):** Thank you.

*Second reading debate deemed adjourned.*

## HOUSE SITTINGS

**The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell):** I beg to inform the House that, pursuant to standing order 9(g), the Clerk has received written notice from the government House leader indicating that a temporary change in the

weekly meeting schedule of the House is required, and therefore, the afternoon routine on Wednesday, December 3, 2025, shall commence at 1 p.m.

## REPORT, FINANCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICER

**The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell):** I beg to inform the House that the following document was tabled: a report entitled Ontario Economic Monitor: April to September 2025, from the office of the Financial Accountability Officer of Ontario.

## MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

### MARA TECHNOLOGIES

**Mr. Logan Kanapathi:** I'm proud to rise today to share this great investment for our community in Markham–Thornhill.

Last week, I was honoured to visit a very impressive company with a long history and vision: Mara Technologies. They are expanding their production capacity with a \$12.5-million investment at their Markham facility.

Our government is happy to support thriving technology with \$2.2 million through the Ontario Together Trade Fund. Through this fund, Mara will strengthen its high-precision electronic assembly operation that directly addresses the unprecedented challenges we face due to US tariffs.

Most importantly, this project will create 95 new jobs and protect 191 existing positions in Markham. This investment will strengthen our domestic supply chain and support long-term competitiveness.

This announcement is especially meaningful and very memorable to me. I had the privilege of attending the groundbreaking ceremony of Mara Technologies in 2007, when I served as a Markham city councillor.

Thank you to the Mara leadership team: Peter Schmied, Kerry Mannella, Scott Tordoff, Matthew Ruscica and all the team members.

Thank you to Premier Doug Ford and our government for remaining committed to Ontario workers and the economy.

## SERVICES FOR PERSONS WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

**Mr. Jeff Burch:** I rise today to share a message on behalf of developmental service agencies I've been meeting with in the Niagara region, a dedicated group of organizations serving collectively over 7,000 individuals with developmental disabilities and their families and employing collectively over 1,600 people in Niagara.

Across Ontario, over 52,000 people are currently on wait-lists for developmental services. In Niagara alone, approximately 9,000 individuals are waiting—many for



years—for the supports they need to live safely with dignity and in community.

These statistics are similar in all regions of Ontario. More people wait for service than who are currently being served.

These wait-lists are not just numbers. They represent real people: children, youth and adults who, without timely support, often end up in crisis. Some are hospitalized unnecessarily. Others tragically find themselves in the judicial system. These outcomes are avoidable and unacceptable.

The developmental services sector sees first-hand the consequences of underfunding. We also see the transformative impact of adequate, responsive services. When people are met where they are, whether through supportive living, respite or family supports, they thrive, families stabilize and communities grow stronger.

We call for adequate, sustained funding to ensure that people on wait-lists are not left behind. Every person deserves the opportunity to live a full life, supported and included.

#### KIDS' ONLINE SAFETY AND PRIVACY MONTH

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** Every parent in Ontario knows the worry that comes with handing a child a device. The Internet is now embedded in every part of their lives—in learning, in gaming, in connecting with friends. But alongside those opportunities come real dangers that too many families only learn about after it's too late.

Today, child predators are lurking in dark corners of the Internet. They are entering our homes through the most popular platforms our kids use every day. Through online games like Roblox and Minecraft and countless others, predators can disguise themselves, build trust with children and begin to groom them, often without a parent knowing that it's happening. And, of course, traditional social media platforms continue to expose young people to cyberbullying, exploitation, trafficking and manipulation.

Madam Speaker, this isn't theoretical. Police forces across Ontario are sounding the alarm. Educators are overwhelmed. Parents are terrified that, despite doing everything right, someone can reach your child through a game or an app or even a school-based device.

That's why my colleagues and I have introduced legislation to proclaim October as Kids' Online Safety and Privacy Month, a dedicated, province-wide effort to educate families, strengthen awareness and empower parents with the tools they need to keep their children safe. This month will highlight the importance of digital supervision, responsible online habits and honest conversations in our schools. It will remind all of us—parents, teachers, tech companies and legislators—that protecting kids online is a shared responsibility.

#### GOVERNMENT INVESTMENTS

**Mr. Matthew Rae:** It's great today to rise and speak a little bit about some of the investments that our government is making in the great riding of Perth–Wellington.

**1020**

Recently, I had the opportunity to highlight an additional \$700,000 through the Ontario Municipal Partnership Fund, a very important fund for our rural municipalities and northern municipalities. That \$700,000 extra next year will help our municipalities build more roads, bridges, and invest in critical infrastructure.

Perth–Wellington, this year, is receiving over \$10 million through the OMPF fund from the Ministry of Finance. And it was great to see, in a previous provincial budget, we increased that amount—the first time in many years.

Our provincial government, listening to rural Ontario—increasing the amount in the OMPF funding by \$50 million, ensuring that we're there to support our rural municipalities and ensuring that that fund keeps up with the demands that our municipalities are facing.

We're working together to build a stronger Ontario, to build stronger communities, to ensure that we have a strong Ontario that leads to a strong Canada.

I was really pleased to see the Minister of Finance present a fall economic statement—one of many we do in this place—really outlining our investments and the continued investments we will make in rural Ontario and all communities across Ontario.

#### TENANT PROTECTION

**Ms. Jennifer K. French:** This government's terrible Bill 60 and attack on tenants' protections is not the way to solve our housing crisis. This government has not listened to me or to the official opposition. But please listen to the people of Oshawa.

Jacob says, "Our country is in a housing crisis, many people are already stretched to pay rent, and Ford appears to want to see even more people go homeless."

Megan says, "As someone whose partner works in a GM parts facility, it's deeply concerning to me that Premier Ford would propose these changes while being aware of the struggles people are facing in the current political and economic climate."

Amanda says, "I'm terrified for the 99% of Ontario children who are set up for complete failure in this province."

Moira wonders, "After the inevitable mass evictions occur, how many will become homeless? How many of those homeless will die? I am terrified for my future."

Randy writes, "My wife and I are renters in Oshawa and would love to start a family, but we cannot even consider that if we don't have security in our housing costs."

From Lianna: "I spend \$1,800 per month renting a one-bedroom apartment with no parking, and although I benefit from a competitive rent, it still costs me 43% of my take-home pay per month, not including hydro and Inter-

net. Think of Ontario's young people; many of us are barely making it work."

Madelyne suggests, "We need real solutions. Ontario should be investing in affordable housing, strengthening rent control, and protecting the rental units we already have."

Premier, Bill 60 is a terrible mistake, and real lives will be turned upside down. Repeal Bill 60. Forcing people out of apartments does not create supply. Quit wrecking things, and start building housing.

#### SCOTTISH HERITAGE DAY

**Mr. Dave Smith:** You'll notice that today I'm wearing one of my kilts. Today is the last day for me to rise with a statement before November 30, so I'm wearing my kilt for Scottish Heritage Day. This kilt is actually one of my family tartans. I'm part of Clan Macpherson. This kilt, specifically, is Macpherson hunt; my tie is Macpherson dress. There are actually a number of Macpherson tartans, and you'll often see me wearing one of those tartan ties here in the Legislature.

People have asked my daughter, who works here at Queen's Park, "Why does your dad wear a kilt so much?" Usually, she says "I think he thinks it's cool." Well, I can confirm that it is cool—but that's only in January, when there's an updraft.

My former colleague and MPP for Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry, Jim McDonnell, introduced Bill 208 in the last government. The bill passed and received royal assent in early November 2021, and that's when we first celebrated Scottish Heritage Day. November 30 was chosen because it's St. Andrew's Day, a national holiday in Scotland.

In Ontario, we have roughly two million people of Scottish heritage—including former Premier Oliver Mowat.

On November 30, I want everyone in Ontario to have a very happy Scottish Heritage Day.

#### WOMEN'S SERVICES

**MPP Alexa Gilmour:** Today, as we bring forward my women in the workforce motion, I am so honoured to speak about the remarkable women in Parkdale–High Park who are leading life-saving, community-building work every single day.

In my riding, the Redwood, led by the strength and compassion of Abi Ajibolade, offers safety and sanctuary to women and children fleeing violence. It is life-saving work.

At Evangeline Residence, Stephanie Corringham and her team walk with women as they rebuild their lives after homelessness, providing stability, connection and dignity.

At Parkdale Queen West Community Health Centre, under the leadership of Angela Robertson, they deliver essential women's health care, counselling and, until last week, harm reduction services.

At Working for Change, under the leadership of Anita Prasad, they transform lived experience into leadership

through a trauma-informed employment and training program, opening up real pathways for women.

At Sistering, guided by Volleta Peters, they remain a 24/7 lifeline to women navigating violence, deep poverty and homelessness, while at West Neighbourhood House, Maureen Fair leads innovative programs to support newcomers and families. At PARC, with Barbara Domenech, they step into the long-standing tradition of supporting low-income women.

Speaker, these organizations are doing incredible work, and I am so honoured to stand by them in this moment today.

#### TRAGEDY IN BRAMPTON WEST

**Mr. Amarjot Sandhu:** I rise today with profound sadness following the tragic house fire on November 20 that has shaken the community of Brampton West. This heartbreaking incident has now tragically taken five lives, leaving families grieving unimaginable loss, while others continue to pray for the recovery of loved ones who were injured and for the safe return of those still unaccounted for. My deepest condolences go out to everyone affected, and I join our entire community in keeping the victims in our thoughts and prayers.

I also want to acknowledge the extraordinary efforts of Brampton fire, Peel paramedics, Peel Regional Police and the Office of the Fire Marshal. These first responders faced extremely difficult and dangerous conditions, yet they worked tirelessly to protect lives and support families during this devastating event.

Madam Speaker, as our community grieves, I urge all residents to follow fire safety protocols, ensure alarms and detectors are functioning, and take every precaution to keep their homes safe.

Together we stand in solidarity, compassion and support for all those impacted.

#### SENIOR CITIZENS

**MPP Bill Rosenberg:** My home, Thessalon, is a small town with a big heart, and I'm proud to share one of the ways we honour the seniors in our community. Each Christmas season, our local pharmacy partners with long-term-care homes to ensure every resident feels remembered and cherished. Together, the caring staff have created a simple yet beautiful tradition that allows the public to brighten a senior's holiday.

A Christmas tree is set up at the pharmacy decorated with tags listing each senior's simple wishes. Anyone can choose a tag, purchase the items and return the gift with a tag attached so it reaches the right person. The gifts are placed under a tree until the staff gather them and deliver them to the home in time for Christmas morning. This special tradition has been happening for several years, and the community eagerly awaits the moment the tree goes up. The tags disappear quickly, and many gift-givers include cards filled with warm wishes, something the residents treasure deeply.

Small towns truly are a special place, but this act of kindness isn't limited to small communities. I encourage others to adopt this model where they live. We must remember our seniors, the people who built our communities through decades of hard work, volunteering and generosity. The comforts and connections we enjoy today exist because of them. This story is a testament to the power of remembering, honouring and giving back—a good reminder that a simple gesture can make a meaningful impact on many very special people.

### POLICE RECORD CHECKS

**Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady:** Since the change to centralized and provincially standardized police checks, there have been an increasing number of negative effects for Ontarians. I have been contacted by nurses, teachers, coaches and social workers who are facing significant delays in receiving vulnerable sector checks. Some are waiting over three months. These delays have led to rescinded job offers because individuals cannot start work without the required clearance. Long-term-care homes are even struggling to hire staff because no one can obtain their vulnerable sector clearance in time.

Speaker, imagine being offered the job of your dreams or maybe even a job just to make ends meet. The initial relief of being told the job is yours—you think, “No problem. I'm good to go.” You're told, “One last step.” That step turns into a protracted delay, and your almost-employer has to pass you over. Hope turns into heartbreak.

1030

We must find a better way forward. Previously, when municipal governments handled these checks, the average wait time was two to three weeks. What's going wrong? Triton Canada is the vendor of record for OPP background checks and handles the intake. Is this middleman necessary? Is this red tape?

The CBC reported a social worker left Ontario because she couldn't afford to live here. She moved to Labrador for a job contingent on a background check. At publication time, she had waited 45 days and figured she'd be without income for three months.

Speaker, the negative consequences of this centralized system far outweigh the benefits. I urge immediate action to address this issue.

### HOUSE SITTINGS

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

**Hon. Steve Clark:** I just want to advise the House that the night sitting scheduled for this evening has been cancelled.

### INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

**Hon. Michael S. Kerzner:** Not that they need an introduction again because they're here so often, but welcome

to the Ontario Professional Fire Fighters Association, and specifically the president, Mr. Greg Horton, and Jason Corazza, the president of the Oakville Professional Firefighters Association local. Welcome to the Legislative—

*Applause.*

**The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly):** I'll add a few seconds to the clock.

**Mme Dawn Gallagher Murphy:** I'd like to welcome the Medical Laboratory Professionals' Association of Ontario and their CEO, Michelle Hoad; the Eastern Ontario Regional Laboratory Association; and representatives from medical laboratories across the province. As well, I would like to introduce the representatives from Home Care Ontario on their annual awareness day. Welcome to Sandra Ketchen and Josephine DesLauriers.

**MPP Lisa Gretzky:** It is my pleasure to introduce Martha Hradowy, who is the president of the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation and a Windsor gal, as well as Shay Currie and Mike Merry from Windsor with the Ontario Professional Fire Fighters Association. Welcome to Queen's Park.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Waterloo Fire is in the House. Welcome to your House, Adam Overgaard and Kevin Collins from the Ontario Professional Fire Fighters Association.

**Mr. Mike Schreiner:** I'd like to welcome a large contingent of Rotarians from the Rotary Club of Guelph. Thank you for putting service above self. And speaking of that, I'd like to acknowledge Colin Hunter, the outgoing president of the Guelph fire fighters association, who will be retiring in two months. Welcome to Queen's Park.

**Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon:** I'd like to welcome marvelous Michelle Hoad from the Medical Laboratory Professionals' Association of Ontario and her whole team. Thank you for keeping us healthy and safe in Ontario.

**MPP George Darouze:** It's my pleasure to welcome my friend Kent Smith with PwC. Kent is a great friend and community volunteer in so many organizations, and also he sits in different capacity. Welcome, Kent, to your House.

**Mrs. Michelle Cooper:** I'm honoured to welcome to the Legislature the Consul General of the Philippines, Kristine Leilani R. Salle, and the Consul of the Philippines, Rodney Jonas Sumague. We are grateful for your presence at Queen's Park. Welcome to Queen's Park.

**Mr. Tyler Allsopp:** I'd like to welcome Steve Morgan and Curtis Clarke from the Belleville Professional Fire Fighters Association. Welcome to your House.

**Hon. Rob Flack:** I'd like to recognize Daryl Smith in the House, president of the St. Thomas Professional Firefighter's Association. Welcome, Daryl.

**Hon. Jill Dunlop:** I'd like to welcome the Salvation Army for their lobby day—Rick Zelinsky, Dan Millar, Brian Armstrong and Lynn Armstrong—and remind all members there's a reception in 228/230 at lunch, and to also record a video statement in support of their annual kettle campaign.

**Hon. Stan Cho:** The GTHA is here, the Greater Toronto to Hotel Association. I want to welcome all its members, as well as president and CEO, Sara Anghel, and VP of

government and public affairs, Jim Wielgosz. Welcome to the Legislature.

**Ms. Marit Stiles:** Good morning. We have a number of student groups joining us today. I really want to welcome members of the College Student Alliance, the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance, and Ontario Student Voices. I promised I'd give them a shout-out today. Welcome to—

*Applause.*

**Mr. Rob Cerjanec:** I'd like to welcome a former colleague of mine, Jeff Maharaj, president of the Ontario Principals' Council, to the Legislature today. Welcome to your House.

**Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens:** I'd like to welcome some Niagara College students here today: Hish Clifford, Peter Almounauar—sorry for the mispronunciation—and Colton Hess.

The Student Union of Confederation College Inc.: I promised to give a shout out, as well to Balkaran Singh Dhanesar and to Gaurav Baghla. Thank you, and welcome to your House.

**MPP Lise Vaugeois:** I'd like to welcome people from the Ontario Principals' Council: Alisa Cashore, chair of the Toronto School Administrators' Association and a principal with the TDSB; Nadine Trépanier-Bisson, executive director of the principals' council; and from the association of professional firefighters, Alexander Dzuba, Kyle Solomon and Tyler Reinelt.

**Mr. Anthony Leardi:** I welcome Jason Durocher and Andrew Challens from the Ontario Professional Fire Fighters Association, and also welcome to Jeff Maharaj, Jen Lendrum, Nadine Trépanier-Bisson, Alisa Cashore, Amy Johnson and Colleen Golightly from the Ontario Principals' Council.

**Mr. Ric Bresee:** From Tyendinaga township council, I'd like to welcome Mayor Claire Kennelly and his wife, Cathy Kennelly; Deputy Mayor Heather Lang; Councillor Dave Ogden; Councillor Don McFarlane; and Councillor Jen Phillips, and her father, a good friend, former Hastings county warden Rick Phillips.

## QUESTION PERIOD

### GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

**Ms. Marit Stiles:** Yesterday, in what could only be called a very Trumpian-style outburst, the Premier threatened to audit non-profits and community organizations because they dared to speak out against his government. Meanwhile, the Premier stands here every single day defending his Minister of Labour's \$2.5-billion gift, handing out taxpayer dollars to insiders and lobbyists while regular people just keep losing out.

My question to the Premier is, why won't the Premier show some respect to the taxpayers who pay his salary and hold the Minister of Labour accountable for this mess?

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

**Hon. Steve Clark:** Madam Speaker, I want to talk about what happened in this place earlier this week. Let's face it: What happened in this place was supported 100% by the Leader of the Opposition and, actually, members of her party, which is shameful. It was shameful that that situation was enabled by members of the opposition.

This is a place—Speaker, through you—for debating ideas. We were all sent here to do a job, and we should do it without stunts, tricks and enabling radicals—and let's face it, it was an enabling of radicals in this chamber. Shame on the Leader of the Opposition, and shame on your caucus.

Let's get back to debating the issues that are before us.

**The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly):** Back to the Leader of the Opposition.

**Ms. Marit Stiles:** Well, Speaker, I won't take a lecture like that from that member whose own work as a minister is under criminal investigation by the OPP. So please, come on.

Look, the Premier and his ministers want to distract, but I want to bring the Premier's attention back to where we are at today, because the Financial Accountability Office just reported that Ontario's manufacturing jobs have hit the lowest point since 1976. I was putting Shaun Cassidy posters on my wall in 1976. I was a little young, but I was doing that. Donna Summer was teaching us how to disco in 1976.

This Premier is a jobs disaster. Instead of investing in training people for good jobs, the Premier continues to stand there every day and make excuses for his Minister of Labour who turned that fund into a pay-to-play scheme. When will the Premier clean up this mess and fire his minister?

**Hon. Steve Clark:** No, I'm not going to let the leader shift off her original narrative.

The Leader of the Opposition very clearly this week sided with professional protesters, and to take a word from my Premier and my leader, "yahoos," rather than debating the issues in this House.

1040

Again, we're going to make sure that we talk about what's important to Ontarians.

I know that the Minister of Labour, both today and every day, is committed to ensuring that young people have an opportunity to have a skilled trade; that we continue to put forward policies that ensure that we are the leading jurisdiction in the G7.

The Leader of the Opposition and her crew can continue to stand up with these protesters and yahoos; they can continue to collaborate with them.

It's this party and our government that's continuing to stand up for young people; that will continue to stand up for unions. That's where—

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

**Ms. Marit Stiles:** Speaker, with this government, it's always the same thing. We see it over and over again. We

saw it with the greenbelt scheme, and now we see it with pay-to-play: It is one set of rules for them, and then it's a whole other set of rules for everybody else, regular people, the rest of us.

Construction workers that I have met just in the last couple of weeks are asking me how money went to strip clubs instead of apprenticeships, because they don't have enough of them.

Health care workers are fighting for higher wages while their tax dollars—not your piggy bank, not your money; the people's money—are going to the Premier's campaign manager.

Shame on you—

*Interjection.*

**The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly):** I apologize to the Leader of the Opposition.

I will ask the member for Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound to withdraw. Stand up and withdraw.

**MPP Paul Vickers:** Withdrawn.

**The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly):** I will go back to the Leader of the Opposition for 10 seconds.

**Ms. Marit Stiles:** Just this morning, I was speaking to farmers, here from all across Ontario, who said to me—over and over again, they thanked me for shining a light on the shadows of this government and this cabinet because people have a right to know that their taxpayer dollars are going to programs that are going to benefit them, not this member's family and friends.

When will the Premier put an end to this scheme and finally fire his Minister of Labour?

**The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly):** The Minister of Labour.

**Hon. David Piccini:** Speaker, it's important that we don't mislead the public.

That member—if she has visited unions and union training centres, I would ask her to name where she has visited. For weeks—

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

**Hon. David Piccini:** Withdraw.

Speaker, every member of this caucus shows up in union training halls to support funding. We know they're subject to robust accountability metrics—just visit them at one of their membership meetings. They're subject to accountability metrics through our fund.

We're investing in training centres. We're providing funding to support training in every corner of this province. We've seen an increase in the number of apprentices registering, thanks to the work of this Premier. We're actually building.

They're a professional protest party who don't want to build highways, don't want to build roads, don't want to build bridges.

Again, I would ask her, which union did you visit?

Those unions have abandoned her party in favour of a Premier who's going to put their members to—

**The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly):** Question?

## GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

**Ms. Marit Stiles:** I'm not even going to go there because I've got to tell you, I've been to so many training facilities—and not only that; I have sat on the side of workers for unions bargaining against the big corporate bosses that they represent. So give me a break. Honestly, give me a break.

The bare minimum that Ontarians should be able to expect from their government is the truth. They want to see honesty. They want to see integrity, the kind of integrity that workers in this province show every single day when they wake up in the morning and they go to work to earn a decent living.

But this government? They are only concerned about their friends and their insiders, while the rest of us fall behind.

There are 200,000 more people unemployed today than there were when this government took office. That is a fact. People are looking for work and are unable to find it because of this government's jobs disaster.

To the Premier: Can he tell us exactly how many jobs—full-time jobs—this pay-to-play scheme created?

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

**Hon. David Piccini:** Last month, we saw over 56,000 jobs added to the Ontario economy. When juxtaposed with the United States, that's almost half of what the entire United States generated in the same time period. This Premier is creating meaningful opportunities. Through the Skills Development Fund, 100,000 workers have received employment within 60 days or less.

What have we seen through investing in training halls in every corner of this province? We've seen a 33% increase in cement finishers. The Leader of the Opposition doesn't even know what a cement finisher is, Speaker. We've seen a 25% increase in heat and frost insulators, a 64% increase in pressure system welders.

What do you need these professions for, Speaker? You need them to build a stronger Ontario, to build new nuclear plants, to build new homes, to build new hospitals. Each and every measure, they vote against.

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

**Ms. Marit Stiles:** It's pretty low, right? It's really sexist, and it's beneath the minister. I will say that.

But look, the numbers tell us a very different story, because while the Premier stands here and he holds the line for his Minister of Labour, handing out millions to his buddies like the Paris groom and the strip club owner, workers are the ones that are falling through the cracks. People out there are finding life more expensive every single day under your government. We now have 20,600 fewer jobs in the manufacturing sector alone, according to the Financial Accountability Office, Speaker—manufacturing, a sector that used to be at the very heart of our economy.

Fewer opportunities, more uncertainty: That is all that this government has to offer to workers in this province.

Does the Premier honestly think that his pay-to-play scheme is going to fix his jobs disaster?

**The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly):** I recognize the member for Bay of Quinte.

**Mr. Tyler Allsopp:** Thank you to the Leader of the Opposition for the question. Let's get this straight: When our government came into office in 2018, there were 100,000 auto jobs that were hanging in the balance, after the 300,000 manufacturing jobs that left under the previous government. We now have 800,000 jobs in this province in manufacturing, up 24,000 in the last four months alone. We have more manufacturing jobs than Florida and New York, and are third in all of North America only to California and Texas.

We continue to be a manufacturing powerhouse, and we will continue to create good jobs and great opportunities for all the people in Ontario. And we will take no lessons from the NDP.

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

**Ms. Marit Stiles:** There they go again, Speaker, patting themselves on the back while—

*Interjections.*

**Ms. Marit Stiles:** "Patting themselves on the back"—you like that? Yes, they really like it. They really like to applaud themselves while people are seeing their hard-earned dollars flowing out of this government and into the pockets of the strip club owners of your friends and your campaign managers, and it's disgusting.

This year we are seeing—again, I want to remind the member: Go read the reports. We are seeing the first back-to-back quarterly job losses since 2009. Just in the past six months, we've lost almost 40,000 jobs. I talked to the workers in Brampton, in Ingersoll, in Windsor, in Oshawa, all across this province, in Sault Ste Marie. This government is a jobs disaster.

When will the Premier stand up for workers and fire his Minister of Labour?

**Mr. Tyler Allsopp:** Thank you to the Leader of the Opposition for the question. This government has worked tirelessly to create the conditions for businesses to thrive. We've cut the cost of doing business in Ontario by over \$12 billion a year. Through our red tape reduction measures, we've saved businesses over 1.8 million hours and \$1.2 billion a year.

That has led to the top foreign direct investment in the entire country, creating over 90,000 jobs through FDI between 2018 and 2023. That's to say nothing about the \$40 billion that we brought in just last year for 409 international companies, creating 23,711 jobs. We are continuing to drive innovation, growth and job creation across this province, and, once again, we will do that without the help of the opposition.

#### GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

**Mr. John Fraser:** My question is for the President of the Treasury Board. I've asked maybe a dozen times now about why Keel Digital Solutions continued to receive tens

of millions of dollars while they were under a forensic audit that's now been forwarded to the OPP for investigation. We still haven't gotten a response, but it's bigger than Keel. There's a bigger, broader question about the Skills Development Fund.

**1050**

Through you, Speaker, to the President of the Treasury Board: What is the reason that the President of the Treasury Board refuses to take broader action in investigating the rot that is the Skills Development Fund?

**The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly):** Government House leader.

**Hon. Steve Clark:** Speaker, through you to the honourable member: I just want to take the member back. He has asked these questions over and over again.

We've been very, very clear in this House about the path forward. The government outlined that in 2023 we had a routine audit that raised concerns about this external service provider. The process that the government went forward with identified irregularities that ultimately led to a very comprehensive forensic audit on the organization that's in question.

The results of the audit, which the government received on November 5, recommended that the matter be referred to the Ontario Provincial Police. My colleague the Minister of Colleges, Universities, Research Excellence and Security has said repeatedly in this House that within 24 hours of receiving that forensic report, the referral was made.

So the member can continue to grandstand. I know he's the perennial leader of the opposition, and they're going through a bit of a thing with their—

**The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly):** Supplementary?

**Mr. John Fraser:** The government House leader missed the point. The clock started when that routine audit ended and it was identified, and you continued to send millions and millions of dollars. Why did that happen? You can't run a business that way; you would go bankrupt.

We know that the Auditor General's report on the Skills Development Fund said it wasn't fair, transparent or accountable and that there was a perception of bias, and that it was hard to get any information about the fund. We also know that the lowest-scoring proposals got the most amount of money. That just doesn't make any sense. How does that happen?

It doesn't make any sense, right? There's a process: There's a problem; you identify it; you stop sending money; you stop doing business with somebody that you don't trust—unless someone else is interfering.

So my question is, why has the President of the Treasury Board not undertaken further audits into Keel Digital Solutions or all the other low-scoring proposals—

**The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly):** Minister of Labour.

**Hon. David Piccini:** Speaker, you can't, on one hand, say there's no process and then, on the other hand, point to actual forensic audits done and acting promptly on those forensic audits. We have those processes in place for a reason.

When that member talks about investing in programs, be clear to the members of OPFFA who are here today—we invest in their training, ground survival training, Speaker. I visited them yesterday, and many members will have a chance to speak to them today. These are the government priorities we're advancing.

Let's be very clear when we're referencing these funds. All dollars go to training: to training our professional firefighters and to training our men and women in the construction sectors. These are the priorities of government that we are advancing, and we're proud to stand with those workers and invest in the incredible training that they do.

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

**Mr. John Fraser:** The minister conveniently forgot to mention that the company that was under forensic audit is the company that he intervened on behalf of, a low-scoring proposal, because he was friends with the lobbyist. So I don't think I'd be crowing about accounting and auditing if I were you. That's a big mistake, Minister. I'm not sure if it was a mistake.

**The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly):** Through the Speaker.

**Mr. John Fraser:** So \$27 million to bars and night-clubs in downtown Toronto; \$10 million to the owner of a strip club. Low-scoring proposals—all went to an insider, a lobbyist friend, a donor, an endorser. It doesn't make any sense.

No one is protecting the taxpayer dollar over there. I can see in their faces, all of them. I can see it in their faces. How do you go and explain this to someone back in your constituency?

Why won't the President of the Treasury Board take responsibility and get to the bottom of the rot that's the Skills Development Fund?

**Hon. David Piccini:** Again, Speaker, we're talking about programs that are investing in the people of Ontario—investing in those plans.

When the pandemic hit and we needed a plan to support workers, it's this government that stepped up. After every successive round, we've made improvements to the program. We've had independent officers analyze this program. We've accepted those recommendations and are moving forward to strengthen that program.

But when he stands up against these programs—I support the independent audits; they're not done by us but by independent officers—he's standing against the men and women of our fire services who are getting trained, thanks to the Skills Development Fund, and the men and women in our construction sector in every corner of the province.

Last night they passed Bill 30 on voice vote. So on one hand they stand here and complain; on the other hand they quietly actually support this, because they can't even name a single union they visited that doesn't support the Skills Development Fund and the incredible work we're doing to train the next generation of workers.

## GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

**The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly):** I recognize the leader of the third party.

**Mr. John Fraser:** Maybe the minister didn't hear the first time around. The company in the forensic audit is the one that he intervened on behalf of while they were under a forensic audit because his friend was the lobbyist. Also, he was hanging around with the director of the company at a hockey game. So I'm not sure he should be standing up here and crowing about his record, because how do you explain to people who are trying to put food on the table, who are trying to get clothes for their kids, pay the rent—how do you go back home and explain to them, "I intervened to give \$7 million to a company because my friend was the lobbyist and I overrode the low-scoring proposals"?

How do you explain that to people? And how does the President of the Treasury Board not get to the bottom of the rot, the absolute, total rot the Skills Development Fund is?

**The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly):** Government House leader.

**Hon. Steve Clark:** Again, Speaker, over and over and over again the member asks the same question. The path was crystal clear by the government on this file. You have the routine audit that took place two years ago, which led to the ultimate forensic audit.

I'm speaking today on behalf of the Minister of Colleges, Universities, Research Excellence and Security: Within 24 hours of getting that forensic audit, the audit is passed along to the OPP under the investigation. The minister has said over and over and over again that all payments associated with this provider are currently under review and further actions will be taken by our government based on the outcome.

We're not going to comment any further on the OPP investigation. But let's face facts: The member is going to continue to ask the questions. The path forward has been brought to you many, many times.

**The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly):** Leader of the third party.

**Mr. John Fraser:** The House leader's answer is a day late and a dollar short—well actually, millions of dollars short.

There are 200,000 young people looking for work in this province, looking for a start, and this government has let the college system wither—their college system, their opportunity—and fired 10,000 workers, at the same time shovelling tens of millions of dollars out the door to donors, insiders, friends, lobbyists, whoever has got a connection.

How does the President of the Treasury Board explain that to the young people that are in the gallery right now, why their colleges are being allowed to wither while friends, insiders, lobbyists are all being taken care of? How does the President of the Treasury Board explain that?

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

**Mr. Lorne Coe:** Funding for Ontario's publicly assisted colleges and universities has never been higher in our province's history. Under the leadership of Premier Ford, this government is making the strategic investments to ensure Ontario's institutions get students into rewarding careers that address the province's current and future labour market needs.

Through budget 2025, we announced nearly \$1 billion in targeted investment to expand enrolment and critical labour market programs. This is all new funding, on top of the \$1.3-billion investment in Ontario's post-secondary last year and in addition to over \$5 billion in operating funding we contribute annually so that Ontario institutions can continue to deliver for our students.

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

**Mr. John Fraser:** Some \$10 million to a strip club owner: Can you explain that to the students, somebody over there? President of the Treasury Board? Some \$27 million to bars and nightclubs: Can you explain that? Millions of dollars to a law firm—the principal is a Conservative appointee. Millions and millions of dollars shoveled out the door to friends and donors and insiders—it's just gross. While the college system withers and people lose opportunity, these guys are feathering their friends' nests. It's wrong. The President of the Treasury Board has a responsibility to look after the people's money, and she's not.

Why is the President of the Treasury Board refusing to get to the bottom of the Skills Development Fund and the stinking, rotting mass that it is?

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

**Mr. Lorne Coe:** We know our colleges and universities build Ontario's workforce for generations to come. That is why in the last 19 months we provided \$2 billion in new funding to support our colleges and universities. We're taking a comprehensive approach with the sector to strategically invest in critical areas that will benefit Ontario students and our economy.

The people of Ontario elected us because they know it is this government who will make fiscally responsible decisions, and it is this government that will maintain Ontario's reputation of having a world-class post-secondary system while building the workforce our province needs to succeed.

#### CHILD CARE

**MPP Alexa Gilmour:** Speaker, women make up 75% of Ontario's community public service workforce, the very workers who hold up the care economy. But instead of investing in the jobs, in the services that women count on, after eight years of Conservative government, funding for social services has fallen 16%, and the FOA says that the government is going to be short, get this, \$7 billion just

to maintain—just to maintain—the basic services. Meanwhile, workers, mostly women, are paid so little that they are struggling to feed their own families, even as they care for ours.

How can the Premier claim to support women's economic opportunity when his own cuts have pushed the care economy to the brink?

**The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly):** I recognize the Associate Minister of Women's Social and Economic Opportunity.

**Hon. Charmaine A. Williams:** I was elected in 2022. That's when we changed the name of the ministry from "women's issues" to "women's social and economic opportunity," because we know the driving factor that contributes to violence against women is economic instability. It only took four years for the members opposite to realize this, so thank you, I guess.

This is why we contributed \$1.4 billion to Ontario-STANDS, which is our strategy to address and end violence against women. The last pillar that anchors the strategy is "promote economic security." This is why we've invested over \$41 million in 58 organizations across the province to ensure that women have training and wraparound supports so that they can complete their training and get jobs in the trades, in high-growth sectors, in any sector that they want to.

Madam Speaker, we will do everything that we can—

**The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly):** Back to the member for Parkdale–High Park.

**MPP Alexa Gilmour:** It seems that the FAO is telling this minister that she has been failing at her job.

Women make up 96% of the child care workforce, and child care is that lifeline that allows mothers to work, to study, to rebuild their lives, especially those fleeing violence, yet the fees are still \$19 a day, the spaces are scarce and the sector is short 10,000 RECEs because wages are so low that the workers cannot stay.

Will this government finally deliver affordable, accessible child care with a real workforce strategy, or will it continue to hold back the very women our economy depends on?

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

**Hon. Charmaine A. Williams:** Madam Speaker, you know it was our government that made sure that women, or any worker who is in child care, can ladder up to make sure they become registered ECEs so they can earn higher paycheques and contribute even more to our society that we need. We know that women are important to our economy, which is why we are working hard to ensure our economy is strong. You cannot have a strong economy when you don't have healthy workers.

That's why we invest heavily to get women into the trades, women I met, like Sarah, who came from doing nothing to getting into our Women's Economic Security Program and is now a carpenter. That was through a program in Burlington.

It is programs like these that are making sure that women have opportunities, which is why we call our ministry



women's social and economic opportunities. We will always work hard to ensure that Ontario is the best place for women to be able to get a job, earn an income—

**The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly):** Question?

#### GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

**Mrs. Karen McCrimmon:** The Ontario internal audit division within the Treasury Board Secretariat has the mandate to provide independence, assurance, advisory and forensic audit services aimed at evaluating and improving, among other things, whether the internal government controls over taxpayer money are working as intended.

We've seen example after example in the Skills Development Fund of millions and millions of dollars given to low-scoring applicants, insiders, donors, strip club owners, and now, a company undergoing a forensic audit.

How does the President of the Treasury Board think the people of Ontario will interpret her refusal to stand in this House and explain the action—or inaction—of her department? How is it she is not worried that people will assume that her government—

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

**Hon. Steve Clark:** You know, Speaker, I just can't understand. This is a very open and transparent process that has been outlined many, many times in this House. The minister has talked about the audits that take place routinely on government programs. He has also indicated in this House that, based on the Auditor General's recommendations, we'll be implementing those recommendations.

Again, to continue to target one of the ministers that—we've outlined very clearly in this House how this happened: A routine audit in 2023 led to a forensic audit, and 24 hours after that audit was received on November 5, it was forwarded to the Ontario Provincial Police.

I don't know whether I've got to do instant Hansard and send it over to the members, but the process has been very, very clear. We'll continue to stand up and move those processes forward. The member can continue to try—

**The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly):** Member for Kanata—Carleton.

**Mrs. Karen McCrimmon:** Speaker, of course the question has to go to the President of the Treasury Board. It is the responsibility of the President of the Treasury Board, and I'm puzzled why, over the past few days, she has specifically chosen not to answer these questions.

We've seen the Minister of Labour try to defend his actions through misdirection, wild excuses and, I would say, a certain pride in taking care of his friends with taxpayer money.

Now, back to the President of the Treasury Board: How is it that she doesn't seem to care that people will either think that she is incompetent or that her government has something to hide?

**Hon. Steve Clark:** Come on, Speaker. Come on. The President of the Treasury Board is one of the most accomplished ministers in our government, and I take great offence, through you, Speaker, to that member that you

even question her competency as a minister. Shame on you. Shame on you. Shame on you.

*Interjections.*

**The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly):** Order. Order. The member for Ajax will come to order. I'm going to start warning people.

Continue.

**Hon. Steve Clark:** Do you know what's important for our government? The fact that we're facing unprecedented economic times. We need Ontario skilled workers to deliver on our \$200-billion infrastructure program. We need skilled workers for our unprecedented energy program. Again, to highlight a process that we've answered numerous times and then to defame one of our most competent members? Shame on the Liberal Party—

**The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly):** Question?

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#### AGRICULTURE INDUSTRY

**Mr. Joseph Racinsky:** My question is for the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness. Ontario farmers feed our province and drive our economy. They put fresh food on our tables. They support towns and families across Ontario. They work long hours, face high costs and deal with risks that most people never see.

Two weeks ago, at the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair, our government heard one message again and again: Farmers are worried about what is coming next. They see rising global pressure. They hear the threats Donald Trump keeps making. They know new tariffs or trade fights could hit their crops, their herds, their income and their future.

Can the minister explain how our government is protecting Ontario's agriculture sector from these growing economic threats?

**Hon. Trevor Jones:** Good morning, Speaker, and thank you to the hard-working member from Wellington—Halton Hills. This gentleman knows where his food comes from.

And he's right, Madam Speaker. Against the backdrop of our beautiful Royal Agricultural Winter Fair, I had the privilege of hosting thought leaders from academia, agriculture, farms, commodity groups, to distill and find ways to invest better and do more with innovation and research to benefit our farmers and food producers.

Farmers do feed cities. But with farmers being concerned about tariffs, what I've heard from those thought leaders was potential—limitless potential and massive upsides. Just last month, I had the privilege of announcing \$41 million in agricultural research and innovation for our farmers and food producers. Our government will continue to listen to and learn from our food producers to protect Ontario and protect Ontario's food supply.

**The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly):** Back to the member for Wellington—Halton Hills.

**Mr. Joseph Racinsky:** Thank you to the minister for his answer and his strong leadership.

Speaker, our farmers are clear. They want stability, they want safe markets and they want our government to con-

tinue to stand with them when outside forces put their work at risk. At the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair, our government spoke with growers, ranchers and young farmers. They told us they were worried about economic threats from Donald Trump. They know one tariff can wipe out a season. They know how trade fights can hurt small farmers the most. They want to see continued strong support and strong action by our government.

Can the minister share how our government is helping farmers remain economically strong and competitive as these threats grow?

**Hon. Trevor Jones:** Thank you again for the question. Our two-way trade in food and agri-products between Canada and the US is \$45 billion, so US tariffs threaten our farmers and American farmers. They threaten our consumers and American consumers—both sides of the border. This is precisely why my colleague and former Minister of Agriculture announced \$100 million to shore up our business risk management programs to \$250 million annually. Whether it's through research, innovation or shoring up our insurance programs, our government has the backs of farmers, even in turbulent times.

We'll always protect Ontario farmers. We'll always protect Ontario. And we know where our food comes from. Thank a farmer if you ate today.

#### EMPLOYMENT

**Mr. Chris Glover:** Last week I was at a food bank, and the lineup was around the block. One in 10 Ontarians is now reliant on a food bank; one in three are there because they lost their jobs. Bell Canada recently laid off 700 employees. This Conservative government cut 10,000 jobs from our public colleges, and Ontario's manufacturing jobs are at the lowest level since 1976.

But instead of helping workers get jobs, this government has spent 2.3 billion taxpayer dollars on the Skills Development Fund, and they aren't even tracking whether there are any jobs being created at all. While Ontario workers are getting pink slips and lining up at food banks, why is this government spending 2.3 billion taxpayer dollars with no evidence that it's helping anyone but their donors?

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

**Hon. David Piccini:** That's simply incorrect. As I've said before, over 100,000 people find employment within 60 days or less. We've also integrated our centralized employment management service tracking outcome six, nine, 12 months out, tracking SIN numbers so that we could track long-term employment.

It's also not just employment; it's about retention as well. For example, there's the incredible training we're doing with firefighters to support health and safety, also driving our retention for first responders, who are running into danger while we run from it.

It's also about breaking down barriers, as you heard from my caucus colleague earlier, for women entering employment. The construction sector—this is a party that

doesn't support construction, doesn't support the men and women in our union training halls who are landing better jobs working on things like Highway 413 and the Bradford Bypass. These are tangible projects that are putting men and women to work.

The 18,000 jobs for SMRs alone—again, they don't support those things. These are putting men and women to work in our community—

**The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly):** Spadina–Fort York.

**Mr. Chris Glover:** The government uses words like “creating opportunities” and “retention,” but if you don't have any data, then you have no evidence that you've gotten anything or Ontarians have benefited at all from the 2.3 billion taxpayer dollars in this slush fund.

Ontario has now the second-highest unemployment rate of any province in Canada, and instead of creating jobs, this Premier gave 100 million taxpayer dollars to clients of the Premier's campaign manager. If this government is so confident that giving 100 million taxpayer dollars to the Premier's campaign manager creates real, permanent jobs, will they stop hiding the data and publish today the list of every funded project, every employer and the number of actual full-time jobs created?

**Hon. David Piccini:** Let's talk about real stats that this training is supporting—again, a 33% increase in registered training agreements among cement workers. That member doesn't know what a registered training agreement is, so I'll explain it to him. That's when an employer signs on an apprentice. They're getting paid while they are learning. Those are real jobs, real training opportunities—a 25% increase in heat and frost insulators; a 64% increase in pressure system welders.

A 14% increase in registered training agreements for network cabling specialists: In my community, we've delivered a \$40-million project that's supporting driving fibre, connecting it to homes so that rural Ontario businesses can connect and drive sales for their business. Guess what? It's men and women—network cabling specialists, among others—who helped get that job done. They're signing registered training agreements, thanks to training this government is investing in. That's leading to real jobs. Those are real stats, real jobs.

#### GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

**Ms. Stephanie Bowman:** The internal audit department for the government is in Treasury Board. Treasury Board is supposed to provide “services that support ... prudent financial and risk management, transparency, accountability ... and helps to ensure value for money in government spending.”

We know a routine audit of Keel Digital Solutions done by Treasury Board's internal audit function found irregularities in 2023. In any well-run organization, the executive committee—here, the cabinet—would be informed the minute irregularities were found. Every minister, including the labour minister, should have been alerted. If they weren't, the Treasury Board failed in its duty.

Through you, Speaker, to the President of the Treasury Board: When did she inform cabinet of the irregularities uncovered during the Keel Digital Solutions routine audit?

**The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly):** Government House leader.

**Hon. Steve Clark:** Speaker, I don't know how many times the government has to outline the process for the opposition. Obviously, they've got some track that they're on that no one understands but them. Let's talk about what's important—I outlined it a previous question to one of the third party members—the importance of skills training.

There's no better way to show that the Liberals have lost their way than to talk about the Ontario Professional Fire Fighters Association—Speaker, through you to the members that are here today. The minister earlier today talked about the great partnership that our government has in skills development with our firefighters. I can remember a time when I was in this House in the early days, when it was that party that worked closely with them. That just shows you how far Liberals have lost their way, when they vilify skills training contracts that we've done, when they vilify the President of the Treasury Board and they—

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

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**Ms. Stephanie Bowman:** Speaker, it's clear: The Treasury Board president does not want to talk about the Skills Development Fund. Why? Because she cannot defend the indefensible. The Skills Development Fund house of cards is about to come crashing down, and she doesn't want to be anywhere near it.

Any experienced auditor would have done two things when irregularities showed up: They would make sure all taxpayer money to Keel Digital Solutions stopped flowing—that didn't happen—and they would audit every program the government has with Keel, including the \$7.5 million they got from the Skills Development Fund. That's the only acceptable course of action.

My question to the President of the Treasury Board: Will she commit to auditing every dollar of taxpayer money that this government gave to Keel Digital Solutions and telling the people of Ontario if they really got value for money?

**Hon. Steve Clark:** Through you, Speaker: The third party is fixated on the President of the Treasury Board, and do you know why? It's because the Minister of Colleges, Universities, Research Excellence and Security has consistently answered their questions. The minister has stood in his place and answered when the audit took place, when the forensic audit was returned, and when he referred the audit to the Ontario Provincial Police. Both ministers have indicated in this House what has happened with the applicants' funds since then. It has been crystal clear to everyone in this House but the third party, on the path forward.

I just find it very interesting, on a day when I'm accepting questions for the Minister of Colleges and Universities, that all of a sudden every question is dealing with the President of the Treasury Board.

We've answered the questions—asked and answered.

## AGRICULTURE AND FOOD PROCESSING INDUSTRIES

**Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady:** My question is for the Premier. We have witnessed this government condone the expropriation and development of farmland over the past few years. If this is a government best practice, then I suggest we keep it in the ag family and begin investing in ag food processing.

Speaker, \$670 million to a Norwegian company, \$424 million to Umicore—the Parliamentary Budget Officer estimates total provincial contributions for EV projects in Canada to be about \$21.1 billion, most of that coming right here from Ontario.

Yesterday, Stellantis, a company this government upholds with immense amounts of taxpayer dollars, couldn't even be bothered to show up and meet with MPs. Do you know who always shows up? Our farmers and ag organizations.

And talking about a \$100-million boost to our RMP two days before this provincial election in 2025 is absolutely rich, when farmers had been begging for that for years.

Speaker, when will the Premier protect and tariff-proof Ontario by strengthening local food systems through farmland protection and increased domestic processing?

**The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly):** The Minister of Agriculture.

**Hon. Trevor Jones:** Thank you for the question about protecting farmers, protecting food supply systems, and protecting farmland.

Last evening—the member may not know—I stood proudly in front of over 700 delegates from the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, highlighting the fact that one in nine jobs, mine included, are in food and food care. We talked about soil health. We talked about the balanced approach this government is taking for protecting land.

Now, just outside the GTA, but all of Ontario, has an agriculture impact assessment done when there's any land use change whatsoever—so protecting farmers, food systems; investing, like I just mentioned earlier, \$41 million in research and innovation to make sure Canada remains and Ontario remains the leader in global food production.

**Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady:** As a farm girl, I appreciate a good word salad.

R&D funding is an essential part of our agri-food sector but is not food processing, no matter how you try to spin it.

Look south of the border, where Ontario's investments pale in comparison to those being made in several states. Our neighbours have prioritized strengthening food systems across every segment of the food supply chain, from farm to fork—and, yes, there is the significant support from the feds.

I say to the minister opposite, it's time to multitask and lean on the federal government but also take the time to take the lead and set the example right here in Ontario. Because agriculture is not subject to the boom and bust

that other industries are subjected to doesn't mean it should be an afterthought. I'll remind members: no mention of this in the fall economic statement, and I'm hoping things will change at budget time.

Speaker, to the Premier once again: Will this government develop a long-term strategy for ag-food processing in Ontario?

**Hon. Trevor Jones:** We've made record investments. Maybe \$100 million is trifling to the member opposite, but \$100 million came from the very people who inform us. So farm girls, farm boys, professional farmers and researchers came together to inform this Premier, who picks up his phone when he's called—and this minister who picks up his phone when he's called upon—to listen to the people that inform us.

Those investments aren't trifling; those investments are real. Provincial policy statements with land use planning are real things, too. We're taking farmers' input and researchers' input into consideration, developing good policy, making strategic investments in research and innovation.

I invite the member opposite to check out Agricultural Research and Innovation Ontario to find out all the good things we're doing, to make sure we grow all the good things that continue to grow in Ontario.

#### RED TAPE REDUCTION

**Hon. Ernie Hardeman:** My question is to the Minister of Red Tape Reduction. With growing tariff threats from Donald Trump and global uncertainty affecting our supply chains, people want to know their governments are working on their behalf now, not later.

Ontario families and businesses want stability, faster services and a system that supports growth instead of slowing it down. That's exactly why cutting red tape matters. It keeps costs down, removes delays and gives businesses the certainty they need during unpredictable times. Our government must continue to take decisive action and protect Ontarians' competitive advantage by removing regulatory burden.

Speaker, can the minister explain how our government's work to reduce red tape is protecting Ontarians' position in a time of rising economic pressures?

**The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly):** Minister of Red Tape Reduction.

**Hon. Andrea Khanjin:** Like many people in our government, I would not be here without the great constituents of Barrie-Innisfil that I represent. Today, in the gallery, I am pleased to welcome Mike Arnold and Steve Bly from the Ontario Professional Fire Fighters Association, who serve so bravely for our local community.

It's the local community that inspires me every day to reduce and cut red tape with my colleagues here in our government. It's the farmers I represent in my riding of Barrie-Innisfil. When I drive home after serving here in this Legislature, I pass farms like Horodinsky Farms, where we can get our local onions; EFT Farms, where I can get local produce; and also Tony's Produce. I can go

past Innisfil Creek Honey and get some honey just on 10th Sideroad.

This is the lifeblood of our communities where, for far too long, our farmers were mired in red tape. This is why we reduced red tape by digitalizing the agricultural licensing process, saving those farmers over 1,200 hours every year, and we're not going to stop, so that the farmers can do their great work.

**The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly):** Member for Oxford.

**Hon. Ernie Hardeman:** Thank you to the minister for the response. People remember what it was like before 2018: slow services, endless delays and rules that blocked progress instead of supporting it. Business struggled and workers paid the price. Today, we're taking a different approach. We're making government work better for people and smarter for business. We're clearing outdated barriers. We're helping people get ahead, especially now with economic risks like US tariffs putting pressure on jobs and industries.

Speaker, can the minister share how our red tape reduction work is protecting workers, supporting families and helping Ontario stay competitive in this environment?

**Hon. Andrea Khanjin:** Again, as a team approach, we're putting people before paperwork so farmers can spend more time on their crops, feeding our cities and supporting our farmers' markets. Again, it's this government that's saving them 1,200 hours every year in burden, something that the opposition did not support. That's time farmers can spend growing their crops and driving our economy, especially when we're talking about protecting Ontario's food supply chain.

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We're strengthening our economy. We're making the investments. Under the previous governments, farmers were stuck in red tape. They were being taxed. We inherited a system that punished ambition instead of replacing it with rewarding ambition, Speaker. It's under our government that we're changing the rules that were inherited—lots of red tape from the opposition—and we're putting our people first. We're building the province of tomorrow. We're growing the province of Ontario, and we're going to support our farmers and workers every step of the way.

#### COST OF LIVING

**MPP Wayne Gates:** My question is to the Premier. A recent poll in Niagara found that nine out of 10 residents are worried about the next generation's ability to buy a home; 70% of renters in Niagara have given up hope of being able to afford a home.

This year had the lowest number of housing starts in Ontario since 2009. In Niagara, wait-lists for affordable housing are up to 21 years, yet the Premier attacked renters through Bill 60 instead of addressing the crisis.

When will the Premier act on the housing affordability crisis, pass real rent control and get government back in the business of building affordable housing for our young people?

**The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly):** The Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

**Hon. Rob Flack:** Thank you for that question, Speaker. The one bright light in the housing continuum—and we know we have a housing crisis in this province—is rental starts: 17,000 new starts this year, up over last year; 51,000 new starts in the last three years.

And I want to point out—protections for renters are there before Bill 60, there after Bill 60. Why? We doubled the adjudicators from 40 to 80. We added \$25 million to the administration of the Landlord and Tenant Board to ensure that we have a fast process. We've reduced the backlog by 80%, and we've got great policies in place to protect our renters.

Speaker, there is a housing crisis, and it's taking too long and costing too much to get housing built. That is why, through Bill 17 and Bill 60, we are creating the conditions to get more homes built faster and better.

**The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly):** Supplementary?

**MPP Wayne Gates:** I'll just repeat this line: This year is the lowest number of housing starts in the province of Ontario since 2009.

Back to the Premier: The same poll in Niagara found that three out of four residents are frustrated with the lack of progress on affordability. The demand for food banks has never been higher. Project SHARE in Niagara Falls serves one in seven of Niagara's residents. Think about that: One in seven people need a food bank just to get by in the province of Ontario.

The Premier has been in charge for nearly eight years, and the affordability crisis has gotten much worse. When will the Premier commit today to finally taking on price gouging by corporate grocery chains?

**Hon. Rob Flack:** Speaker, I think we all know that there's a housing crisis in this province; we don't need to be told that. We're creating the conditions to make a change.

When it comes to grocery prices, I will echo the words of our Minister of Agriculture that we are doing everything we can in our power, again, to create the environment to get more food processing put in place in this province, protect our farmers and get prices down.

When it comes to affordability, what we are doing in this province is creating the conditions. We don't build the housing. We understand we need more built. Why? Because we've got higher development charges. Because taxes are too high. We don't build the housing; builders do. Municipalities need to lower the cost, lower the time it takes to get housing built. We're going to get that job done.

We're seeing good progress. In the rental market alone, as he points out, 17,000 new starts over last year, up 38%. We're on the right path. It's a difficult path. We will prevail.

#### SERVICES FOR PERSONS WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

**Mr. Jonathan Tsao:** My question is to the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services. While this gov-

ernment continues to shovel out the SDF cash to friends and families, this government also continues to starve developmental services in Ontario.

Central West Specialized Developmental Services recently forced adults with developmental disabilities out of their group homes and into a single Oakville facility without their consent. Since then, families report a rapid decline in care, and they say their loved ones' safety and well-being are now at serious risk. Disability rights advocates have called it "unconscionable," and families have received almost no information from management or the board, yet the government says it won't get involved.

Speaker, this government funds this agency. It sets its quality standards. How can they justify staying out of this when vulnerable adults are moved without their consent and put at risk?

**Hon. Michael Parsa:** I thank my honourable colleague for the important question. Speaker, our government believes that every Ontarian with developmental disabilities deserves to live with dignity, with respect, in a setting that supports their individual needs.

Madam Speaker, while my honourable colleague knows that collective bargaining is between the employer and the union, as government, of course, we urge both parties to reach a deal to be able to provide those supports as quickly as possible. That is what our message is to both parties.

But when it comes to the developmental services sector, we have invested, this year alone, \$3.7 billion in the sector. To put that in perspective, that is more than \$1.4 billion since we formed government in 2018, Madam Speaker.

Supportive housing has increased: \$2.4 billion in supportive housing, an increase of—

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

**Mr. Jonathan Tsao:** Speaker, the minister's answer was about process. This is a question about people.

In the gallery this morning is Shannon Beddoe, whose brother Chris was moved to the Oakville facility without his consent. He is now living in a converted storage closet. Shannon has reached out to the minister's office on October 27 and has not even received a reply, so let me read to the House a passage from Shannon's letter:

"To watch this happen, as a sister, is devastating. To go from (his 'true bedroom at his true home') to a windowless room with nothing but a cardboard box by his bed is a denial of his humanity. I am fearful he is starting to internalize the message. I am fearful that he will wonder if maybe ... he is of lesser worth, and he doesn't deserve better than this."

So Speaker, I will ask the minister for three things: (1) Will you order an urgent compliance inspection of CWSDS, (2) report the inspection findings and corrective actions to the families, and (3) convene talks with the employers and the union so Ontarians with disabilities are not used as pawns in a labour dispute?

**Hon. Michael Parsa:** Madam Speaker, as a government and certainly as a minister, I require every agency to have strong contingency plans in place to make sure every

individual who is receiving services and supports through that organization receives the best care possible. And as I mentioned, Madam Speaker, we have invested more than \$3.7 billion in the sector to make sure that they receive those quality services.

It wasn't long ago, under the previous government—the Liberal government that the member is a part of—that they failed the people of this province. Families were languishing on wait-lists. They had no access to any support.

It was our government that stepped in and said, “Time for talk is over; now it's time for action.” It's why we hold providers accountable. It's why we put families first. It's why we put individuals first. I won't take any lessons from the Liberals, certainly, when it comes to protecting the most vulnerable in this province—

*Interjections.*

**The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly):** Order. Order.

*Interjection.*

**The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly):** The leader of the third party will come to order. I will start warning people.

#### MEMBER'S BIRTHDAY

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

**Hon. Steve Clark:** Thanks, Speaker. I want to take this opportunity to wish my seatmate, the Minister of Energy and Mines, a very happy birthday.

#### NOTICES OF DISSATISFACTION

**The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly):** Pursuant to standing order 36(a), the member for Ottawa South has given a notice of dissatisfaction with the answer to his question given by the parliamentary assistant to the Premier regarding the Skills Development Fund. This matter will be debated today, following private members' public business.

Pursuant to standing order 36(a), the member for Don Valley West has given a notice of dissatisfaction with the answer to the question given by the parliamentary assistant to the Premier regarding audits done by the Treasury Board. This matter will be debated today following private members' public business.

#### DEFERRED VOTES

#### REMEMBRANCE DAY OBSERVANCE ACT, 2025

#### LOI DE 2025 SUR L'OBSERVATION DU JOUR DU SOUVENIR

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

Bill 65, An Act to amend the Remembrance Day and Veterans' Week Act, 2024 with respect to schools and workplaces / Projet de loi 65, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2024

sur la Semaine du jour du Souvenir et des anciens combattants au sujet des écoles et des lieux de travail.

**The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly):** Call in the members. This is a five-minute bell.

*The division bells rang from 1140 to 1145.*

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

On November 25, 2025, MPP Stevens moved second reading of Bill 65, An Act to amend the Remembrance Day and Veterans' Week Act, 2024 with respect to schools and workplaces.

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

#### Ayes

Armstrong, Teresa J.	Gélinas, France	Schreiner, Mike
Bell, Jessica	Gilmour, Alexa	Shaw, Sandy
Bourgoin, Guy	Glover, Chris	Stevens, Jennifer (Jennie)
Brady, Bobbi Ann	Gretzky, Lisa	Stiles, Marit
Burch, Jeff	Kernaghan, Terence	Tabuns, Peter
Clancy, Aislinn	Mamakwa, Sol	Vaugois, Lise
Fife, Catherine	McKenney, Catherine	West, Jamie
French, Jennifer K.	Pasma, Chandra	Wong-Tam, Kristyn
Gates, Wayne	Sattler, Peggy	

**The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly):** All those opposed, please rise and remain standing until recognized by the Clerk.

#### Nays

Allsopp, Tyler	Gallagher Murphy, Dawn	Rae, Matthew
Anand, Deepak	Grewal, Hardeep Singh	Rickford, Greg
Babikian, Aris	Gualtieri, Silvia	Riddell, Brian
Bailey, Robert	Hamid, Zee	Rosenberg, Bill
Bouma, Will	Hardeman, Ernie	Sabawy, Sheref
Bresee, Ric	Holland, Kevin	Sandhu, Amarjot
Calandra, Paul	Jones, Trevor	Sarkaria, Prabmeet Singh
Cho, Raymond Sung Joon	Kanapathi, Logan	Sarrazin, Stéphane
Cho, Stan	Kerzner, Michael S.	Saunderson, Brian
Ciriello, Monica	Khanjin, Andrea	Scott, Laurie
Clark, Steve	Kusendova-Bashta, Natalia	Smith, Dave
Coe, Lorne	Leardi, Anthony	Smith, David
Cooper, Michelle	Lecce, Stephen	Smith, Graydon
Crawford, Stephen	Lumsden, Neil	Smith, Laura
Cuzzetto, Rudy	McCarthy, Todd J.	Tangri, Nina
Darouze, George	McGregor, Graham	Thanigasalam, Vijay
Denault, Billy	Oosterhoff, Sam	Thompson, Lisa M.
Dixon, Jess	Pang, Billy	Tibollo, Michael A.
Dowie, Andrew	Parsa, Michael	Vickers, Paul
Downey, Doug	Piccini, David	Wai, Daisy
Dunlop, Jill	Pierre, Natalie	Williams, Charmaine A.
Firin, Mohamed	Pirie, George	
Flack, Rob	Racinsky, Joseph	

**The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Trevor Day):** The ayes are 26; the nays are 67.

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

*Second reading negatived.*

**The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly):** There being no further business, this House stands in recess until 1 o'clock.

*The House recessed from 1149 to 1300.*

## INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

**Mr. Logan Kanapathi:** My visitors are not here yet at the gallery but I'd like to introduce them. They are going to be here very soon.

Today, I would like to welcome my family members, my sisters-in-law, from the amazing country of Switzerland: Kamaladevi Kanakanayagam and Sarathadevi Subramaniam. They are here to see their mother. Their mother has lived with me for 28 years. She is 92 years old. These are my wife's sisters, my sisters-in-law. Welcome to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

**Ms. Doly Begum:** My guests are just coming in, but I still wanted to take the opportunity to welcome Professor Merle Jacobs and the TAs Khandker Haque and Tareq Al Khalaf and all the York University students who are here today to visit the Legislature. Welcome to your House.

## INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

CHAD'S LAW  
(ENFORCING SAFER PASSING), 2025

LOI CHAD DE 2025  
(POUR DES DÉPASSEMENTS  
PLUS SÉCURITAIRES)

Mr. Bourgouin moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 79, An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act to prohibit passing on a highway painted with double solid yellow lines / Projet de loi 79, Loi modifiant le Code de la route en vue d'interdire les dépassements sur une voie publique avec une double ligne jaune continue.

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

*First reading agreed to.*

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

**Mr. Guy Bourgouin:** Section 148 of the Highway Traffic Act is amended to prohibit passing or attempting to pass another vehicle going in the same direction on a highway if doing so would require the crossing of double solid yellow lines painted on the roadway. Every person that contravenes this prohibition is guilty of an offence and if convicted, is liable for \$400 and three or more demerit points.

GENDER AFFIRMING HEALTH CARE  
ADVISORY COMMITTEE ACT, 2025

LOI DE 2025 SUR LE COMITÉ  
CONSULTATIF DES SOINS DE SANTÉ  
AXÉS SUR L'AFFIRMATION DE GENRE

MPP Wong-Tam moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 80, An Act to establish the Gender Affirming Health Care Advisory Committee / Projet de loi 80, Loi créant le

Comité consultatif des soins de santé axés sur l'affirmation de genre.

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

*First reading agreed to.*

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

**MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam:** I would, Madam Speaker. I just realized I gave over all my copies to the Clerk. I will run down and get it.

The bill is to enact the Gender Affirming Health Care Advisory Committee Act, 2025. The act provides that the Minister of Health shall, within 60 days of the act coming into force, establish a gender-affirming health care advisory committee. The advisory committee shall submit a report making recommendations to the minister for improving access to and coverage for gender-affirming health care. After receiving the advisory committee's report, the minister shall inform the assembly of the measures that the minister recommends to the government of Ontario, so that they may implement them.

## PETITIONS

### LONG-TERM CARE

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** This petition addresses gaps in safety for residents in long-term care. It's looking to address overall the safety, well-being, protection, respect and dignity of vulnerable seniors in Ontario's long-term-care homes. It's actually asking for accountability from the ministry, so that upon infractions and reports of abuse and/or neglect in long-term-care homes, these would, in fact, trigger a series of accountability measures.

Particularly, of course, when a resident's death notice is produced and there are questions around that resident's passing, reports from the board to the ministry will have to be addressed to both the coroner's office of Ontario and the Ministries of Long-Term Care and Health. This would automatically trigger the Ministry of Long-Term Care to submit a request that the coroner's office investigate and report.

All of us know that during the pandemic, thousands of seniors died. The RCMP officers who were in some of those homes experienced post-traumatic stress disorder based on what they saw in those homes. This petition is signed by folks from Woodstock, from Waterloo, from Kitchener, really hoping to build some accountability measures into how we're treating seniors when they are in long-term-care homes.

Of course, it has my full support. I will affix my signature and give the petition to Mila. Thank you very much.

### SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

**Ms. Doly Begum:** I see that my guests are here, so perfect timing. I just want to welcome professor Jacobs,

Mr. Haque, Mr. Tareq, and all the York University students who are here today. Welcome to your House.

I also want to thank Sally Palmer, who's been so active in giving us all these petitions. This petition is to raise social assistance rates. This has been an ongoing issue for a long time.

Speaker, as you very well know, social assistance rates are well below Canada's official Market Basket Measure poverty line and far from adequate to cover the rising cost of food, of rent: right now, \$733 for individuals on OW and \$1,368 for ODSP. There have been letters sent to the minister, as well as the Premier, and signed by 230 organizations that recommend that social assistance rates be doubled for both OW and ODSP.

This goes on to ask for a freeze on rates and to make sure that we're actually aligning with inflation, as well as for the government of Canada to recognize that there have been issues, especially post-COVID. A lot of people are facing significant struggles. That basic income program did not go well enough in terms of being sufficient for the standard of living. So the undersigned petitioners are asking the province of Ontario and the Legislative Assembly to double social assistance rates for OW and ODSP.

I fully support this petition. I will affix my signature to it and give it to page Luke to take it to the Clerks. Thank you very much, Speaker.

#### MUNICIPAL RESTRUCTURING

**Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady:** I have a petition before me from residents of the former municipalities of the town of Bothwell and Zone township. They are petitioning the Legislative Assembly to release them from Chatham-Kent and allow them to amalgamate as a new lower-tier municipality under the county of Lambton.

I will affix my name to the petition and send it to the Clerks' table with page Raj. Thank you.

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#### CONSUMER PROTECTION

**MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam:** I'm proud to rise in this House to present this petition. It is entitled, "Protect Ontario Consumers—Stop the Sale of ... Palestinian Land in Ontario."

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas real estate events are being held across Ontario to promote the sale of foreign real estate to Ontario consumers, which further illegal Israeli settlements on occupied Palestinian land;

"Whereas such activities are prohibited under international law and in violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention;

"Whereas these events are happening behind closed doors, with no transparency about who is selling this real estate, how it was obtained or the legal and financial risks Ontarians are being exposed to;

"Whereas these real estate sales violate the spirit of Ontario's Consumer Protection Act and raise serious concerns under international ... law;

"Whereas the government of Ontario has a responsibility to protect Ontario consumers from misinformation and illegal activity;"

The undersigned petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to do the following:

"—Immediately take action to protect Ontario consumers;

"—End the sale and expansion of illegal settlements—a recognized barrier to" long-standing "peace;

"—Ban the promotion and marketing of illegal and stolen property;

"—Require public disclosure of individuals, companies, governments and other entities promoting and profiting from the sale of illegal and stolen property;

"—Issue a province-wide warning about these real estate events under the Consumer Protection Act;

"—Hold those facilitating the sale of illegal and stolen property accountable;

"—Uphold Canada's responsibilities under international humanitarian law."

I will sign this petition and send it back to the centre table with page Tristan.

#### HOMELESSNESS

**Ms. Chandra Pasma:** I am pleased to rise to table a petition entitled, "Homes, Not Encampments," which has been signed by many of my constituents in Parkwood Hills who are paying more than they can afford on rent because of the exorbitant costs of rent in Ottawa and the repeated above-guideline rent increases by large corporate landlords like Minto.

These constituents are going to be considerably worse off as a result of Bill 60, which makes it easier for their landlords to evict them rather than taking any steps to actually make housing more affordable in Ontario and to protect the rights of tenants.

The constituents also note that Bill 6 was also an attack on those who are precariously housed, because people who can't afford to pay \$2,000 a month in rent certainly can't afford to pay \$10,000 in a fine.

We know that prisons are a far more expensive form of housing people than just building affordable housing or supportive housing, but we have far too many people on the wait-list for supportive housing: over 10,000 people in Ottawa on the central registry for affordable housing.

And so what the petitioners are asking for is that the Legislative Assembly of Ontario take immediate action to address the housing and homelessness crisis in Ontario by building thousands of new units of affordable housing and of supportive housing, reinstating real rent control, doubling Ontario Works and ODSP, reinstating supervised consumption sites and expanding access to low-barrier addiction treatment programs.

I fully endorse this petition, Speaker, will add my name to it and send it to the table with page Emelin.



## UNIVERSITY FUNDING

**Mr. Rob Cerjanec:** I rise today to introduce a petition calling for the investment in Ontario's future by boosting Ontario universities' base operating funding to bring us much closer to the Canadian average.

Here in Ontario, an Ontario student is worth almost about two thirds of the average of students across the country when we look at the per-student funding provided by the province to our universities.

We need to be able to drive innovation and research to address the needs of Ontarians, train the talent needed for Ontario growth industries and benefit all Ontarians, no matter where they are or where they live in this province, so that they can contribute and support good economies and good jobs through our universities in different parts of the province.

I'm pleased to introduce this petition today. I will leave this with page Anna and sign my name to it.

## CONSUMER PROTECTION

**Ms. Doly Begum:** Speaker, I have a petition here to also protect Ontario consumers and uphold international law.

"Whereas real estate events are being held" in "Ontario to promote the sale of foreign real estate to Ontario consumers, which further illegal Israeli settlements on occupied Palestinian lands;

"Whereas such activities are prohibited under international law"—and it's been called by the Geneva Convention. As well, it's a violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention.

"Whereas these events are happening behind closed doors," are not permitted in Ontario, "with no transparency about who is selling this real estate"—consumers have no protection in terms of buying this real estate—"how it was obtained or the legal and financial risks" to Ontarians who "are being exposed to" such sales;

"Whereas these real estate sales violate the spirit of Ontario's Consumer Protection Act and raise serious concerns under international humanitarian law;

"Whereas the government of Ontario" actually "has a responsibility to protect" Ontarians and to protect "Ontario consumers from misinformation and illegal activity; ..."

This petition asks that the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"—Immediately take action to protect Ontario consumers;

"—End the sale and expansion of illegal settlements—a recognized barrier to long-lasting peace;

"—Ban the promotion and marketing of illegal and stolen property;

"—Require public disclosure of individuals, companies, governments and other entities promoting and profiting from the sale of illegal and stolen property;

"—Issue a province-wide warning about these real estate events under the Consumer Protection Act;

"—Hold those facilitating" such "sale of illegal and stolen property accountable;" and of course

"—Uphold Canada's responsibilities under international humanitarian law."

I fully support this petition, will affix my signature to it and give it to page Shriya to take it to the Clerks.

## ENDANGERED SPECIES

**MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam:** I am rising in this House to present a petition entitled "Withdraw Bill 5—Maintain the Endangered Species Act, 2007.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Endangered Species Act, 2007 ... has been instrumental in protecting Ontario's biodiversity by providing science-based assessments, automatic species listings, and comprehensive habitat protections; and

"Whereas Bill 5 proposes to repeal the ESA and replace it with the Species Conservation Act ... which introduces discretionary species listings, narrows habitat definitions, and removes mandatory recovery strategies, thereby weakening protections for at-risk species; and

"Whereas the ... legislation concentrates excessive decision-making power in the hands of a single minister, reducing transparency and accountability in species protection decisions; and

"Whereas we acknowledge the importance of supporting Ontario's economy during turbulent times, such efforts must not come at the" irrevocable "cost of our most" endangered "wildlife and natural ecosystems;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario ... to maintain the Endangered Species Act ... while ensuring economic growth does not come at the expense of biodiversity and ecological integrity."

I'm proud to sign this petition and send it back to the centre table with page Luke.

## GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

**Ms. Chandra Pasma:** I'm rising on behalf of my constituents to present a petition entitled "Repeal Bill 5." This has been signed by constituents from across Ottawa West-Nepean, but especially in the Carlington and General Burns neighbourhoods. I thank them for showing their support for this petition.

The petitioners note that Bill 5 was pushed through the Legislature, much like other pieces of legislation have been, without adequate consultation nor time for debate. This particular piece of legislation is very egregious because it attacks treaty and First Nations rights, it threatens critical land and water protections, it puts species at risk and it creates special economic zones which would allow ministers and cabinet to choose areas where laws wouldn't apply. They could suspend any law—labour laws, environmental protections, public health rules, even legal liability—and this could actually derail important projects by provoking legal and social conflict. It certainly doesn't reflect the years of progress that we've made in

providing greater protections for people, for species at risk and for land and water in Ontario.

The petitioners note that the government is ignoring real solutions and instead choosing to politicize critical infrastructure and development projects at a time when we really need those projects to be moving ahead to support our economy.

The petitioners are requesting that the Legislative Assembly of Ontario repeal Bill 5.

I wholeheartedly support this petition, will add my name to it and send it to the table with page Tristan.

### SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

**MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam:** I'm again proud to rise in this House to bring forward a petition on behalf of Dr. Sally Palmer, who has collected signatures under the title of a petition, "To Raise Social Assistance Rates.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Ontario's social assistance rates are well below Canada's official Market Basket Measure poverty line and far from adequate to cover the rising cost of food and rent," only "\$733 for individuals on OW and \$1,368 for ODSP" recipients;

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"Whereas an open letter to the Premier and two cabinet ministers, signed by over 230 organizations, recommends that social assistance rates be doubled for both Ontario Works (OW) and the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP)...;

"Whereas small increases to ODSP have still left" many "citizens below the poverty line" because they are losing the affordability at an alarming rate of inflation;

"Whereas the government of Canada recognized in its CERB program that a 'basic income' of \$2,000 per month was the standard support required" for "individuals who lost their" jobs "during the pandemic...;"

Therefore, the undersigned citizens of Ontario petition this Legislature to double ODSP rates and OW rates.

I'm very proud to sign this petition and send it to the table with the wonderful page Olivia.

### TUITION

**Ms. Doly Begum:** I'd be remiss if I did not read this petition on the record and call on the government and the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas since 1980, whilst accounting for inflation, the average domestic undergraduate tuition has increased by 215%, and the average domestic graduate tuition by 247%; and

"Whereas upon graduation, 50% of students have a median debt of around \$17,500, which takes an average of" about "9.5 years to repay; and

"Whereas the average undergraduate tuition for international students has increased by 192% between 2011-2021"—over those 10 years—"and in colleges, they pay an average of \$14,306 annually compared to the average domestic fee of" about \$3,500; and

"Whereas the government of Ontario made changes to OSAP and student financial assistance in 2018-2019"—right after they were elected—"resulting in over a \$1-billion cut in assistance to students; and

"Whereas the so-called 'Student Choice Initiative' was defeated in the courts, students need legislation to protect their right to organize and funding for students' groups;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, support the Canadian Federation of Students-Ontario's call" to "petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to commit to:

"(1) Free and accessible education for all;

"(2) Grants, not loans;

"(3) Legislate students' right to organize."

Speaker, I fully support this petition, will affix my signature to it and give it to the wonderful page Shriya, once again, to take it to the Clerks.

I think it's very important when we have students in the House to know that we stand up for them and we call on the government to decrease tuition fees so they can afford their tuition.

### ORDERS OF THE DAY

BARRIE — ORO-MEDONTE —  
SPRINGWATER BOUNDARY  
ADJUSTMENT ACT, 2025

LOI DE 2025 SUR LA MODIFICATION  
DES LIMITES TERRITORIALES  
ENTRE BARRIE, ORO-MEDONTE  
ET SPRINGWATER

Mr. Graydon Smith, on behalf of Mr. Flack, moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 76, An Act respecting the adjustment of the boundaries between the City of Barrie, the Township of Oro-Medonte and the Township of Springwater / Projet de loi 76, Loi concernant la modification des limites territoriales entre la cité de Barrie, le canton d'Oro-Medonte et le canton de Springwater.

**The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell):** I recognize the Associate Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing to lead off the debate.

**Hon. Graydon Smith:** Just as I get under way today, I'll note that I'll be sharing the government's lead-off time with the Attorney General and the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, the member from Simcoe-Grey.

It's always an honour to speak here in this chamber and an honour to rise today to speak to second reading of the Barrie — Oro-Medonte — Springwater Boundary Adjustment Act, 2025. This bill is about one thing above all else: supporting the continued growth and prosperity of Simcoe by giving Barrie the certainty and the room it needs to keep building homes, creating jobs, and serving the region.

One thing is clear: Barrie is growing faster than almost any other community in Ontario. For the last several years, its population has surged at a pace few could have pre-

dicted. In just the last two years, the city has grown by nearly 13%.

Families continue to choose Barrie for opportunity. Entrepreneurs choose it because of its access to transportation and talent. Students choose it because of its educational institutions. And employers choose it because of its strategic position within Ontario's economic corridor.

Speaker, you simply cannot talk about the future of Simcoe county without talking about the central role that Barrie plays. It is the region's hub for health care, for post-secondary education, for transit, for commerce and, of course, for employment. Communities rely on Barrie every single day in ways both visible and unseen.

That growth, however, comes with pressure. And that is where the bill before us today becomes essential. Barrie is growing, and we need to plan to support that growth today. The facts speak for themselves. Barrie is on track to nearly double in size over the next 25 years, growing from 169,000 people in 2024 to roughly 298,000 by 2051; job growth is projected to expand as well, reaching 150,000 positions by that same year. This growth will benefit everyone in Simcoe, but it needs to be planned for and managed properly. We cannot just hope for the best. These are not abstract forecasts. They reflect what we are already seeing: a region adding people, employers and investment at an extraordinary pace; a region where stability and clarity in planning are becoming more urgent every year.

But there is a problem: Barrie has no remaining developable land inside its municipal boundary that could be brought into the urban area to support future population or job growth. The city would run out of residential land in the 2030s and employment land in the 2040s. The cost of doing nothing, of delay, of waiting for perfect consensus, of hoping local conditions align is simply too high. The people of Simcoe and Barrie deserve clarity.

Let us be clear: This is not just for Barrie, but for Simcoe county in its entirety. When a major regional metropolitan area like Barrie hits a hard planning ceiling, the impact radiates outward. Businesses cannot expand. Investments stall. Servicing uncertainty increases. And the costs always fall on the people. We cannot let that continue. For the people who live and work in Simcoe, the ability to find a home close to family, close to school, close to work becomes harder and harder. Again, we can't let it happen.

The second thing I want to be absolutely clear about today is this: Barrie has the infrastructure and the capacity to build more to support the homes and employment growth this region desperately needs. This is what makes the boundary adjustment not only reasonable, but practical and necessary.

For decades, the city of Barrie has invested heavily in the infrastructure required to support population and job growth—a prudent investment, I would say, as Barrie's growth is undeniable. The city has expanded water and waste water treatment facilities projects, measured in the hundreds of millions of dollars, to ensure that growth can be accommodated safely and responsibly. It has strengthened transit connections, improved arterial roads, and

helped shape the development patterns of surrounding municipalities.

### 1330

The Barrie GO line alone carried 4.3 million riders in 2024; by 2041, that number is expected to grow to between 10 million and 14 million.

This is not the infrastructure profile of a small town. It is the infrastructure profile of a regional centre—one that needs more land to grow or risks being held back by the very success its own planning has created.

Major provincial projects reinforce this reality. The Bradford Bypass will connect Highways 400 and 404, providing a direct four-lane corridor that boosts connectivity, reduces congestion and supports the flow of goods and people across the entire region. These projects are not theoretical. They are being built today, and growth is already aligning around them. This is why new homes and employment areas must be tied to infrastructure.

Speaker, housing does not get built in a vacuum. People need water and waste water servicing, transit, roads, schools, and job opportunities. And all of that exists in Barrie. The surrounding townships provide vital contributions to the region, and they will continue to do so, but they do not have the same servicing capacity, the same regional transit connections, or the same ability to support dense housing and employment growth. That's not a criticism; it's simply geographic and economic reality. If Simcoe is going to meet its housing and job creation needs, it must grow where the infrastructure exists to support it. And Barrie is that place.

Speaker, this brings me to the third foundational point behind this legislation. Barrie has the demand. Barrie has the infrastructure. Barrie has the economic strength to support growth. What it does not have is land. That is the fundamental problem this bill solves.

For 18 months, the Office of the Provincial Land and Development Facilitator worked closely with all four local governments: the city of Barrie, the township of Oro-Medonte, the township of Springwater and the county of Simcoe. The goal was simple: Find a locally agreed-upon solution to Barrie's long-standing need for serviced urban land. The facilitator reviewed engineering reports, legal submissions, council resolutions, public meeting feedback, servicing models, and growth projections. Every option was explored. Every perspective was considered. Every concern was put on the table. But after that exhaustive process, the conclusion was unmistakable: Consensus could not be reached. While all municipalities agree that Barrie needs land to grow, details around the edges precluded an agreement being reached in time.

So it is time to act, to provide certainty for residents, for business, and for civic leadership.

Conflicting conditions attached to local resolutions, including conditions tied to unrelated planning matters, created legal uncertainty and procedural risk.

Meanwhile, major development proposals were stalled: more than 2,500 homes, a future high school, a hospice, a long-term-care facility and hundreds of jobs projects that could not move forward without clarity on who would

service the land. Residents and landowners were left without certainty about who would plan their neighbourhoods, what policies would apply, or when servicing could be delivered. With a municipal election approaching and ward boundaries needing to be finalized, delaying until 2027 was simply not an option.

The facilitator recommended legislation because it was the only viable path forward. Speaker, the fact that I am speaking here now shows that we agreed with his recommendation. It transfers approximately 1,673 hectares of land from Springwater and Oro-Medonte to the city of Barrie. It ensures continuity of planning approvals. It provides for phased-in tax changes, and it authorizes the minister to make regulations for compensation, wards and transitional arrangements so that residents and businesses have a smooth, orderly transition. It is a fair plan, it is a balanced plan and it is a regional plan that benefits every municipality in Simcoe, because this legislation does not remove potential growth from surrounding municipalities; it makes future growth possible by relieving pressure, clarifying responsibilities and ensuring that residential and employment development happens in the right places for the right reasons.

Only 2.3% of Springwater's land area and 0.8% of Oro-Medonte's is proposed for transfer, but those strategically located lands will unlock up to 8,000 homes that would house more than 23,000 people by 2051. This is the kind of long-term region-building decision that makes sense not just for today but for the next generation.

The benefits of this bill go well beyond residential growth. The boundary adjustment strengthens the region's economic future. It protects and advances the strategic economic corridor along Highway 400, an essential area for linking southern Ontario's manufacturing base with northern Ontario's resource industries. This corridor has been described by local leaders, including Barrie's mayor, Alex Nuttall, as a "game changer"—lands capable of supporting the next generation of employers, bringing thousands of jobs closer to home, reducing out commuting and improving the quality of life for families. When people can live where they work, communities thrive. That is the vision behind this legislation: stronger local job creation, more complete communities and a regional economy positioned for long-term prosperity.

The people of Simcoe deserve clarity. They deserve to know who provides their services, who plans their neighbourhoods and how their communities will grow. Uncertainty is the enemy of progress; this legislation removes that uncertainty. It replaces fragmented planning with a coherent regionally aligned approach; it provides a responsible timeline for transition; and, most importantly, it ensures that the projects already waiting—homes, schools, long-term care, employment areas—can finally move forward. The alternative is continued delay, continued gridlock, continued uncertainty, and that is not acceptable for a region experiencing some of the strongest population growth in Ontario.

Speaker, before I turn to my conclusion, I want to address another essential element of this legislation: the

transition process itself. When boundaries shift, when planning authority changes and when long-term land use decisions move from one municipality to another, people expect clarity, they expect fairness and they expect stability. That's exactly what this legislation provides. The bill does not simply just transfer land; it establishes a framework to ensure that every step of the transition is orderly, transparent and responsive to the needs of the people who live and work in the affected area.

This is why the legislation authorizes the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing to make regulations on key transitional matters, including phasing in property tax changes, establishing financial compensation, protecting existing approvals and setting out requirements for the continuation of local services. These tools matter. They provide certainty for homeowners who may be wondering how municipal taxes will change over time. They provide certainty for businesses who want to know that zoning, servicing and local requirements will remain stable during the transition period. They give municipalities the flexibility to collaborate, resolve issues and plan for growth together without risking disruption for residents. This is responsible, modern boundary restructuring. It respects local autonomy while ensuring regional needs are met, it ensures neighbouring municipalities are properly compensated and it ensures every community involved can plan confidently going forward.

#### 1340

Speaker, good planning is about looking far enough down the road to avoid the problems we know are coming. Barrie's imminent shortfall of developable land is not a hypothetical risk, it is a documented reality grounded in engineering assessments, servicing capacity analyses, and projected household and employment needs. Barrie is expected to run out of residential land in the 2030s and employment land in the 2040s. That may sound far away to some but, in planning terms and certainly in infrastructure terms, that timeline is already upon us.

Servicing expansion, as we know, can take years. Community planning processes can take years. Environmental assessments can take years. Road networks, trunk mains and waste water capacity cannot simply be built overnight. If we fail to act now, the region will face severe constraints just as population and job growth are hitting their stride. In other words, the cost of delay is not just financial, it is generational.

This legislation ensures that Simcoe county is not caught unprepared. It gives Barrie the land it needs to align growth with servicing. It gives Springwater and Oro-Medonte financial certainty and compensation, and it gives employers confidence that the Highway 400 corridor can host the next generation of jobs. It gives families confidence that the homes they need are not just promised but possible.

Speaker, this is not about favouring one municipality at the expense of another. It is about supporting the economic engine of the region so that everyone benefits from co-ordinated infrastructure-aligned growth. North Simcoe cannot succeed if its anchor city is constrained, and Barrie

cannot meet its responsibilities to the region without the land needed to grow.

Speaker, if there is one message I want to leave with members before closing, it is this: The future of Simcoe depends on practical, forward-looking solutions made today. Communities across Ontario are adapting to rapid population growth, changing economic realities and the pressures facing the housing market but few regions experience that convergence as acutely as Simcoe.

This boundary adjustment is not just theoretical planning; it is a precise, targeted measure that reflects how people already live, work, commute and build their futures in this region. It aligns land use decisions with infrastructure that already exists. It positions employment areas where transportation corridors can support them, and it supports housing growth where servicing capacity can facilitate it most efficiently.

Without this legislation, the region faces a fragmented future. With it, Simcoe county gains the clarity, the capacity and the stability it needs to continue thriving. The Barrie — Oro-Medonte — Springwater Boundary Adjustment Act, 2025, is a generational decision, one that will shape the next 25 years of growth across Simcoe county.

Barrie is growing. Barrie has the infrastructure to grow responsibly. Barrie does not have the land, and this legislation fixes that in a way that is fair, measured and grounded in evidence. It unlocks new homes, it strengthens regional employment lands, it supports transit-orientated growth, it aligns planning with major provincial investments, and it gives residents and businesses the certainty they need to plan their futures.

Speaker, I urge all members of this House to support this legislation and help ensure that Simcoe county continues to grow, to lead and to prosper.

Thank you, Speaker, and I yield my time to the Attorney General.

**The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell):** I recognize the Attorney General.

**Hon. Doug Downey:** I really want to thank the honourable member from Parry Sound—Muskoka, the Associate Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

This is particularly an important piece for me, and I want to give some context. So many things that he said were so true, and they resonated on why we're doing it now. But I want to talk about Simcoe county, and I want to talk about why now and why this, but I have to put it into context. It goes back some ways.

I grew up in the south end of the Simcoe county, in a little town called Bond Head. It's between Bradford and Alliston, if that will help you locate geographically—on the edge of the marsh, not too far away from that, the wonderful marsh that we have in Holland Landing. It was an incredible place to grow up. It was a little town of about 400 people. We used to ride our bicycles out Highway 88 to go to school two miles away. In fact, we used to ride our bicycles out to Highway 400, and we would stop and we would watch traffic back up. And some things do not change, although it is a different scale of challenge that we are tackling.

But look, I grew up in this small space in the south end of the county, and it really was a wonderful place to grow up. My father is still there. A lot of the neighbours are still there, and I go back often and check in with them.

But it's changed because when Bradford was there—and now, Bradford is slowly moving west into areas that were farm fields. All of that area between Bradford and Bond Head—all of it—20 years ago, was either sold or auctioned off to people who were anticipating development, who were anticipating the push north out of the city. And it sat there, and nothing happened for the longest time. Nothing happened because water/waste water was the challenge. Where will we find the water and the waste water to develop this space?

Now, that challenge has been solved in the south end of the county, and it is now developing. I went to high school in Bradford, played hockey in Bradford; a lot of growing up and learning in that space. The growth pressure that was there all that time—we knew we couldn't go into the marsh. It was too valuable a property. But some of these properties just had to be used because of the economics of what was happening in Ontario.

Just to give you a sense of context: Lake Simcoe itself has half of Ontario's population within an hour's drive, just to give you a sense of scale and place. When that growth pressure was moving towards Lake Simcoe and moving north—this was in the 1970s. There was a time when Orillia, on the north end of Simcoe county—Orillia now has a population of 30,000, 35,000; I'll come to that in a moment—but it was actually larger than Barrie in the 1970s. And the growth that came to Barrie because of the highway infrastructure, when Highway 11—which, at the time, was not divided. There was no divider there, and as you go up through Gasoline Alley and all those spaces, you can see the remnants of that, where people now can't cross the roads. So businesses have not flourished in the way that they were, those service sector businesses.

So what was happening in the south end was all this growth pressure, and it sat there. It sat there for my entire childhood and beyond. Not to be trite, but as the old saying goes, "The best time to plant a tree is 25 years ago. And the next best time is now." That's what we're doing with this act, is we're planting a tree for the future, because the growth is coming. The growth is absolutely coming. And we feel the pressure both in terms of where people want to live, where they need to live, and where the employment is going. And the need to expand our manufacturing and our service industry goes along with that. You're only an hour's drive away. If you want to see a great range of restaurants, come on up. There was a Country Bob's buffet. It's been rebranded as something. I always think of Bob Bailey when I see that place.

But in all seriousness, that growth pressure is there, so it kept pushing and pushing and pushing. At that time, into the 1980s, the GO service—when you think about the robust GO service, the amount of transit this government is doing, generational change in GO service. But at the time, in the early 1980s, there was GO service from Toronto. It was one train, and it stopped in Bradford. There

was nothing else going north. The tracks had been ripped out. Very short-sighted—that's a whole other soapbox that I have. But it's a fact and that's what happened.

So that one train was there and, eventually, they came to have three trains parked for a little bit more service. But it wasn't until well into the 1990s that Jack Garner and local people out of Barrie said, "We need service all the way up here," and that got extended further into Barrie. That really was the moment when Barrie started to really take off—not because of the GO train, but that was a symbol of the kind of growth pressure that was happening. The cultural mix of Barrie started to change. It's all very healthy and it has really made it a fantastic area.

**1350**

Again, we all take pride of place, so I want to go back into the 1970s and then into the 190s. I can tell you there was great angst in my little town of Bond Head. Now, when I say "Bond Head," most people say, "Oh, the golf course at Bond Head," right? That's sort of a branding. Well, I've never golfed those fields. I farmed those fields. That's what paid for my schooling.

Jimmy Cerswell was a great farmer—lots of good stories about Jimmy. And the Middlebrooks: Tom Middlebrook is a good friend of mine to this day. Old farm families around there—the Wilcoxes and the Eisses, who my colleague from Barrie-Innisfil knows well; John and Jim Williams, and Sue, their sister. That is the last farm—when you drive north and you see the Husky and you see the big flag, all the land around that is still being farmed by John, Jim, Sue and their families.

But everything else is being prepped for development, because the infrastructure is there. We can't wait for what's coming north. We just absolutely cannot. We see, as you come through Innisfil, the amazing growth—the 1.1-million square foot building that has gone up in the last year and a half, an incredible distribution centre.

But it was the late 1980s when Honda came along and moved to Alliston, and that didn't just happen. Water had to come from somewhere. Lou Biffis, who was a visionary in his time, who passed away recently, had land and the local effort that came together. MPP Saunderson, Simcoe-Grey, lived through this as well.

But in the late 1980s, when Honda came, what an incredible transformational opportunity for the county of Simcoe—absolutely incredible. I'll tell you this one thing: I have friends who still work there, because they came to our high school and they said, "Anybody who is a farm kid is guaranteed a job." I thought, "What a way to recruit." So some of my friends did exactly that, and one of them is still there. His kids are actually working there. I saw Craig Wurzburger when we did a tour there not too long ago.

Honda did that for the south end. Things are, again, pushing to the north. We have great institutions as we move through and up through the north of Barrie. We have Georgian College, which is a world-class training facility. The things they do—their hospitality program is amazing. The automotive program they have: Everybody who works in automotive across this country has some touch-

stone to that school. It's right next door to RVH, Royal Victoria hospital, the regional hospital with cancer care.

Dave Hudson—a tremendous individual—and his family, in the name of his sister Lara, donated \$10 million to RVH for the cancer centre, because the need is there and the growth is there, and the growth is coming. I happened to go to high school with Dave. Was I ever shocked when I found out who the donor was; I clearly took the wrong courses in school. But he's a hard worker in the engineering world and connected to the automotive—again, back to Honda.

So great things have been happening, but we have to plant the tree today to be ready for the next round. There are companies in Barrie and around that need space. We're going to build 8,000 homes with this change, because housing is the primary, but there are companies that need more space, local companies that started in the garage of an individual.

Lee McDonald with Southmedic started in her garage, solving a problem for a doctor, and now is an international, multinational supply manufacturer for medical—everything from breathing masks to razor blades to just tubing; everything you can think of—out of Barrie.

Flags Unlimited is there. They're producing flags all over the place, all over Canada. When we had all the Premiers here, with our Premier as the chair of the Council of the Federation, they put up flags all across the overpass on the 400.

We're getting ready for this growth so that our companies can grow with us, the employment can be local and we can have a robust place to live, because, you know what, on the other side, you're only 15 minutes away from Horseshoe Valley—skiing, snowtubing, mountain biking. We have Hardwood Hills, where they train for the Olympics, an incredible facility up on Line 4 in Oro-Medonte, right there. We have Snow Valley, another great ski hill, and we have Mount St. Louis Moonstone just up the road, another fantastic ski hill. So you can live, work, and play there if you have somewhere to live and work. That's what we're solving with this. We're creating capacity in the system to make sure that people have a place to live and work so that they can play there as well, and bring their colleagues and show the best of Ontario. It literally is the best of Ontario, and it's only an hour away from half of Ontario's population.

It's not just the local. The airport on Line 7 in Oro-Medonte: You can clear international customs there. The county is expanding the runway, investing. Ornge Air is setting up in a hangar there, so Ornge Air will service all of Ontario in coordination with its other location. We have incredible opportunities.

Volatus Aerospace, the largest drone company in Canada, primarily headquartered in Montreal: They came and they saw what Oro-Medonte had to offer, the airport and the proximity to all of the things that come with a big city, and they set up a location there. They're operational in pipelines and forestry and mining and all the things that are drone-related. It's very exciting. We have high-tech, really high-tech, stuff.

When you go to your condo down here and you go to park underground and you've got that great big door that opens up, look in the corner. It says TNR—TNR in the corner. I guarantee you, nine times out of 10, it says TNR, and that's Line 4 of Oro-Medonte. It was south of Barrie. The growth pressure pushed them out. They needed more space. They needed to be somewhere. We don't want to lose this talent. It's a German private company. They could have gone anywhere in the world. They could have gone anywhere in the States, but they wanted to stay local because of the amazing things that we have.

We worked together, my colleague the Minister of Red Tape Reduction, the MPP for Barrie—Innisfil, and I. We're not really good with boundaries. This is the irony. We're not good with boundaries at all. We work as a team. We're part of Team Simcoe. I didn't steal TNR from her; they left. We just couldn't let them leave the county.

Look, I've talked a lot about that space, but I also want to talk about the north end and what happens from—although I'll let my colleague from Simcoe—Grey talk about the west north end more. On the northeast end where Orillia and Ramara and Severn and even over in Midland, Tiny, Tay—some of you will know, but I'll say it for those that don't, I sat on a municipal council. I was a city councillor with the city of Orillia for a couple of terms. I ran a law firm there, and my partners continue—Tim Timpano and Sheri Tornosky and some others. I'll tell you, being on the north end of the county gave me a different perspective than I grew up with on the south end of the county, but I do see myself of the county. These different perspectives allow me to see this kind of change through the eyes of others.

When I was younger and they wanted to expand Bradford, to call it Bradford West Gwillimbury, oh my goodness, the angst in the town of 400 in Bond Head—we thought we were going to lose our identity. We thought we were going to get swept up by the big bad Bradford West Gwillimbury. Well, guess what? It didn't happen, because pride of place matters. We have towns within municipalities all over the place. We're not going to lose any identity with this, but we are going to bring more people with more opportunities.

My colleague from Richmond Hill tells me that the Barrie area has the third-largest Persian community in the country. It actually makes sense. When my colleague from Barrie—Innisfil and I are at events and out doing things and see people engaged in the community, that actually makes sense, but it's not something that I would have caught on to unless Minister Parsa had flagged that for me.

We also have a significant Chinese community, families of Chinese through Horseshoe Valley and through other areas, and there are different reasons for that, but primarily it's because it's such a great place to live.

**Mr. Amarjot Sandhu:** And Indian.

1400

**Hon. Doug Downey:** I'm coming, I'm coming. Georgian College has fostered—when people train somewhere, they often stay—a phenomenal Indian community in Barrie. Holi is—I actually have specific white shirts that I

wear to Holi because I can't completely clean them. I wash them, but—it's so much fun, the rich cultural diversity of what's happening in our space. But it's only possible if we have a place to be. We want people to move. We want people to come up and enjoy what we have. We want them to give back, but we want them to work in the area. And if we build 8,000 more homes within the next period of time, in the next 20, 25 years, that will enrich the community and bring opportunities that we haven't even thought of yet. That's really exciting for me.

I know pride of place evokes an emotional reaction. I know that because I grew up with it. When Bradford West Gwillimbury took over little Bond Head, there was an emotional reaction. But we have to look beyond that. It's not about us today; it's about the people that haven't even come yet. We want them to have the quality of life and do all of the things that we did.

It's really a remarkable opportunity. We're seeing some movement that we want to keep up with. Lakehead has now set up a master's program in STEM in Barrie to complement its fantastic university in Orillia.

We're seeing investments and consolidation, and we're doing our part to get ahead of the infrastructure. When you come up the 400, you will see, all the way up, bridge work. At Highway 88, that's the first one you're going to see. Line 5 got put in south of that, toward Schomberg, but Highway 88, that's the bridge we used to ride our bikes out to. It's being widened.

If you come up a little bit farther, Highway 89 has already been done. Innisfil Beach Road in my colleague's riding is almost done—significant work. Then you come up to Dunlop or Essa; it's finished, that bridge. And these aren't small bridges. This is building capacity for highways. Then, as you get past there, Innisfil Beach Road and then Essa and then Dunlop—that's a tricky one, but the dirt is moving already. It's getting done, and it will be done.

Then, when you get past that, we have Bayfield, the famous Bayfield. It's going to be tricky. But I have faith that MTO will get this done. Beyond that, everything else is done. Sunnidale, Anne Street, Duckworth, Lines 3, 5, 7 and 9 in Oro-Medonte: All of that infrastructure has been done. That's billions and billions of dollars getting ready for the inevitable growth that's going to come.

I haven't even touched on the Bradford Bypass. The Bradford Bypass: It was a mythical unicorn when I grew up. Everybody was talking about the Bradford Bypass. Should it come through Bradford? Should it go around Bradford? This route, that route—nothing happened. People sold farms, bought properties. Everybody was speculating. My entire life I've heard about this Bradford Bypass. Not until I got elected to this space, with this Premier and the transportation ministers that we've had, did that actually get unlocked. And it's becoming a reality. I am absolutely thrilled to stand with my colleagues for that.

It's amazing to have grown up in the county, in all parts of the county for all different phases of my life, gone away for a little bit to do school and come back to the county

and see it through another lens. It really is an opportunity for this government to do generational changes. As my colleague from Parry Sound–Muskoka said, this is a generational decision to move forward to create 8,000 new homes, to unlock that potential. The servicing is in the ground in some of the spaces. It's literally up the road; it's in the ground. We just have to unlock it and get building and create those spaces. In the short term it will happen, and in the long term it's going to serve us well because it will unlock opportunities, again, like I say, that we haven't even talked about yet.

So I'm just thrilled to stand with my colleagues. It's the right thing to do. It's the right time to do it. I know there's going to be emotion and pride of place, but we will stand together, we will build together, we will live together, we will play together. I just want to thank the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing for being bold and for bringing this forward. I will cede the balance of my time to the member from Simcoe–Grey.

**The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell):** I recognize the member from Simcoe–Grey.

**Mr. Brian Saunderson:** It's an honour to rise in the House today to speak to the second reading of the Barrie — Oro-Medonte — Springwater Boundary Adjustment Act, 2025.

I'm very proud to share the government's lead time with the Attorney General and the Associate Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, because the story this bill tells is critical to our riding and critical, really, to the development of our province. I appreciate the Attorney General's historical look at the development of the region that he knows, going back to his childhood.

I formerly served as the mayor of Collingwood and was on Collingwood council for eight years and the Simcoe county council for eight years as our upper-tier government. I have called Collingwood home now for 25 years. I raised my three sons there, and it is in fact a beautiful region and one that has gone through incredible growth pressures in the time that I've been there and continues to go through those pressures looking forward.

The analysis that this is the best opportunity to plant this tree and have this discussion might have been 25 years ago. But the reality is it's a living area, things evolve, and this is really a story of the evolution of Simcoe county and its relationship to its separated cities.

So I think, on that evolutionary theme, this goes hand in hand: what benefits one, benefits the other. This is not a question about picking winners in terms of municipalities. It's about doing what's best for the growth of the region to make sure the growth that happens is sustainable and resilient and in the best interests of the community moving forward. It really is about making sure that we seize the opportunity; that we allow Barrie to grow as it needs and that growth will benefit the surrounding community.

Just to give this House an idea of the makeup of Simcoe county and the Simcoe region: The Simcoe region involves Simcoe county, which has 16 member municipalities, and also two separated cities, the city of Barrie and

the city of Orillia. Barrie, being our largest urban centre and an economic engine in the sense that it has been attracting businesses— but it also has the Royal Victoria Hospital, the regional hospital, and I'll speak more about that in the coming minutes. It also has Georgian College, which is in partnership with Laurentian University, and there's a great dynamic there. And it is a quickly growing region that has, as the Attorney General outlined in his remarks, gone through great evolution in the last 40 years, and that evolution will continue.

In fact, if we look at the current populations, the city of Barrie has a current population of about 170,000 people, and its 2025 municipal budget was \$319 million. The county of Simcoe has a current population of 530,000 people, and its 2025 budget was \$962 million, and in fact, will go above about \$1 billion this year.

The county provides for the separated cities services in the social and community services—so long-term-care homes, housing, paramedicine, ODSP and Ontario Works, among just a matter of a few of our examples. So there is a very strong relationship and collaboration between the separated city of Barrie and the county of Simcoe, and the hospitals are one great example of that.

The county has the Simcoe County Hospital Alliance, and Simcoe county budgets to contribute \$3 million annually to that. The CEOs of the hospital, together with the general manager of health services for the county, work together to allocate those funds to make sure all seven hospitals in the region are thriving. I know that the hospitals in my riding of Simcoe–Grey—Stevenson Memorial down in Alliston received \$10 million towards its capital project, which is breaking ground and in its final phase 3 right now of construction. The Collingwood General and Marine Hospital in the north end of the riding is receiving \$20 million through the hospital alliance funding through the county. And the Royal Victoria Hospital in Barrie, as well as the Orillia Stevenson Memorial Hospital in the two separated cities, are also receiving funds through that hospital alliance program to ensure that we are making sure that our health care is supported throughout all 16 member communities and two separated cities, to make sure that the region is growing together.

In fact, the motto for Simcoe county is “For the Greater Good.” I think it has a great history of collaborating with its separated cities and the 16 member municipalities going back to its creation in the late 1800s. It has a record of working together to make sure that the area thrives and that all needs are met for the greater good.

#### 1410

We can see that in Simcoe county there is resource-sharing. As the Attorney General mentioned in his speech, when Honda came to Alliston in the mid-1980s—and has continued to expand since then. In the late 1990s, the Collingwood water treatment plant, the Raymond A. Barker treatment plant, was sending water south to Alliston to help them meet their needs. That's just one example of services sharing that goes on in the region. So, the motto “For the Greater Good” is very much something that Simcoe county lives by.



Barrie, as our biggest urban centre, is very much an economic engine and a health care hub and an education hub and a transit spine for the region. The 400 runs right through Barrie, but it also runs through Oro-Medonte and Springwater, as does Highway 11, and that will be a critical alleyway as we move forward for the development of our regional employment lands, our regional economy which will support the growth and residential growth. Simcoe county owns the Lake Simcoe Regional Airport. That airport is a critical part of our airport network not only in southern Ontario but, as the Ring of Fire develops, will be a critical player in that, and that will see the growth of the employment lands throughout the 400 corridor.

This, Madam Speaker, is really a story of collaboration amongst the municipalities to work together to make sure that the area continues to thrive, and it is thriving. We know it will grow by 40%. It's projected to grow by 40% over the 2051 planning timeline, and that applies to the city of Barrie and to this county of Simcoe. Between them, as we've said, they have a population of 700,000. So that will be well over a million by 2051.

We know there's a need. Over the last two years, the population in the city of Barrie has jumped by nearly 13%, as has the county of Simcoe's, so we need to continue that collaborative effort to make sure we work together to plan for a sustainable future that is intentional and makes sense so that we can be resilient and continue to thrive in the coming decades.

It is an ecosystem as well. Whether you work in Barrie and live maybe in Oro-Medonte or Springwater or elsewhere in the county, or whether you live in Barrie and work elsewhere in the county, this is all part of the economic engine, the ecosystem which drives our community and supports both residential growth and the employment context. So on good planning principles, it's important; for every new residential unit you establish, there has to be an employment component to that. So, making sure that we have residential lands and employment lands for Barrie to grow and for the region to grow is a critical piece of that puzzle.

As indicated before, we know the hard truth is that developable land in Barrie, whether it be for residential or employment lands, is running out, and inside its current boundaries, Barrie has a shortage of developable lands that can be serviced for new homes or new jobs. The city's own forecast, endorsed by the county and independently verified, shows that residential land is exhausted by the 2030s and employment land is gone by the 2040s. So, in the collaborative process through the Ontario Provincial Land and Development Facilitator's office, which started 18 months ago, we worked through what would the needs be, and Hemson was contracted as a consultant to determine those land needs so that when we started the conversation about what lands were needed, we had an idea of what those were. Hemson's report came up with a target of 800 hectares. A hectare is 2.5 acres. They needed over 500 hectares for residential use and 300 hectares for employment uses. So that was the target that they were working towards collaboratively, and the discussions

involved not only Barrie and the towns of Oro-Medonte and Springwater but also the county of Simcoe, so all three levels of government working together to make sure that what was moving forward was done on a co-operative and collaborative basis.

After 18 months of that process, we got very, very close to a collaborative agreement. And when it came time for the council vote, it was passed by the city of Barrie. The county of Simcoe passed it, but with certain other related demands which were outside of the scope of the negotiation. The township of Springwater approved it. And the township of Oro-Medonte approved it, again, with some modifications.

So what we're doing here today, through this legislation, is trying to get through the boundary changes—while we will discuss the compensation as through the regulations and determine that. We were 99% of the way there, but for some unrelated issues, we couldn't get it across the line. We have a looming deadline of December 31 of this year in order to get the changes through, the boundary expansions through, so that we can make the ward changes and the adjustments for the upcoming municipal election next fall, and to make sure that the tax rolls can be adjusted and set for the beginning of the taxation year.

As both the Associate Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing and the Attorney General mentioned, when you start to talk about boundaries, it can be an emotional issue for the local communities, understanding what's at stake here.

At the end of the day, to put it in relative perspective, what's at stake for the city of Barrie is an expansion of just under 17% of their land mass for employment needs and residential needs—it's about 16.7%. What does that mean for the township of Springwater? It's about 2.2% of their land mass that we're discussing—and for the town of Oro-Medonte, it's about 0.8%, less than 1%.

So when we look at the relative needs of the three communities, we see what has to happen in Barrie, and we see the impacts for the municipalities of Oro-Medonte and Springwater themselves. They will be compensated. That is part of the plan. But what we have to do is make sure that we get the boundaries changed to make sure that we can meet the needs and get it done in time, without procedural delays and without a growing cloud of uncertainty over thousands of homes, a new high school, a hospice, a long-term-care centre, and hundreds of jobs, not to mention thousands of residences. With the municipal election looming and ward boundaries needing to be settled, we cannot delay beyond the end of this year to meet the timelines and not drag this into 2027.

Madam Speaker, the facilitator's recommendation was unambiguous: The only way to deliver certainty in a timely fashion was through the provincial legislation. That is why we're here today. We're not overriding local democracy. We're here to rescue the planning processes from gridlock to ensure that, moving forward, local democracy can get back to the work of building complete communities.

So what does the bill actually do? I mentioned the Hemson report requiring 800 hectares, and so what we're doing is transferring to the city of Barrie 557 hectares for community lands or residential purposes and 313 hectares for employment lands and job creation. That totals 870 hectares, which is in line with the recommendation for the 800 hectares of lands that needed to be transferred. And I've told you the relative numbers in terms of the importance it is to the city of Barrie: It would add 16.7% to their land mass, and in that land mass, it would unlock up to 8,000 new homes—homes for more than 23,000 people over a 25-year window. It would also protect and expand the strategic employment corridor that the local leaders have rightly called a game-changer, bringing thousands of good-paying jobs closer to where people live, both in the city of Barrie and in the townships of Oro-Medonte and Springwater, and to Simcoe county, generally.

As we indicated earlier in the speech, the city of Barrie, for many years, has been an economic engine and driver for the Simcoe region. But Simcoe county is also a critical part of this puzzle, in making sure that the whole region continues to thrive—going right up to my riding of Simcoe—Grey, where I have six of the westerly municipalities in my riding. And it is, as I said, a connected local ecosystem. We have many people, as the Attorney General indicated, driving from Barrie and other parts in Simcoe county to the Honda plant to work there. We have others living in my area of the county driving to Barrie to work there.

**1420**

What is good for Barrie is good for Simcoe county and the member municipalities, and this is what smart, infrastructure-led growth looks like, Madam Speaker. We want to make sure that this is a win-win-win for everyone, that Barrie can continue to grow and thrive, continue to work together with Simcoe county for the greater good. This bill will help resolve that issue right now.

The pipes do not build the houses by themselves. We need to make sure that the homes are being built in areas that make sense, where the infrastructure is already in place—not just the linear infrastructure servicing the development, but also the infrastructure to create complete neighbourhoods, like hospitals, like schools, like recreation facilities and the other amenities that people will expect when they move to a new area.

This boundary adjustment, Madam Speaker, is about augmenting the growth that Barrie needs but also opening opportunities for the neighbouring municipalities of Springwater and Oro-Medonte and the county of Simcoe to make sure there are alternatives and options for people moving to the region so that we can continue to grow and thrive together. Again, it is about the greater good.

This legislation, Madam Speaker, will enable growth for everyone. By taking pressure off the system, by clarifying who plans for what and who services what, it actually frees the townships to focus on the kind of lower-density rural and hamlet-based development that their residents have repeatedly said they want to protect, and

also to target and develop those plans as they move forward with their official plans.

Madam Speaker, this is an addition, not just for Barrie but for the entire county and for the municipalities of Oro-Medonte and Springwater. It is not a subtraction. It is coordination, not competition. And while transitions like this are never simple, we have worked together on a collaborative basis which has formed the framework of this legislation that we're having second reading for today. If passed, it will make important critical planning changes and boundary changes in the area that will serve the municipalities for years to come—generations to come, in fact.

That is why the legislation does not simply move a line on a map and walk away. It authorizes the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing to make regulations on compensation, on phasing in of tax rates, on protection of existing approvals and on the continuation of local services. Simcoe county is engaged right now with the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing in its official plan update, OPA 7, which is all part of this process and is being worked on as we speak. It's about making sure that the region has the opportunity to grow in a way that it is determining with the province and to make sure that we can get these planning changes in place so that they can be effective and move forward immediately.

As I indicated, home owners will not wake up tomorrow facing a Barrie tax bill. Businesses will not see their zoning vanish overnight, and farmers who have agreements in place will see those agreements honoured. This will be an orderly, respectful, modern boundary restructuring—the same approach this province has successfully used before when regions needed certainty to move forward, as in the St. Thomas region for the planning of the Stellantis plant.

These are parts of responsible, proactive boundary planning to make sure that our communities can thrive, that we can host the growing industry that's going to support the jobs for the residential demands that we see across the province. Simcoe county and Barrie are one of the fastest-growing areas in the province. Their proximity to the GTA, the incredible environment that Simcoe has to offer, and the fact that it will be a jumping off point for the Ring of Fire through the Lake Simcoe Regional Airport all make this an important and timely change to make sure that the city of Barrie, the towns of Oro-Medonte and Springwater, and the county of Simcoe continue to move forward together for the greater good.

In Simcoe county, Madam Speaker, the corner we are turning is unmistakable. We are becoming one of Ontario's great metropolitan regions, anchored by a confident, capable city that is ready to grow if we let it. When we grow that, at the same time we'll be taking advantage of the natural amenities that make Simcoe county so great. I look forward to working with this House for the greater good.

**The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell):** Question?

**Mr. Jeff Burch:** Thank you to the government members for their comments. I have a question for the Associate Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

This bill lists the properties to be annexed, but gives the minister the power to set aside this list and prescribe different lands to be annexed. So why does the minister need this unusual power, and can he guarantee that the lands listed in the bill will be the ones annexed or not?

**Hon. Graydon Smith:** Thank you very much, and I appreciate the question.

You know, we've gone through a process here that I think has been very clear with all the parties, and unfortunately, going through that process and working with the Provincial Land and Development Facilitator could not get us to the complete finish line. That's a shame, because it seemed like that might happen. But nevertheless, we're at a point where, obviously, this is critical for Barrie. This is critical for Simcoe county.

As we bring this legislation forward today to debate it—and hopefully we get the pleasure of the House to see this pass—embedded within that are certain regulatory-making powers for the minister to work on the details, as parcels are identified very precisely. So we're reserving some ability to ensure a very precise, final outcome for this.

**The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell):** Question?

**Mr. Rob Cerjanec:** I listened quite intently to the Attorney General speaking about growing up in Bond Head. My family grew up in Bradford. My mom went to Bradford high school there, and my grandfather worked in the fields picking carrots.

My question for the Attorney General is, I guess, a two-parter: (1) What is his favourite thing in Bradford, not Bond Head? (2) Where does he see development and growth happening in that area of Simcoe County?

**Hon. Doug Downey:** I thank you for the question, because the growth that's happening—it's the infill. I will get to my favourite thing in Bradford, although I have a few of my favourite things.

But the infill is between Bond Head and Bradford, and you're seeing it creep out west. Line 10 used to be fields; it's now the Fallis hockey arena. It's all that stuff. I knew I felt old when I found out that we were refurbishing part of the Fallis arena. Bob Fallis was my hockey coach and the arena is old enough that it's got to be refurbished.

What I love is that it's so close to everything. It's very dynamic. It's got a great base of Italian and Portuguese heritage in the space and it's well celebrated. And the marsh is celebrated with Carrot Fest and all those things. There are so many great things.

I'll have to check the yearbooks to see if I went at the same time as your mom.

**The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell):** Question?

**Mr. Sheref Sabawy:** To the minister: As we know, one of the central challenges facing a rapid urban growth is ensuring that the new communities are aligned with the infrastructure that already exists, including roads,

water/waste water systems and transit networks. Barrie has invested hundreds of millions of dollars over the last several decades to expand its water treatment facilities, roadways and transit options.

Could the minister elaborate on how this legislation ensures that the growth occurs in the areas that can immediately leverage this investment?

**Mr. Brian Saunderson:** It's a very good question. I thank my colleague for that question. When we get into discussions about boundary adjustments, not only the need is a critical issue, but the servicing is an issue. What areas are contiguous to the boundaries that have access to services, so that we can start the development we need immediately, and, as well, plan for the expansion of that development moving forward with the linkage to the services?

We know servicing water infrastructure, water and waste water, is a pinch point for development across the province. As the minister has said many times, we probably have a deficit of about \$200 billion going across the province to make sure that we have appropriate servicing in the ground to get the development we need in place. And so, Barrie has a head start. They have services in the ground that we can take advantage of immediately to get this development going.

1430

**The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell):** Question?

**Mr. Jeff Burch:** A question for the associate minister: The legally required consultation on the bill will end on December 25, 2025. Given how the bill is already being rushed, does the government intend to rush the bill through before the consultation is complete, which would once again be a violation of the Environmental Bill of Rights?

**Hon. Graydon Smith:** I can't speak to the timeline of this bill's passage through the House. I'll leave that to the minister and the government House leader to talk about timing.

But I will reiterate the importance of this bill in getting it done in a timely fashion. We have an election year coming up, and beyond the boundary changes that impact the ability to build more homes and the ability to drive the economy of Barrie and Simcoe county, there are also some ward boundary changes and other changes that need to be addressed.

We have provided an exceptional amount of time for consensus to be reached through all the parties. Unfortunately, that wasn't possible, so we have taken this opportunity to bring this bill forward in a way that respects the time constraints that are involved in getting things done in preparation for 2026, and also the opportunity that is before Barrie and Simcoe county.

**The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell):** Question?

**Mr. Adil Shamji:** One of the purported reasons for this legislation is to accelerate home-building in that area. I'm curious to know how this government landed on this particular solution as opposed to alternative solutions such as eliminating the HST for all homebuyers on new primary

residences or fixing backlogs at the Landlord and Tenant Board.

**Mr. Brian Saunderson:** Thank you for the question.

I think there's two issues you're dealing with here. One is an immediate need. Barrie is bursting at the seams. In terms of larger issues about how to address home-building and home-purchasing across the province, that's an issue for another day and it's very much an issue before this House.

However, this issue that needed rectification—I would remind the member that this process, through the land facilitator's office, started 18 months ago. We've been working towards this December 31 deadline in order to get it in place for the upcoming elections. With Barrie's concerns, we know that they're going to be maxed out within the next 10 years on the housing stock and about the next 15 years with employment land stock. So this was a very urgent matter that needed addressing immediately.

**The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell):** Question?

**Ms. Laura Smith:** I was just going to ask the associate minister—I know he served as a mayor, and I know that he understands how important involvement of multiple municipalities with their own perspectives and priorities and planning process is, and how they work in conjunction to make the decision. Could the minister describe how this legislation reflects collaboration between the province and municipalities with respect to local input and ultimately allows council to focus on their strengths? I'm just wondering about how people and organizations, especially municipalities, can move forward on something like this and how this will empower the—

**The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell):** I recognize the minister.

**Hon. Graydon Smith:** Yes, thank you very much for the question from my colleague.

I'll reiterate that this is a moment in time that has only happened after an exceptional amount of collaboration, of municipalities working together. And no one disagreed on the core issue. The core issue is that we have an urban municipality that is growing and bursting at the seams and has opportunity before it that they wish to take advantage of and surrounding municipalities in the county that will also benefit from this growth, as has been articulated by my colleagues that have spoken today.

Again, everyone is generally in agreement on what the problem is that we're trying to solve and the way to do it. The devil can sometimes be in the details as we work together as municipal partners. But I respect the fact that everyone was at the table, talking about what they wanted to achieve and that they did realize that this type of movement forward is necessary for the benefit of all the citizens in the area.

**The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell):** Further debate?

**Mr. Jeff Burch:** I appreciate the comments from government members in their hour lead. I'll be sharing my time with the member from Ottawa Centre—who will bring a perspective, lots of experience in land use planning—

as well as the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane, who watches a lot of the goings-on in rural municipal politics for our caucus.

Here we have another government bill that's being rushed through the Legislature very quickly. Whenever we see that, we believe that it's a possibility that it's to avoid public scrutiny. I've listened to government members. They've talked about—this was first brought to our attention yesterday. Another problem, obviously, with respect to respecting the democratic process, is the government not giving the opposition the time to really prepare and ask the questions we need to ask and have the time to research comments from local councils and local citizens so that that can be part of the debate. So it's problematic when the government brings forward legislation like this and rams it through.

I have no idea if the government intends to time-allocate it. I assume they probably will since they seem to be in a rush, but there are obvious problems with the way that this legislation is being brought forward. I have to mention that because it really does a disservice to the democratic process that we use here in the Legislature.

The Barrie — Oro-Medonte — Springwater Boundary Adjustment Act authorizes the annexation of certain lands from the township of Oro-Medonte and the township of Springwater into the city of Barrie. Of course, that includes real property and infrastructure, like roads and water and waste water. The goal, as stated by the government, of the boundary adjustment is to secure additional service to residential and employment lands for Barrie's projected growth through 2051 while providing compensation and transitional measures—for example, tax rate phasing, continued servicing agreements and possible payments to the affected municipalities that were referenced by the associate minister for those townships.

However, as I will discuss, there are concerns, as we've done our best to research this issue, about local councils being overlooked; insufficient consultation; potential impacts on the protection of farmland and natural heritage, which I'm sure my friend from Timiskaming–Cochrane will talk about; and, of course, the use of strong mayor powers, which was an interesting battle between the mayor of Springwater and that council throughout this process.

We also are sensitive to respect for municipal autonomy. This government has had a real habit of interfering in municipal councils and municipalities' land use planning. In our opinion, municipalities should be partners in growth planning and certainly not hostages to provincial direction. If municipalities disagree or have outstanding concerns, the province should facilitate fair mediation, not impose boundaries by law.

I did hear the associate minister talk about the facilitator and that it was the facilitator's suggestion to go to the province. I don't have any evidence to the contrary, but there's also no evidence that measures like strong mayor powers, MZOs, forced revisions to urban boundaries, ignoring the Environmental Bill of Rights, forced amalgamations or annexations increase housing starts—actually, to the contrary.

Getting into the bill, as mentioned, the bill provides for the city of Barrie's annexation of roughly 4,100 acres of land from the townships of Oro-Medonte and Springwater as of January 1, 2026, very soon. The annexed lands are listed in the bill's schedule 1.

**1440**

I just asked the associate minister, since the bill lists the properties that are supposed to be annexed, but it also gives the minister the power to set aside this list and prescribe different lands to be annexed, why does he need the power? Will those lands be the ones that are annexed? I believe his response was that the government has flexibility and they could change, so the lands that are listed in the bill are not necessarily the lands that will be annexed. The minister can change those at their discretion.

While the bill's schedule does list the lands, as I mentioned, the government has the power to retroactively amend that statute and authorize the minister to prescribe the annexed lands by regulation, in which case the lands are deemed to have been annexed as of January 1, 2026. They can really do whatever they want with those lands. I'm not sure if they need that flexibility. The minister says they do, but it will be interesting, as we ask questions of the government, if they can answer why they need that power.

All township real property—that's roads, sewers, easements etc.—within the annexed areas immediately vest in the city of Barrie. The township reserve funds held for the sole purpose of maintaining or operating this real property will be transferred to the city of Barrie. Other assets and liabilities will remain with the townships. The bill also says that all Barrie bylaws and resolutions shall extend to the annexed areas, and township bylaws will cease to apply, with certain exceptions. Township zoning bylaws, local traffic laws, bylaws under the Drainage Act and Weed Control Act and other laws such as that will continue to apply.

Property tax increases: I have seen comments from local folks in the area obviously concerned about that. The bill says that property tax increases for the annexed properties will be phased in over 20 years for agricultural properties and for five years for all the other properties, so there does seem to be a grace period built in. The property tax increase is immediate if there's a change in ownership, so that can happen more quickly. The bill says the minister can make regulations requiring Barrie, Simcoe county, Oro-Medonte or Springwater to pay specified compensation to each other and has additional broad authority to govern the annexation. The minister has an awful lot of power to do pretty much whatever they want.

In terms of the background of the bill, Speaker, about two years ago, Barrie mayor Alex Nuttall pitched an annexation proposal to the Legislature's Standing Committee on Heritage, Infrastructure and Cultural Policy. I was actually at that meeting, travelling around with the governance review committee under that committee. Nuttall said the city was in the best position to accommodate new housing and industrial development relatively quickly. There was already a dispute happening, obvious-

ly, with the other municipalities and I know that they can get quite messy and emotional.

The proposal has been controversial among certain residents: "The opposition to annexation runs" fairly deeply "in Oro-Medonte. It is a vibrant land consisting of valuable farmland, ... wetlands, and cherished homes," as witnessed at the committee hearing by Jane Voorheis, who's a member of a local group. Friends of the Future, which was created to oppose the annexation, so there's been a fair bit of citizen opposition to the entire annexation.

In June, the province appointed a deputy provincial land and development facilitator that the associate minister referenced to facilitate discussions between Barrie, Oro-Medonte, Springwater and Simcoe county—all four—on the proposal. Despite the local opposition in early 2025, in November, just a few weeks ago, Oro-Medonte council endorsed this annexation proposal, subject to the fulfillment of certain agreements that Barrie has agreed to. That endorsement also came with a request to the minister that conversions to employment land be deferred pending further study on servicing considerations, and that annexed land be used solely for community uses. So that is obviously one of the outstanding issues: What part of the land will be used for housing and what will be employment lands? I assume the minister will be the one making that decision.

Also in November, Simcoe county council gave its conditional approval for the proposal.

One thing we noticed is that the township's and the county's requests and conditions are not reflected in Bill 76, so it's unknown whether the minister will address these conditions by regulation or by whatever other process.

As I mentioned, Barrie last month endorsed the annexation proposal. However, a majority of Springwater council has opposed the proposal, and this is where things have gotten, I think, a bit messy. The mayor, Jennifer Coughlin, used her strong-mayor powers to block the council's democratic decision to oppose the annexation. There's a dispute—we'll see if I have time to get into that later in my speech—

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** You have time.

**Mr. Jeff Burch:** My colleagues are dying to speak to this bill—over whether these strong-mayor powers were exercised lawfully, leaving the official position of Springwater in doubt.

Also interesting, the township's lawyer, Quinto Annibale—and I asked my wife, who is Italian, how to say the last name, so I know I got it right—argued that Coughlin did not exercise her powers lawfully. That's the town's lawyer. So council's opposition to the annexation, according to them, should stand. Then the mayor used the strong-mayor powers to fire Annibale, the township's lawyer.

Annibale was simultaneously representing a group called the Midhurst Landowners Group, which was pursuing a separate proposal to expand the township's Midhurst secondary plan area. Now, Midhurst is located a bit north

of the annexed areas, and landowner hopes for development could have been affected by an annexation proposal—or they will be—that directs growth to Barrie instead of Midhurst.

In July, Annibale presented Springwater council with an assessment of the Barrie annexation proposal. The assessment was critical of the annexation proposal, cautioning Springwater that the Barrie proposal would likely shortchange the town on the value of the annexed properties. It also said that the expansion of the Midhurst urban area could meet regional development needs without the annexation that has been proposed. They argued that if Springwater threw its support behind that expansion, that would benefit the Midhurst Landowners Group.

Then there was a whole issue of conflict of interest, or the appearance of conflict of interest. The document we looked at had the lawyer who was fired through strong-mayor powers assuring the town that even though the law firm represented the landowners group, with a direct interest in the Barrie annexation proposal—it said, “Out of an abundance of caution, an ethical screen has been implemented on this file in accordance with our firm’s ethical screen policy, which will ensure that no conflict of interest arises.”

So you’ve got a very complicated legal situation where the Springwater council, which I believe had seven members, moved against the annexation; the town lawyer of Springwater saying that the annexation was not necessary—some conflict-of-interest concerns there; the lawyer being fired, again, under strong-mayor powers. So there’s very little that we can glean on short notice on whether that town lawyer was correct and there were other ways to satisfy development needs without annexation or whether that lawyer was acting for two different interests—so a lot happening here that would be beneficial for us to work out, but it’s hard to do that when the bill is being rushed through the Legislature so quickly.

**1450**

A few other things to raise: Part V of the Municipal Act, we know, already lays out a process to govern annexation proposals. It’s unknown why this process is not being filed with respect to the Barrie proposal. Part V does require annexation proposals to achieve a prescribed degree of support, which is the majority support of all the affected councils; that it meet consultation requirements, which we’ve talked about; as well as adhere to certain standards of transparency. So is the purpose of Bill 76 to bypass those requirements? That’s a question that we’re asking, and we’re going to listen intently to the other government presenters and ask those questions as we go along.

The annexation proposal as well will create winners and losers. If growth in Simcoe county is directed to the annexed areas, it will mean less opportunity to develop other lands in the region, and many folks brought this forward at the governance review committee, including Midhurst and Innisfil. It is possible that council debates concerning annexation have been influenced by competing special interests and not just evidence and the public

interest. And it’s hard to know because of the way it’s being rushed through and because of the lack of information—who is speaking in the public interest.

The scope of the annexation has been based on a report by a company called Hemson Consulting, which provided an estimate of the lands needed to accommodate growth to 2051 and 2061. Hemson’s land budget assumes sprawl-oriented development, as per this government’s sprawl-friendly land use budgeting guidelines attached to the provincial growth plan, which have reduced the density of jobs and residents in planned growth areas, accelerating farmland loss.

That’s always a real concern of ours, Speaker. Through the eight years that I’ve been elected to this place, the entire time as municipal affairs critic, we’ve had a real concern about the government’s land use policies and its effect on farmland. We’re losing a shocking amount of farmland every single year, every single week, and many members of this Legislature in the opposition have brought that forward, and the government continues to bring forward policies that infringe on farmland and endanger our food security. So we’re very, very concerned about that.

In closing, I will just say that we’ve done our best to apply a critical eye to this bill, which is the job of the opposition. But again, we don’t appreciate the way it’s being rammed through the Legislature. We understand that the province wants to accommodate development concerns. We realize it’s a very fast-growing area of the province. We realize that we need to have smart land use policies so that we don’t end up with sprawl, which is far more expensive than using the available land that’s there. And many of the consultants and experts that have given evidence to these municipal councils have talked about the possibility that this development can be accomplished without using the heavy-handed tactic of annexing.

And, just to say, we have real concerns with the way this government has encouraged and allowed the use of strong-mayor powers. For those who may be listening and aren’t fully aware of what those powers entail, it’s basically the ability of a mayor to override the democratic vote of a council to propose budgets without consulting anyone and to veto anything the council comes out with democratically. We consider that an attack on basic democracy. There’s been reports out, because strong mayor powers have been out there for a while now. There’s no evidence that they have created the conditions for more housing. As a matter of fact, there are circumstances where it can be shown that it’s actually held up housing because it creates confusion and anger on city councils, who are tasked with making decisions about development.

Those are just some of our concerns. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to Bill 76, and I’d like to hand things over to my colleague from Ottawa Centre.

**The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell):** I recognize the member for Ottawa Centre.

**MPP Catherine McKenney:** I thank my colleague from Niagara Centre for sharing his time with me on this lead so that I can share a cautionary tale of what forced

amalgamation could look like—and looks like in the city that I come from and the area that I represent.

I'm going back 24 years here in what is probably the most controversial moment in Ottawa's modern history, and that is the amalgamation of 2001. After months of political wrangling and often name-calling, we had 11 municipalities—cities, townships and one village—that were forced to create what some people today call a super-city and others call a mistake.

I know first-hand about amalgamation. I served on Ottawa city council for eight years, but I also worked at the city from the time it was amalgamated almost up until the time I served on council. So I've been around the city of Ottawa a long time, and I learned how amalgamation changed our city, and not always for the better. If I could just take you through a wee bit of history, because it does help understand how we got to where we are today and what happens when change is forced onto a municipality.

In 1995, a Conservative government under Mike Harris won a majority government on a platform called the Common Sense Revolution. They promised lower taxes. They promised less government. They cut social assistance rates—at that time, they cut the rates by 21.6%; we are still living with that today. They closed and amalgamated many hospitals, slashed the number of school boards we had and privatized highways. They cut OW benefits, as I said. People today cannot afford housing, and we're seeing a growing housing and homelessness crisis as a result.

Then, after all of that, they decided to go after municipalities with Bill 26, the Savings and Restructuring Act, which undertook an extensive program of municipal mergers. Between 1996 and 2002, the province went from 850 municipalities and reduced that to 447. The rationale for them was simple: They wanted to streamline government. They wanted to cut costs, reduce duplication, lower taxes and make government more efficient—common sense. But here's the thing about common sense: Sometimes the way you pursue it is wrong, and it was wrong in this case.

I don't often quote the Fraser Institute, but I'm going to. A 2015 Fraser Institute study concluded that “the cost savings, smaller bureaucracy and lower taxes promised by consolidating of local governments have not materialized.”

So it didn't happen. Fifteen years after amalgamation, it did not result in any cost savings. But like today, in 1990, this government was not interested in evidence.

**1500**

Before amalgamation, Ottawa, as I said, was made up of 11 municipalities. You had the city of Ottawa, which is the old downtown core. You had the city of Vanier, maybe one of my favourite parts of the city—a historically francophone, working-class community. You had Nepean, which is a large suburban area. You had a newer city, the city of Kanata, which was also a suburban area—high-tech. You had the city of Gloucester, which was both suburban and some rural. You had Cumberland, which, again, was both suburban and rural. Then you had the

townships of Rideau, West Carleton, Goulbourn, Osgoode, and the village of Rockcliffe Park.

That's not what it looks like today. Today it's amalgamated into one, and that was done through a transition board. A transition board was appointed in 2000 that would march the region of Ottawa-Carleton through amalgamation. It wasn't a democratic process. The province imposed amalgamation, and then it appointed this transition board to figure out how it was going to do that.

Just as an example of how the transition board failed—it failed in many ways. I'm going to give you one example which I've always found amusing. We had a flag that was a visual identity that we had to develop—and that was led by 1,000 Ottawa residents. So 1,000 residents came together and designed and decided on a new flag and a new visual identity for the city. It was the transition board that developed the new coat of arms for the city—it was actually comical in the end; the new council did vote to keep Ottawa's historic coat of arms—and people called it meaningless, sterile, an embarrassment. So that's how amalgamation started—with a coat of arms that even the transition board couldn't get right, and it has been pretty much sideways from then on.

What has happened here and what happens when we force amalgamation is that we get structural issues within boundaries of cities, and they're almost impossible to overcome.

Just the city of Ottawa, for example—it's enormous. Because we were forced to amalgamate 11 municipalities—rural areas and a village—just the geography of it makes it almost unworkable. You can fit the cities of Calgary, Edmonton, Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver—all five of those cities can fit within the geography of Ottawa. This is not a city that grew organically. It was a city that grew because the Conservative government of the day drew a line around 11 municipalities and called it one city.

We have to ask ourselves, and you're probably wondering, “Well, did it deliver what was promised?” No. I assume it was done on some evidence. Was it efficient? No. It actually increased the number of municipal employees by 39%, and that's after growth—so 39% more municipal employees. That's kind of the opposite of what was promised. We had fewer politicians, but more bureaucrats, and I know, because I was one of them.

No cost savings: When you merge municipalities, you can't pay workers in one municipality less than the other. The wages get harmonized upwards, so that became the new standard. There really were no meaningful cost savings, certainly not lower taxes. There's a much, much higher debt that's being carried by the city today.

I would have to argue that the services are not much better either, and I think that everyone in the city would agree with that. When you live, for example, in a rural township and suddenly you're part of a big city and you're paying big-city taxes, you expect big-city-level services, as you should: paved roads, more frequent garbage collection, better snow clearing, recreation centres, libraries. This all costs money, and it did here. We can just look

as far as our transit services in the city to know that the services are no better.

The Attorney General brought up community identity, and I have to tell you that these 11 municipalities went into amalgamation against their will. Nobody wanted amalgamation. People in the suburban areas didn't want it. People in the downtown core didn't want it. People in the rural areas didn't want it. And today, if you offered people de-amalgamation, I would guess that it would be overwhelmingly supported.

So now what we've got is we've got sprawl. It didn't just create a big city. It created sprawl, and here's the financial reality that amalgamation created.

I find it interesting that the government today is using Hemson Consulting in their proposal to annex Barrie's residential employment land needs. Again, as my colleague said, this land budget does assume sprawl-oriented development.

I just want to draw your attention to another Hemson Consulting report. The city of Ottawa had Hemson Consulting Ltd. also conduct a major study and update some of its numbers from 2012. They had that done just a couple of years ago, and here's what they found: Hemson Consulting found that it costs the city of Ottawa \$465 per person each year to serve new low-density homes built on underdeveloped land. That's over and above what it receives from property taxes and water bills. So \$465 per person per year is what it costs forever once you build those new low-density homes. And on the other hand, if you build in infill development, where the servicing is already in place, where you've got the water services, the waste water, infill development pays for itself, and it leaves the city with an extra \$606 per capita each year.

So fiscally, if you want to talk about fiscal responsibility, we have got to in this province start thinking seriously about land use and what that means, and we cannot continue, as we have, to build and to sprawl on un-serviced land—and the loss of farmland, which I'm sure my colleague from Timiskaming–Cochrane will talk about.

We've got today in Ottawa, as a result, an infrastructure crisis. The replacement cost of our infrastructure today is \$51.2 billion. I'm not sure how anyone is ever going to pay for that. We've got 9,600 kilometres of water, waste water and storm pipes. That number in 2017 was \$20 billion and it has ballooned to \$50 billion. That's because we've allowed ourselves to continue to sprawl.

**1510**

We've got an infrastructure crisis, and that is going to have to be paid for by residents who are living there today and will be living there in the future. That will not build more housing, that will not create more housing, that will not make transit better and that will not make life more affordable.

So what can it teach us? Bigger is not better. The promise was efficiency through scale; the reality was dysfunction, really, and an infrastructure time bomb that people are going have to pay for. You cannot legislate efficiency. You cannot force communities to amalgamate and expect that it will all work out.

Local democracy does matter. People need to feel connected to the government that serves them. Before amalgamation, I can tell you that people in Nepean were some of the proudest people; they loved their city. People in Vanier felt very, very connected to their neighbourhood, to their city. People in Rockcliffe, people in rural villages felt very connected to where they were. Nobody wanted to be part of one big city. Even today, I don't think that Vanier calls itself Ottawa. Kanata certainly doesn't; it still has that big "Kanata" sign out on the highway. Nepean doesn't.

Again, I'm just going to go back to the Fraser Institute's study in 2015. They concluded that a "vast amount of research has found that consolidation fails to produce promised cost savings, rarely leads to more efficient service delivery, and reduces the ability of citizens to be involved in the life of their local governments." That's the Fraser Institute.

Once you amalgamate, it's almost impossible—I don't want to say it is impossible, but it is almost impossible to go back. Once you've put it together, it's pretty difficult to split it all up and carry on.

So why does it matter? Why does this history of Ottawa and this forced amalgamation matter? Well, just like the government of Mike Harris did, this government continues today to attack municipalities. It continues today to centralize power. It ignores evidence, it downloads costs and it strips local autonomy.

We've seen this government give strong mayor powers that override council decisions, this interfering with MZOs, ministerial zoning orders. They've attacked bike lanes in Toronto. They cut Toronto city council and downloaded homelessness costs onto municipalities. And just like the amalgamation that Harris forced on us, none of this interference saves money. It does not improve service, it does not make government more efficient and it destroys local democracy.

So here we are, 24 years later, and we're still dealing with the consequences of a decision made at Queen's Park—over the objections of many residents, without proper consultation—that was based, really, on ideology rather than evidence. I'm afraid that that is what we are doing again today. And unless we keep this bill in this Legislature, unless we put it through committee, unless we invite people out and hear from experts on some of the pros and cons. I'm sure there are pros. I have no doubt. I drove through Barrie this past summer. It's a wonderful area. Surely we want to get it right, right? Surely we want to make sure that what we do is what the people want. We want to hear from experts. We want to know what to expect. Nothing is perfect.

I guess I'll end by saying that the best thing that we can do today is ensure that it does go through committee, that we do have proper debate, that we do listen to experts and that we do make the best decision for these municipalities.

With that, I'm going to hand it over to my colleague from Timiskaming–Cochrane to carry on.

**The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell):** I recognize the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane.



**Mr. John Vanthof:** As always, it's an honour to stand in the House and talk about bills that the government brings forward. This one, Bill 76, the Barrie — Oro-Medonte — Springwater Boundary Adjustment Act—I'm going to be right up front: I don't know much about that area. I drive through it on a weekly basis. I live quite a bit north, and I drive through on a weekly basis.

But you know what was odd, Speaker? Last night and this morning, I was at the Ontario Federation of Agriculture convention. It was a great convention. I know a few people from that area, and they didn't know anything more about it than I did. But there were a few people, and what they basically said—"Well, it's probably another commercial land grab. It's probably for housing, and we're probably going to lose agricultural land." More than "probably," that's highly, highly likely.

Now, I listened intently to the government members regarding this. I also read our research notes. And it brought me back some memories when I used to be a municipal councillor, eons ago. I'm not as young as I look.

**Ms. Doly Begum:** What?

**Mr. John Vanthof:** Yes. Okay, I also can't see very well.

I was a councillor in a rural municipality, but it had an urban strip in front of another municipality. And the other municipality, the town, wanted that urban strip for all the reasons that towns want urban. They want the taxation; I get that. But they also wanted to take the rural municipality's income.

So, as a former councillor, the question I would like to know—and again, I am not speaking as an expert in this area, far from it. But when one municipality—a larger municipality, a more urban municipality—is granted land from rural municipalities, the logical assumption is that the rural municipalities in the long term are going to lose out. They're going to lose revenue. I might be wrong. This might be a case that that isn't going to happen. But when you read that even the reserves that were saved for improvements in the areas that are about to be annexed—I think that's the right word. Even those reserves are being transferred to the urban municipality.

So I'm not sure that this is a benefit to the people who are living in the rural municipality. They should have questions, pretty basic questions. When we went through this in my municipality, what the people want to know is, what's going to happen to our taxes? What's going to happen to our infrastructure? I think our critic on this said that there was going to be a grace period, that the tax increases were going to be put in over a 20-year period unless the property was sold, and then they would kick in right away. So there are going to be tax changes. There are likely going to be service changes, maybe for the better but maybe not.

1520

One thing I did find interesting was that the province actually hired a facilitator to try to make this an amicable process—I don't know if amicable is the right word, but a process that would be mutually agreed upon. Well, the fact that it fell here yesterday and is now being rushed through

the House suggests that that facilitation process didn't work that well, didn't work well at all and maybe for good reasons.

I'm not sure—actually, I'm pretty sure that the province doesn't really have a plan to protect farmland. Actually, in the estimates, I asked the Minister of Agriculture about agriculture impact assessments because that is how—to us, what we proposed is that whenever there is a piece of land and an attempt is being made to rezone a piece of land from agriculture to anything else, there should be a simple question asked: Can you demonstrate that there's a better use of that land than growing food for us, for our children, for our grandchildren? In an unstable world, is there a better use for that land? There might be.

In Bruce county, if you're going to use a piece of agricultural land to build an abattoir in the middle of cattle country, you know what? I think you can make an argument. If you're going to make a vegetable processing/sorting centre or something in the Holland Marsh where they grow a lot of vegetables, that's a worthy argument. You can go to step 2. But if you're going to build houses on prime agricultural land, that's a whole different story because once you build those houses, you're not getting that land back. That land, particularly the land in southern Ontario—Oro-Medonte, Barrie, Springwater to me is southern Ontario. We have great land, but we have unique climatic conditions, because of the Great Lakes, where we can grow crops almost better than anywhere else in North America. In changing times with changing climate, we are insulated quite a bit from that. Immune? Not—that's not the case. We are not immune, but we're insulated. Every time we let land go, that land, that gift, we're not getting it back.

Now, the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, through Stats Canada, did some research and the last number I saw is that we lose 319 or 320 acres a day of land, of arable land in Ontario—land we're not getting back. Now, I think we can predict fairly surely that if there's agricultural land here, and it will be because this is an agricultural area, once the land is annexed to Barrie, given to Barrie, it will go—I'm not saying we shouldn't have housing, but we should look at what the best use of the land is.

I've got the member from Waterloo sitting behind me and she might tell us later this afternoon, there are regions like Waterloo who have done exceptional work on actually not using arable land—around Waterloo, some of the best of the best land. They do a really good job of planning, so they don't waste it.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Until recently.

**Mr. John Vanthof:** Thank you for that—until the current government got involved. The current government, they make things worse for—

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Everybody.

**Mr. John Vanthof:** —everyone, even people who are trying to do it right.

Instead of looking at a place like Waterloo, the tech capital of Ontario, and saying, "Okay, agriculture might not be their focus, but they understand that it's the basis of

our nation, of our province. They don't waste agricultural land." But this province, I'm not sure.

So that's an agricultural impact assessment. We do have agricultural impact assessments in this province, but how it's implemented by the current government is a bit different. They don't do it for parcels; they do it for regions. Also, the government doesn't do it. It's done by an independent third party hired by the developers.

*Interjections.*

**Mr. John Vanthof:** I'm not anti-development, but an independent third party hired by the developers—and the result of the assessment doesn't actually go to the province; it goes to the municipality. The province really has nothing—nothing—to do with it. Basically, to me, it's a check mark on a piece of paper and there's actually no real, serious thought given to protecting that land.

Again, we're not saying that no agricultural land can be used for development. We're not saying that at all. There are certain uses that complement agricultural land that make this province stronger. But simply sprawl for the sake of sprawl? We are not doing our duty for the people we represent, for their children, for their grandchildren. We are squandering the gifts we were given. Is that what's happening here? I think so. I know so.

But I'm going to go back to something that's much more immediate. When you take a municipality and you take the revenue stream from that municipality—what is happening in a lot of rural areas—then the rural municipality can't afford to provide the services they're going to provide for the residents. Because when you take this—I believe it's 4,000 acres? I think 1,600 hectares? I'm still an imperial guy; 4,000 acres, give or take?

**Hon. Steve Clark:** You're imperial?

**Mr. John Vanthof:** Imperial. Imperial.

But now, in the conversion between metric and imperial, I lost my train of thought. Where was I?

**Interjection:** Four thousand acres.

**Mr. John Vanthof:** No, I know. I remember how many acres; I just don't remember what I was going to do with those acres.

**Mr. Chris Glover:** Do we know what they're going to do with them?

**Mr. John Vanthof:** Oh, we know—thank you for that. We know very well what's going to happen to those acres. Whatever is agricultural in those 4,000 acres is going to be gone. It's going to be added to the 320 acres a day. At some point, we're going to feel that, especially now.

We are dealing with threats from the south. We are dealing with an uncertain world. And if there's one thing you need to protect your country—you know the “elbows up” people? Well, you know what? You can't keep your elbows up unless you can feed yourself. Letting the best land in this country get paved over is not a good long-term strategy. It just isn't. It just isn't.

1530

I don't see a lot of long-term strategy here, when bills are dropped that even the local people don't know what's really going on. There's just something here that doesn't—not knowing enough about this issue but knowing a lot

about the issue of being able to feed your own people, being able to grow your own food, being able to withstand the issues that are happening in the rest of the world, it doesn't make sense to squander another 4,000 acres.

Now, it could very well be that there are parts of this land that aren't suitable for agriculture. I said at the start of my speech: I don't pretend to be an expert on that area. I really don't. But I do know it's an agricultural area. I drive through it on a weekly basis.

You know what else? I drive down, and every week, there is less agricultural land on that road. Every week, there are bigger buildings. But every week, there are less fields.

Something that a lot of people think—and I'm going to bring something else up at estimates to fill my last three minutes. I asked the minister of northern development and growth—because he's a big proponent of agriculture in northern Ontario, as am I.

I have been a farmer in northern Ontario my whole life. It's treated me very well. I want to put on the record once more that, although northern Ontario is a great place to farm, you can't just pave an acre in southern Ontario and clear an acre in northern Ontario and call yourself even. That doesn't work. You can't even clear three acres in northern Ontario and call yourself even. That doesn't work.

But the minister of northern development and growth said that there are 10 million acres available in the Great Clay Belt north of me—10 million acres just waiting. And I asked, “Okay, great”—

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Bit far north.

**Mr. John Vanthof:** No, no. It's good land, but that land's already being used.

The forestry sector is going through a tough time right now, but it's a big job creator and we need them. They're using that land now. Because forestry and farming are very similar, except we grow and harvest a crop every year, and in forestry, they grow and harvest a crop every 40 or 50 years. But they do manage that land.

So do you foresee a conflict? And he said, “Absolutely not. They can go farther north to get trees.” I can assure you that the forest companies in my area do not have the same view—not at all.

Is there an opportunity to grow agriculture in northern Ontario? Yes, absolutely. But the only way you're going to grow it is by working with the land users now, by working with First Nations and actually seeing what the best use of that land is for everyone for the future. But to simply say, “Oh no, we can just bulldoze 10 million acres and tile it and we're away to the races”—they're dreaming, Speaker. They're dreaming.

The biggest travesty is land that can and should grow crops for our children and our grandchildren in perpetuity—that's a big word for me, Speaker—is being paved over as we speak. Once you pave it, it's not coming back. We all know that. They know that on the other side, and yet they continue to pave. They continue.

Are there places to build in Ontario? Absolutely. But do we have to be cognizant of what we're giving up? We do. And I question whether this government actually does.

**The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell):** Question?

**Ms. Lee Fairclough:** Thank you to both my colleagues in the House for your remarks just now.

I was quite intrigued by your comment about the fact that you were with people from this community and they weren't necessarily aware of what was happening. I tried to look up a little bit in the news to see if there's any impression that we're getting about this land transfer, and it feels like it might be in a fairly nascent part of its development.

So I guess my question would be—and this would be to either one of you: You both talked a little bit about the experience of these kinds of changes, the loss that you might get. Is there one thing that you think is going to be really important to be sure is in place before a piece of legislation like this passes?

**The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell):** Response? I recognize the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane.

**Mr. John Vanthof:** Just for clarity: I talked to people at the convention. I didn't hold a scientific—and it's not that they weren't aware of the issue; they weren't aware of the legislation. A lot of people were aware of the issue, and when I said, "Yeah, and a bill dropped yesterday." "A what?" That's what they weren't aware of. And that tells me that they haven't been fully consulted on what's going on.

The best thing on controversial issues is full knowledge. Not everybody is going to be happy. We're not always happy here. But as long as everyone knows all the information—and I'll tell you, they didn't know that a bill was dropped yesterday in this House.

**The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell):** I recognize the member from Perth–Wellington.

**Mr. Matthew Rae:** Thank you to my colleagues from across the way for their remarks this afternoon.

Colleagues, I just want to say I think the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane should run for federal leader. I think he would do a great job. There is an NDP farmer, I think, actually running, but from Huron county. But that's not here nor there.

My question is actually for the member from Niagara Centre, and it's related to the fact—I know we heard from the government side already about how we've been spending 18 months, through the facilitator, to work with every municipality. We took 18 months, but we couldn't wait anymore.

And so does the member believe the province has a responsibility to intervene when a region's planning future is at stake and when jobs and community investment and the infrastructure in the ground is at stake?

**Mr. Jeff Burch:** Yes, I do, actually, but there's no way to really know because you dropped it on us yesterday morning. So that's why I talked at the beginning of my speech about the fact that we have a democratic process

here and part of the process is the opposition being able to get their get their head around a bill—at least some, maybe a couple of days or maybe a session with the government where they can explain the bill. But dropping it with absolutely no warning the day before and forcing us to scramble to do a good job for the constituents in this area does nothing for the democratic process. So we don't really know if the facilitator did that work because we haven't had time to look into it, and that's unfortunate.

**The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell):** I recognize the member from Nickel Belt.

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** The government says that they are taking action to support the construction of new homes where it makes most sense. The release said that the change would unlock up to 8,000 new homes and allow for major economic investment.

The member from Timiskaming–Cochrane talked about what it means when agricultural land is transferred and homes are built instead. So what kind of agricultural output are we going to lose if 1,673 hectares of land that now grows food—how much food production are we losing with 1,673 hectares? And I hope you're good in math.

1540

**Mr. John Vanthof:** Thank you very much for that question. Sometimes friendly questions are harder than opposition questions—a lot.

Honestly, it depends on what you're growing. If you're growing corn or if you're growing—but that area, there's a lot of vegetables in that area. Vegetables are high-value and are also, per acre, a lot of—you can feed a lot of people from an acre of cabbage. I think there's a lot of cabbage in that area.

I'm not a cabbage grower, so I don't know how many tonnes, but I do know that cabbage, potatoes, things like that, which are grown a lot in that area—drive through there—they're much more valuable to the province, to people, than what can be grown in some other areas.

**The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell):** Question?

**Ms. Laura Smith:** I want to thank the members opposite for contributing in today's remarks. But what I do want to ask—and this is important to me. We all know that unresolved boundary issues can cause major delays and slowdowns when we talk about cycles having to do with builds, which is what we're here to talk about, and which is, quite frankly, what we're all here in support of. We need housing.

Do the members acknowledge that removing these barriers helps accelerate housing delivery? And if not, then what is their solution? Because we have to remove these barriers in order to move forward with this kind of development. And if not now, then—

**The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell):** Question?

Response? I recognize the member from Niagara Centre.

**Mr. Jeff Burch:** What I did talk about in my comments was the strong-mayor powers that were used to overturn a democratic decision of Springwater council. What

happened is, the mayor overrode the council's decision and council made another motion, which then the mayor had to veto, and they were going around in a circle. So it sounds a lot like, to me, that the strong-mayor powers actually delayed things, complicated things, created chaos and made it harder for the facilitator to get an agreement.

In terms of our solutions, we've been very consistent in proposing that the government get back in the business of housing and build good social and affordable housing for folks in Ontario.

**The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell):** I recognize the member from Hamilton West–Ancaster–Dundas.

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** Thank you, Speaker. As you just said, my riding, Hamilton West–Ancaster–Dundas—Ancaster and Dundas are two historical communities in Ontario. In fact, Ancaster is probably the oldest town in Ontario; it's over 230 years old. Dundas is 177 years old. If you're looking for Christmas shopping, they both have beautiful downtown historic sites to go shopping. But they suffered under the 2001 forced amalgamation by Mike Harris. They were promised efficiencies and cost savings; in fact, the cost to amalgamate ended up being six times the \$58 million that they predicted. It was six times that cost. They still didn't see the efficiencies and we're still dealing with area rating almost 22 years, 25 years later, meaning that certain areas like Ancaster and Dundas don't have the services that the taxpayers have to pay for, so they had to make sure we have two levels of taxation to deal with this mess.

My question to the member is, why are we not taking the time to understand the failures of the past?

**MPP Catherine McKenney:** As you say, it is really important to understand that when we push out our boundaries, every metre of pipe that we lay for water and waste water to support new developments is an additional cost that cannot be borne by current residents. Development charges will pay for some of the new infrastructure; property taxes and water bills will pay for ongoing maintenance and then replacement. And replacement is, again, where residents are then held with what is an infrastructure time bomb. We see it time and time again. It costs far, far too much to maintain and replace that infrastructure, far more than what we could do if we just did good infill development and used our existing infrastructure.

**The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell):** Further debate?

**Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon:** It's always a pleasure to rise in this House and speak on behalf of the great residents of beautiful Beaches–East York. I would prefer to speak on bills that actually fix a problem versus bills that address an issue that really wasn't an issue and caused a whole lot of problems, like Bill 76. It was just dropped upon us I don't know what time yesterday: An Act respecting the adjustment of the boundaries between the City of Barrie, the Township of Oro-Medonte and the Township of Springwater.

I want to also mention I'm sharing my time with one of my favourite colleagues, the member from Orléans—colleagues on this side.

**Interjection:** We were wondering who you were going to choose.

**Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon:** Eeny, meany.

Okay, back to the bill at hand: You know, I'm always up for a challenge, for sure, but what I would say is these bills that you're flinging at us left, right and centre—I feel like I'm in a game of Ping-Pong or something. But we're keeping up, for sure. We're keeping up to you. But really, if you want to do things right, do it right the first time. You take the time. You meet with the people. You meet with stakeholders. You have the conversations. You visit the area. You go to committee. You go through the proper procedures. You don't rush, rush, rush.

What I would say with Bill 76, which interestingly has the word “respect” in it—shockingly, because I don't see a lot of respect—is, what is the rush? Why do you need to rush this? I would like an answer from someone over there at some point in time. You're just ramming this through at the speed of light for some reason, instead of taking the time.

I was on those regional governance reviews with my friend from Perth–Wellington and my friend from—

**Mr. Matthew Rae:** Niagara Centre,

**Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon:** —Niagara Centre; yes, thank you. And they were scintillating and interesting. We went out to Burlington. We went out to St. Catharines. We went out to Barrie years ago, actually.

**Mr. Matthew Rae:** It wasn't years ago. It was, like, two years.

**Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon:** Two years ago is years, and I remember—and it's great to go out all over Ontario and meet other Ontarians who care about their communities and are passionate about building a better province together.

It was interesting because in Barrie, when we were there, the mayor was there, and the mayor had a little document that he had whipped up, I guess, and he handed it out to everyone. In the document, he had a map of lands that he was interested in obtaining. I remember people there from other jurisdictions—their jurisdictions were on those maps, and they had yet to see the map. That was the first time seeing the map, and they actually rushed up to me at the break and said, “Hey, can we see that map? Because our municipality is there and we haven't even seen it.” I don't know; that seems a little backwards to me. That was the first, kind of, little red flag: Why does this mayor have a map of areas he's eyeing up and the people who live in those areas and are political representatives for those areas have not even seen those maps? Very, very interesting, indeed.

That's all I will say about the regional governance review for now, but just think about that.

**1550**

Okay, so then next we're going up to how this is happening. And yes, we have Bill 6 passed and there are strong mayoral powers. Whether we like it or not, they are there. I don't think it's very democratic, personally, as a former member of council—with the Premier, I always remind you. And I'm telling you—not to put words in the

Premier's mouth, but I don't think he would like the strong mayoral powers—maybe with his brother, but not someone else. I don't think it's very democratic. Obviously, the people of Springwater thought it was when their mayor used those powers. Yet as my colleague beside me mentioned, even though the idea of these strong mayoral powers was to speed things up—and God knows we want to rush things through here—when we do rush them through, we end up walking things back or correcting errors that were done in the first spot. So that wastes time, but the strong mayoral powers with this situation in Springwater have actually caused a delay.

You kind of boomeranged yourself with that legislation, personally. And now, you have a whole bunch of lawyers involved.

**Mr. Matthew Rae:** Oh, my God.

**Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon:** Well, I am mindful of taxpayers' dollars. Personally, I'm a fiscally responsible environmentalist who actually cares about taxpayers' dollars. I thought the members across from me called themselves fiscally prudent. I haven't seen that. You're all held up, and everyone's tying themselves in knots over what's happening with Springwater's mayor and council. I can't imagine what those meetings are like now. You had councillors opposing, you had lawyers opposing and the community opposing. The community is very concerned about this.

There's the next topic: the municipal meddling. I'm always trying to remind this government that we are a provincial government; we are not a municipal government. So why do we insist on meddling in municipal affairs?

Bike lanes, speed cameras, elections in the middle of an election, planning, green development standards, conservation authorities, strong mayoral powers, Dresden dumps, supervised injection sites—you name it. You're meddling. I just don't understand why you're obsessed with meddling municipally when we have bigger fish to fry.

We have bigger issues provincially, which you know. Let's get the darn houses built, in the right locations and sustainably. Let's address the health care crisis. Let's clean up the schools with the horrible backlog of disrepair. Let's address the autism wait-list. Let's do the stuff that is under our purview instead of this obsession.

This is basically just what my mother would call a "dog's breakfast." Really, it's just a mess.

Historically, the development always went to the south of Barrie, of course, because it's the Torontonians growing and expanding. And Barrie coming down—you want to be close to urban centres. And now, this is to the north, which is very curious, because we're lacking the servicing there. We all know how expensive it is to put in servicing.

To my knowledge—and I'll have to take a trip up there. My grandparents lived in Orillia, so we'd come from Collingwood, as you know where I'm from, over to Barrie and go up to Orillia. We spent lots of time in Barrie when I was younger because we didn't have a mall in Collingwood, so we used to go to Barrie's Georgian Mall to get our back-to-school clothes. Thank you to people in Barrie for that. But you go expanding up—there weren't the

arterial roads in this area, so it's kind of interesting that this area is being chosen. We want to be building communities where there's access to transit, where there's access to water treatment plants, where there's access to community centres and not just throwing the housing in the middle of nowhere, because we know that is not great for livability, for quality of life, for traffic—not that we're counting greenhouse gas emissions anymore because we just killed those targets and tracking system.

But what are you doing about the transit? What are you doing about the GO Transit? Are you electrifying GO? Do you have track capacity for all these people? What's the plan for transit? Because you sure as heck don't want to be building houses in the middle of nowhere and expecting people just to be on the roads. That's not a good quality of life, people. It's not. In 2025, we need to be building the transit. I'm not sure what you're doing on that front. And we know the history and the reputation of Metrolinx. For God's sake, 15 years—we just had the birthday party for the Eglinton Crosstown. So, do we trust them with getting the GO improved in Barrie?

The other thing I want to talk to you about, since you were so quick to drop a report, drop a bill yesterday, I wonder—you like the speed of that—if you've all read—you expect us to read this bill and have our speeches all ready within 24 hours. Has anyone across the floor had the chance to read the Rescue Lake Simcoe Coalition's protect Lake Simcoe plan that just came out yesterday? Because you should be reading this if you're looking at developing in this area. If you expect us to be speed-readers, you should be speed-readers as well, and you should be caring about Lake Simcoe.

They have a bunch of recommendations, which I'm not sure if you've had the chance to read, but you need to—and I'm not sure if you will, so I'm going to read it to you. This is your story for the day.

(1) They're suggesting to "anchor Lake Simcoe within the federal Freshwater Action Plan." We can assist with that. I know it's federal purview, but we can absolutely advocate for that. Because of the blue-green algae blooms that have appeared over the last two summers, driven by warm temperatures—which we all know is the climate emergency which we find ourselves in—there have been several water quality advisories in 2023 and 2024. The beaches were closed for weeks. We can't have beaches closed when we're dealing with extreme heat, and we know that there can be major fatalities linked to extreme heat; we've seen it before. And it not only affects that but affects recreation and tourism, which is an economic boon for the area. "These blooms can produce toxins harmful to people, pets and wildlife. While variability remains high, the trend is worsening, underscoring the need to reduce nutrient loading and manage climate-related drivers.

"(2) Modernize and enforce the provincial phosphorus-reduction strategy: Update the 2011 phosphorus reduction strategy with subwatershed-specific targets, timelines and public dashboards." This is key—giving ourselves a timeline and making it available to the public. "Integrate low-impact development, stormwater retrofits, natural-

cover restoration and agricultural buffer strips as phosphorus-control measures.” So that’s what we want to be doing, is building using nature-based solutions. It’s much cheaper. We’re not smarter than Mother Nature, even though we might think we are—so more on that.

**1600**

“(3) Tackle road-salt pollution through liability reform, regulation and enforcement.” I believe Landscape Ontario has been having meetings with you and asking you to deal with salt pollution from road salt and get a standard. Definitely, we need it for safety and liability, but there needs to be a standard for application and a chance to explore innovative ideas. I know in areas, they use sand, they use beet juice—they use different things.

“Adopt a limited-liability framework for certified salt contractors, coupled with mandatory training, enforceable application limits and annual reporting.” That’s what needs to be done—so you’re still using it, but you’re using it properly. We’ve all seen it in mounds outside shops and buildings, and this is a serious problem for our waterways.

“Develop a single set of provincially endorsed best management practices for snow and ice management to curb over-application of salt while maintaining public safety.” It can be done. It’s done elsewhere. So let’s have Ontario be a leader in that.

“(4) Invest in stormwater management and asset maintenance.”

“(5) Restore and expand high-quality natural cover: Establish enforceable watershed-wide natural-heritage targets with subwatershed allocations and timelines”—again, timelines. We can certainly have a timeline with this bill. I think we should be able to have timelines with climate action measures.

“(6) Cut property taxes to clean the lake: Expand Ontario’s Conservation Land Tax Incentive Program (CLTIP) and create a Lake Simcoe riparian tax exemption to exempt naturalized areas within 30 metres of streams and rivers from municipal taxation. This incentive would reward landowners who maintain or restore vegetated buffers that reduce runoff, mitigate flooding and enhance habitat. Municipal revenues could be backfilled through a modest provincial transfer and/or the Freshwater Action Plan.” It’s pretty innovative.

“(7) Scale and export municipal best practices: Create a trilateral Lake Simcoe best practices fund to replicate and scale up successful municipal pilots—such as Bradford’s snow-filtration site, Aurora’s LID retrofits and Georgina’s stormwater filter and salt-management programs—across the watershed.” Each municipality is doing great things, but it’s in silos—so just letting everyone share the knowledge and have a fund to help support that.

“(8) Build a public Lake Simcoe dashboard: Develop a map-based, public-facing platform showing timely water quality data, septic-inspection results, sewage treatment performance and beach conditions. Host jointly through” the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks and the Lake Simcoe coalition, “with federal funding support, ensuring open data, transparency and accountability.”

In the beach in Toronto, if I want to go swimming, which I do regularly—not right now, but I do in the warmer weather—I can always just check what the water quality is for the day before I hop in. We have lots of Blue Flag-status beaches. They’re usually pretty good, but sometimes they’re not, especially after a heavy rainfall—so you want that public. You don’t want people getting sick, but you want them to enjoy our great lakes.

“(9) Enable compact, climate-ready housing in serviced areas: Integrate flood plain hazard mitigation”—I have to laugh at this, because you did kill my flooding awareness/emergency preparedness bill, but maybe one day you will reconsider it.

**Mr. Matthew Rae:** And you’ll reintroduce it.

**Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon:** I did reintroduce it. Thank you very much. That shows how much you pay attention to my bills.

And “culvert upgrades and stormwater retrofits into municipal growth strategies to unlock housing within existing settlement boundaries”—we don’t want to be building on flood plains. You want to do it right the first time and build sustainably. Energy efficiency would help as well.

“(10) Ensure MZO and special economic zones uphold the Lake Simcoe Protection Plan.”

“(11) Establish an annual Lake Simcoe science and policy forum”—wow, that would be great.

“Bring back a public science forum—co-chaired by the science and coordinating committees—as an annual, day-long conference to share research findings....” That sounds like a lot of fun and a lot of good knowledge.

“(12) Deliver all-day, two-way regional express rail on the Barrie GO line and strengthen regional connectivity.” We’ve talked about that. You can’t be building these houses and just expect people to get in their cars and drive. People want to take transit. If you build it, they will come. That’s the way it is done in world-class cities all around the world in areas—transit and housing hand in hand.

“(13) Protect and strengthen conservation authority governance.” Well, what can we say about that? I could go on for an hour about that. These seven entities—you’ve taken 36 great entities that were working well, and then you mishmashed them all in into seven and you expect them to know—you know, you need the local knowledge with the watersheds, with the flood protection. I don’t know what to say about that.

All that to say, I’m just going to end it now by saying if you’re serious about building homes, build them in the right places the right way. Look at the provincial lands, build them in urban centres—gentle density. Do not be building them way out in Kalamazoo without building transit. If you build transit, that’s fine, but you’re not taking over farmland when we can build up instead of out. Upzone all the avenues in Toronto. I’m telling you that in any other city—look at our provincial lands, build on our provincial lands, which we’re not building on. That’s the easiest, quickest way to build the housing.

I really question this Bill 76 coming down the pipe last night, basically being rushed through for some bizarre

reason and against municipal wishes by and large. I don't know what's going on here.

**The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell):** I recognize the member from Orléans.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** I want to thank my colleague from Beaches—East York for that compelling discussion over the last 23 minutes or so.

I rise to speak to Bill 76, the Barrie — Oro-Medonte — Springwater Boundary Adjustment Act, 2025. At its core, Madam Speaker, this bill is about land. But more importantly, it is about people—where they live, how they live and whether they can afford to live in the community they call home.

That's why today's debate matters: because Ontario is in the middle of a housing crisis that touches every generation—young families who can't find a starter home, new Canadians squeezed out of the market before they can even begin, seniors who want to downsize but have nowhere to go and stay close to their family, and communities like Barrie, Springwater and Oro-Medonte struggling to plan responsibly for growth.

This boundary adjustment isn't just about maps; it's about the future shape of our province. And it's time that we start to speak honestly about that future. Speaker, over the next decade, Ontario will welcome millions of new residents. We are a growing province, and that is a good thing. Growth is opportunity. Growth is prosperity. But growth also means responsibility.

1610

For seven years, we have heard this government repeat large housing targets—large, fanciful announcements; dog-and-pony shows; big promises—but when you look at the actual results, the story is very different.

According to the government's own numbers, Ontario is tens of thousands of units behind its annual target. Housing completions are flat. Ontario's housing starts were down significantly in October of this year, with a six-month trend decreasing by 3%. These figures are the lowest since 2009, and despite recent gains in some areas, the province's overall average of a little over 60,000 starts over the last 12 months is the lowest in a decade. They've never been lower under this government, Madam Speaker.

In a province of 16 million people, fewer homes were completed last year than in 1973. I look around the room here this afternoon, and I would say that at least a quarter of us weren't born in 1973, the last time the number was this bad.

The government talks like it's building the homes of the future, but the numbers show that they're building the homes of the past. Because they are falling so far behind, housing has become more unaffordable for young families and it's inaccessible for many who need to move on. That includes older adults, one of the most overlooked parts of the housing debate.

When we talk about housing supply, we often focus entirely on first-time buyers, but we ignore the key to unlocking the largest amount of family-sized housing the fastest: That's giving older adults a place to downsize to within their community. Right now, in every corner of

Ontario, empty nesters want to downsize, widows and widowers want a smaller place near their family, and seniors want to move into modern, accessible, lower-maintenance homes, but they can't because the supply doesn't exist.

You can't ask a senior couple, say in their seventies, to sell their family home without offering them somewhere to go. They don't want a 600-square-foot concrete box in the sky. When they sell their family home, they can afford a larger apartment that would not meet the current definition of affordable that so many progressives latch onto. When there is nowhere for them to go, the result is predictable: The family home stays off the market, the next generation can't buy it, and the market gets tighter and tighter and more expensive for everyone.

We have proposals to bring online thousands and thousands and thousands of hectares of new land, when part of the solution is to help free up those family homes that are already built in many, if not most, of our major centres. It is the definition of a housing bottleneck, Madam Speaker. If we want young families to own their first home, we have to build the homes that older Ontarians can right-size into. That is where planning decisions, like the one before us with Bill 76, matter.

Bill 76 reorganizes boundaries so that land in Springwater and Oro-Medonte become part of the city of Barrie. This is not a surprise; this is a conversation that's been going on for years. The affected municipalities have been deeply involved. The city of Barrie has been pushing for clarity so it can plan and move forward. The township of Springwater, their website acknowledges that this has been a decades-long process. Oro-Medonte's council issued public information sessions and local residents have been following the file closely.

What has been a little bit of a surprise—and what my colleague mentioned—is the speed at which the government wants to finally move. I understand the challenges within the bureaucracy in the ministry. They have obligations they need to meet next year as a result of municipal elections, and so there is a requirement to get some kind of clarity on it sooner rather than later. But at the same time, this is a sizable change. I think it would have behooved the government to give everyone a little bit more time for us to take a look at it, and perhaps offer a briefing, so we might be able to ask some of the public servants some questions.

Barrie is a city, I'm told, that genuinely wants to grow. They want to plan and they want to build homes for the next generation. That's great, but we have to be equally honest: Bill 76 hands the minister extraordinary power to redefine the boundaries again through regulation, to expand the compensation rules, to alter municipal wards, to establish taxes and to override other statutes. This is not a set-it-and-forget-it kind of boundary adjustment; this is a framework that gives the minister a second bite, maybe even a third bite of the apple. Too often in this government, when ministers have been given the municipal apple to bite, they've taken a big one, and it hasn't worked out.

The bill says clearly that the minister can, after the fact, alter the annexed area, even retroactively. The bill says clearly that the compensation amounts between Barrie–Springwater–Oro-Medonte and Simcoe county will be determined later through regulations. While the legislation before us looks orderly on paper, the real decisions, the decisions that matter the most are left to future regulations—basically, the cabinet getting together and deciding, and probably the minister doing much of that deciding on his own. Now, that's real power, but real power deserves real scrutiny and a real opportunity to provide scrutiny. I don't think we've been truly given that opportunity with the timelines.

Given what's happened in the past, I would think and I would hope that this government would be careful about how they're going to approach this land, careful about what they're going to propose on this land and how they're going to unilaterally act on this land as it relates to development.

Who owns the land? Who wants to own the land? Who has options already to own the land? I think these are questions the residents of the area deserve to know, these are the questions that Ontario residents deserve to know and these are some of the questions that I think a little bit more scrutiny might have allowed us to be able to answer in the debate tonight—and perhaps might be part of the reason things are moving so quickly.

When you add thousands of acres of new developable land to a city, you also have to build roads. You have to build water servicing and sewer capacity. You should, if you're smart, be building transit first. You need to build fire halls. You need to build community centres. You need to build schools. You can't build a neighbourhood with tens of thousands of new residents on infrastructure that's built for a village. That's irresponsible planning and it leads to the kind of resentment and unsafe conditions we've seen elsewhere.

Barrie and cities across Ontario have been clear: They need provincial help to build the pipes and the roads that growth requires. But this government has repeatedly underfunded municipal infrastructure. They've down-loaded costs and they've left local governments holding the bag. I'm yet to be made aware of a city in Ontario that has a tax change proposal for next year that is at or below inflation. I believe they are all multiple factors of inflation. That's because they are now saddled with costs or revenue shortfalls that didn't exist prior to this government being in power.

**1620**

We also have to talk about the trust deficit. The government's track record on land decisions has been, I think, generously stated, deeply controversial. It has been dubious. They've flipped, they've flopped and they've flipped again like a fish yanked from the water, so I don't think it's surprising that when residents or the opposition or the media hear the term "boundary adjustment"—they shouldn't have to wonder whether another greenbelt-style situation is on the horizon. They shouldn't have to worry about who has special access to the government, who

might be or may want to receive special treatment from the government, who has special access to planning authorities in the area and how they got that special access. This government has created the trust deficit through their own actions—not municipalities, not the people living there.

This government has continued to show a predilection for these kinds of problems, and rebuilding trust requires transparency, not more ministerial discretion or extraordinary regulatory power. As the old saying goes, "Sunlight is the best disinfectant," and at the moment, the details around what is about to happen in Barrie are hidden in the dark corners.

Bill 76 could have been a turning point. It could have been a model for responsible growth management in a rapidly expanding region. The minister and the government could have put the experts within the public service to good use and said, "Show us what you've got. This is going to be a big city; show us what a big, future city on virgin land in Ontario can look like." They could have linked the boundary adjustments with some missing pieces, like incentives for seniors' housing, new infrastructure commitments for roads, for transit, for recreation centres. They could have guaranteed transparency around compensation. They could have presented that long-term plan for complete community. They could have ensured real accountability about the decisions that will follow this legislation. They could have ensured that there would be a provincial requirement for mixed-age, mixed-income neighbourhoods.

Instead, the bill does the bare minimum. It changes the map and it leaves almost everything else up to future regulations, future arm-twisting, future influence. Influence of who? On who? Why? For how much? Yet to be determined. It's incomplete to say the least. It addresses the map but it doesn't actually address or really speak to or talk about the people who live on the map.

Let me outline a more responsible path forward, a more human approach: Build homes for every generation, especially for older adults. In addition to the traditional single-family homes that I think we would all expect a suburban or exurban community to have, we should expect and we should demand that these new lands and the communities that will be built on them have bungalow towns for seniors—well, anyone, but particularly marketed toward seniors—accessible mid-rises built into the community planning, seniors' apartments, supportive housing, co-op housing, co-ops for seniors, village-style communities with services nearby. Why? Because this is how you free up family homes for young couples and parents.

Many of these homes, as I said, are already built. They're built in the older parts of Ottawa. They're built in downtown Toronto. They're built, I'm sure, in the older urban environments and urban centres across the province.

But people are holding on to those homes longer and longer and longer, because there's nowhere for them to downsize into. They don't want a 600-square-foot concrete box in the sky. They don't want to have to move cities and not be close to the grandkids. They want to live, still, either near their grandkids or in the community where



they raised their kids and where their roots are. And they want to do that on a smaller scale. They can afford to pay a little bit more to enjoy that opportunity, but we just don't have that, and no one's talking about it, not in a real concrete way. But that's how you lower pressure in the market. This is how you build supply that responds to the demographics that we're seeing, responding to demographics instead of ignoring them.

We must ensure that growth pays for growth. If we annex this land to build homes, then the government needs to take a degree of responsibility to ensure that the roads are going to be built; that the water systems are going to be built; that the stormwater systems are going to be built and paid for; that the firehalls are going to be there to keep our communities safe; that the schools are going to be built for when the kids arrive and they're not going to be bused across town for five, six, seven years, their entire childhood in elementary school; that the parks are going to be built at the same time as the homes.

I remember, when I first got elected in Ottawa, Orléans was at the time and might still be the fastest-growing or one of the fastest-growing parts of the nation's capital. There were acres and acres. The houses pop up like mushrooms. Families would tell me, "I bought this house. I was marketed. There is a park right next door. Great—I wanted my kids to be able to walk to the park. That makes for a complete community, a safe neighbourhood when my kids can just walk across the street."

Seven years later, the park is not built. "Well, my kid is not a kid anymore. He's a teenager. He doesn't need a play structure. He needs a skateboard ramp, or he needs a soccer field, or he needs a rec centre—whatever it is." The parks, the community infrastructure needs to be there as the homes are built, Madam Speaker. Otherwise, we're just going to continue to make the same mistakes that governments over the ages have made. These things have to come up front, and they need to be tied to staging so that families moving in here will be able to live in a complete community.

You can't announce 150,000 homes and then send the bill to residents who are already struggling with affordability. There needs to be a plan for this new infrastructure to pay for itself or for the province to help support it. You can't build these large subdivisions and ask homeowners to wait five or 10 years for the parks and the schools.

Madam Speaker, in addition to good planning and good infrastructure development, the government really needs to guarantee transparency in and around the boundary decisions. Residents deserve to know who requested the adjustment—not just the adjustment that has been presented publicly, but the adjustments that the minister is going to have the power to make through regulation, which is, for those who are not students of government, a closed-door process of only the cabinet. Who is asking for those changes? What's the rationale for that particular piece of land? What relationship does the person who owns the land or owns the option on the land have to those who are making decisions or analyzing the baseline information to make the decisions? What's the infrastructure plan? What

are the growth projections? And who benefits financially from the development decisions?

**1630**

Now, look, home builders build our communities. We need them. In most parts of the province, they are central to families' community life. In Ottawa, the five or six big home builders are the ones who sponsor the race weekend. Their names are on the YMCA. They're donating millions of dollars for the hospital wing or the community housing project etc., and I imagine that's likely true in the other major centres across the province.

So guess what? They're in business to make money. There's nothing wrong with that. But we need to know about it on the front end so that we can understand if the decisions are being truly made with the prosperity of Ontarians in mind—all Ontarians, or at least Ontarians who might move into these new neighbourhoods. Or is the decision being made with the prosperity of a very select few Ontarians in mind—a select few who have the right phone number, who have grown up with the right people or have otherwise developed some kind of special access? We don't need more greenbelt-style surprises. We don't need backroom carve-outs.

So, Madam Speaker, as I get towards the end, I want to really emphasize the need to build and champion, and for the government in particular to use the experts at the ministry, to really let them flex their muscle on what a complete community could look like and should look like. Because building homes without parks, sidewalks, senior services or public transit is not really good planning. It's land speculation, to be sure, but it's not going to allow us to learn from some of the mistakes that have been made since the 1970s, let's say.

Ontario Liberals believe in complete communities, not simply building disconnected subdivisions.

As I mentioned before, I worked for a decade as councillor in a high-growth community to achieve that vision. As I left, as I put my name forward to come to this place, we were there. Every park that was on a plan where the houses had started to be built was built; new recreation centre with an expansion; a sports park—not a single property tax dollar going into an \$8-million sports park. We built fire halls. We built roads: \$200 million worth of arterial roads, new roads, wider roads, longer roads, roads with bike lanes, roads with multi-use pathways, multi-use pathways through hydro corridors to connect the community. We secured light rail transit to Orléans.

Orléans, for those who don't know, has—or did have, before the pandemic—the highest transit use of any of Ottawa's suburban communities. In fact, from a modal split perspective, Orléans-to-downtown trips by public transit was the highest for any comparable community of that size in North America. That's why Orléans is going to be the first suburban community in Ottawa to get the electric light rail as part of phase 2. We were there on the planning for those complete communities.

Now, five years later, Madam Speaker, largely under the watch of this government, the city of Ottawa has allowed enormous subdivisions to continue in Orléans.

Commercial land conversions that were supposed to be your commercial corner stores, grocery stores and pharmacies etc.—they allowed those to be converted to apartments and high-density housing under the guise of affordability. But what they didn't do—throughout that process, as they were allowing those conversions to happen and as they were building more and more subdivisions, they put on pause for a decade the entirety of the transportation plan for the city of Ottawa. You can deal with more housing, you can deal with intensification, and you can deal with land conversion; that's fine. But when you don't continue to plan for the roads and the transit and the bike lanes and the sidewalks at the same time, you end up in a situation where the frustrations that existed 15 years ago, when I first got elected to city council, are back, when we had caught up. It doesn't take very long, and I can tell you, Madam Speaker, that frustration in Orléans is extraordinarily high.

One of the reasons for the delay to the transportation master plan is certainly because of the lack of leadership, lack of direction from the government, but also their lack of setting a clear course and a clear destination as to where they want to go. The constant changes make it very difficult for municipalities to plan properly.

Madam Speaker, we need to build the Canadian dream, not shrink it. The Canadian dream is still, I think, a family in a safe neighbourhood with a yard, a school nearby and a future they can afford. We cannot abandon that dream. We have to plan for it. We have to invest to make it happen. Ontarians need it. Our kids need it. New Canadians who were asking to come and move here need it. Frankly, I think that's what they are expecting when they get here, to be able to work to that dream. Otherwise, why are they coming?

Ontario needs urban density, we need infill, and we need the missing middle, but we also need large-tract neighbourhoods. We need starter homes. We need seniors' housing. It's not an either/or commitment; it's an all-of-the-above commitment, and we need some leadership from this government to provide that direction to our municipalities.

In conclusion, Madam Speaker, I support intensification, for sure. I support density to a degree, for sure. I support infill. I support purpose-built rentals. I also support building new communities where young families can own a home and seniors can age in dignity. We need a government that believes those things too and is going to put those things into legislation to make it happen.

We need a government that believes in responsible growth and is going to take a leadership role in getting us there because, at the end of the day, Madam Speaker, as I said, this debate isn't about the boundaries on a map. It's about the people who do live there today and the tens of thousands of people we want to live there tomorrow.

**The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell):** Question?

**Mr. Andrew Dowie:** I want to thank both the member from Beaches–East York and from Orléans for their remarks. I join them in being a former municipal council-

lor. In fact, my town of Tecumseh was once annexed, or part was annexed, by the city of Windsor as a result of it being contiguous with existing servicing that surrounded the city and the city had run out of land, effectively, for industrial and residential space.

I know we always debate how much land to consume, but if a city does run out of space and the official plan is required to have growth as part of the 20-year plan and we see that investment in servicing, would it not make a lot of sense to open up the lands adjacent to the servicing rather than try to create other hamlets further inland? I guess my question could be to both, based on their experience.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** Certainly, Madam Speaker, annexing is one option; amalgamation is one option. There are different ways to achieve the end result, which is more homes.

I think the real question the government, I think and hope, would want to answer before they make the decision is, who owns the land? Who has options on the land? Who do they know? Why do they know them? Who is scoring this land as the particularly better pieces of land on which to build homes? I think if those can be answered transparently for everyone to understand, then certainly we can get behind building new neighbourhoods, if the government takes a leadership role in defining what a future neighbourhood in Ontario should look like.

1640

**The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell):** Question?

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** My question is for the member from Beaches–East York.

If you had told me yesterday that I would be reading the minutes of the council meetings for Oro-Medonte and Springwater, I would have said that that's not going to happen. But Springwater council, just on November 5, passed a resolution saying, "Be it resolved that the official position of Springwater council remains and continues to be ... Springwater council opposes the Barrie framework."

Oro-Medonte, to go over here—and this is from Councillor Richard Schell. He said, "I said it a long time ago, if we need to build more houses, don't change the boundary line. Build them in Oro-Medonte. If they take our property and our land, it's still going to be built on our land, but the boundaries changed. The tax dollars go to Barrie."

This was from staff: "The report warned that an outright rejection of the proposal could 'negatively impact the township's relationship with the province.'"

What kind of bullying tactics are we talking about here—and let's just call it what it is, right here in the Legislature.

**Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon:** Thank you very much to the member from Waterloo. That was exactly the word in my head: bully. So I read your mind.

It's like this big town of Barrie is just coming and steamrolling into these little municipalities and not respecting the residents who are there, the elected officials, the hard-working staff, and not respecting that their areas are different than Barrie's.

It's basically, as I called it, a dog's breakfast. It's a hornet's nest. I don't know how this mayor of Springwater is going to recover and work together with her council after this mess that did not have to happen. It's a mess and it started with this government.

**The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell):** I recognize the Associate Solicitor General for Auto Theft and Bail Reform.

**Hon. Zee Hamid:** We had a similar situation in my riding of Milton, where land was transferred from Milton to Mississauga because there was servicing closer to Mississauga. That strip of land just east of the 407 now houses homes, a rec centre, places of worship, small businesses—it's an incredible stretch.

My question to the member is—either of the speakers, actually: What is your suggestion, then? Through you, Speaker, what is the suggestion in developing this land? Isn't it better to put it closer to where the service actually is? Because it's incredibly expensive to provide service in an area where service doesn't start. That's the reason why the strip of land was transferred from Milton to Mississauga, for that servicing. I'd like to hear their thoughts about it.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** If he wants to hear my thoughts in detail, he was here the entire time and he can read Hansard.

But in 45 seconds, I want the professionals at the ministry to flex their intellectual muscle and show us what a modern suburban community of a couple of thousand hectares can look like. Let's see what it's going to look like. And then, Madam Speaker, I want there to be some transparency. Who owns the land? Who has options on the land? Who do those people know? Who are they related to? And how do they know them?

**The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell):** Question?

**Ms. Lee Fairclough:** I want to say thank you to the member for Waterloo for going back to the minutes and reading some of that section. I too—because we've just been given this bill—have been sitting here trying to understand the news and understand the local dynamic. It's pretty clear that it is very unsettled up there, and here we are now with the government putting a bill on the table—what feels like yet another rushed bill to get this done.

Again, I'd be interested to hear from the member from Orléans. You actually gave a very clear vision for what this could be. Again, putting yourself in the shoes of some of the councillors up in that in that area, how do you think that they and that community are feeling right now with this bill being put on the table—

**The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell):** Response?

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** Well, if Barrie is anything like Orléans, and you have a proposal to add 3,000 hectares of land and 10,000 homes, I'm going to want to know what my commute is going to look like after that happens. I'm going to want to know what my kid's schools are going to be like from a population perspective after that happens. I want to know how hard it's going to be to get my kids into

swimming lessons because there's not enough rec centres. I'd like to know that before the decision is made.

Also, if I'm a resident of Barrie, I want to know that before my city agrees to pay the other cities, like, 30 million bucks. Thirty million bucks can build a community centre, Madam Speaker. Thirty million bucks can build a multi-use pathway. It can hire crossing guards. It can do all sorts of stuff in Barrie. So if I'm a taxpayer in Barrie, I want to know why my taxes are being used to pay these other communities to add inconvenience to my life, theoretically, with longer commutes and overcrowded classrooms when no one has presented a plan on how that's going to be solved.

**The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell):** Question?

**Mr. Sheref Sabawy:** My question for the colleague from the opposition: Do you think that any business or owner of lands in this area planning to build some housing or even a planned service centre or community centre to be built in that area care about which area it is? They just want clear, certain borders so that they can go ahead. In my riding, we have a piece of land which is still between Peel region and Halton region, for 11 years, and they can't get services, from neither side, until they decide which area this belongs to.

My question would be, do you accept that vital public facilities cannot sit on hold for years while municipalities work through disagreements? And does the member believe families in the region should wait longer for these services, or should they provide legislative—

**The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell):** I recognize the member for Orléans.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** Yes, I absolutely agree that it will be easier for the home builders to plan their communities dealing with a single municipality and not two or three or whatever the situation might be. That will absolutely be easier for them to do. What I'm saying is the government should present a vision of what that new community should look like. This will be close to a city-sized community. It will be bigger than many of the communities that you all represent today. So what is that going to look like?

And if I'm a taxpayer of Barrie, why am I being asked to pay \$30 million to make my commute longer, to make my rec centres more full, to make my schools more overcrowded, without knowing how any of those community-building pieces of infrastructure are actually going to happen to support that growth?

**The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell):** Further debate? I recognize the member from Perth-Wellington.

**Mr. Matthew Rae:** Hi, Speaker; thank you—

*Interjections.*

**Mr. Matthew Rae:** Thank you, colleagues; thank you. I know, I know.

It's great to rise today to speak to Bill 76, An Act respecting the adjustment of the boundaries between the City of Barrie, the Township of Oro-Medonte and the Township of Springwater.

Colleagues, I grew up—and I loved maps. I loved geography. It was one of my best classes in school, and it's a fascinating debate this afternoon. Over three hours—I know some members have mentioned that we are rushing this through. I don't count three hours of debate on Bill 76 as rushing it through, on something that is not significantly long—I'm counting the pages—11 pages. So it's great to be able to rise this afternoon to speak on maps and boundaries and municipal development.

I know they're saying, "Oh, we weren't aware of this." It was published 25 hours ago for the entire world to read over and to look over, and we're having this debate today. We'll be continuing to have this debate for—well, at least until 6 o'clock today and potentially in the future as well. It's an important opportunity to talk about the important work our government is doing in Simcoe county, in Barrie, Oro-Medonte and Springwater, but really across Ontario.

It's not just an exercise in maps and identifying properties and servicing; it's an exercise in building Ontario—really, what it comes down to. This is what great planners across the province, great planners that work for the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing—and I thank those officials for their quick work on this piece of legislation bringing it forward to this chamber as well. They work diligently to put forward official plans and many other documents that all our municipalities use to plan for growth and plan for development, whether that's housing development, employment lands or light commercial, and transportation is included in that as well.

**1650**

They do this work, very often, in most cases—I know Wellington county, which I have the pleasure to represent half of that county in this place, they usually submit an official plan every year. Perth county has most recently submitted an official plan, which was approved by our Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, planning for future growth in those areas.

I know working with Simcoe county, Barrie, Oro-Medonte and Springwater—this bill is working with those municipalities and the city to ensure that the growth and the land identified for that future growth is there. I know that 2030 is when Barrie is projected to run out of land. I know that may seem like a little ways away for my colleagues in this place—it will be after the next provincial election. A lot of can happen in five years. Five years ago now, I wasn't here in this place. It was 2020 and we were in the depths of a global pandemic. But five years for planners is actually a very short timeline. They plan in decades, identifying potential residential land and potential employment lands. Every municipality, every planner has the training to do this and identifies those lands. So 2030 is actually not that far away for the city of Barrie to not have enough land, whether it is for employment land or residential.

I know my colleagues today have spoken about the significant growth and transformation that Barrie, Simcoe county and the other municipalities are going through. It's not by accident; it's not because of any one policy, but it's because it is stepped into the role that geography and

infrastructure naturally placed upon all the actors that we are discussing here.

Barrie has been for many years a hospital hub for the region, a training ground for a skilled workforce and a transportation anchor that connects the area and the people in it. GO, for example, goes to Barrie; the health care network across not just the hospitals but the community care that exists there; Georgian College that some of my constituents attend in Barrie, and I've lived in Barrie.

Really, the importance of having the land identified to ensure that Barrie can thrive and Simcoe county can thrive—I know the member from Simcoe-Grey talked about his experience and really working closely with the local municipalities as a representative from that area. But also the provincial land facilitators, who have been working diligently, colleagues, for over 18 months with municipal councils, county staff, municipal staff, planners locally—18 months of hard deliberations.

I know working in the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing in my role as parliamentary assistant that boundary expansion, annexation, amalgamation—all those words that have been described this afternoon—is not an easy process, colleagues. There's always discussion around servicing. There's discussion around taxation and compensation.

In the past, the city of Stratford—not to the same size of Barrie, but a similar issue of being landlocked—has had to negotiate with the county of Perth and some of the surrounding municipalities to bring some land into their boundaries for employment land, for housing, and it's a negotiation process. And for the past 18 months, there has been a very rigorous negotiation process, facilitated by the province with a provincial land development facilitator, ensuring that every party is at the table and ensuring that they are planning for the needs of tomorrow in their area. It was a hard, arduous process, but, unfortunately, we reached a point where the government had to take decisive action.

I've risen in this place many times to talk about how our government is not afraid to make difficult decisions and put forward ambitious pieces of legislation because we know we need to continue to build Ontario. We're in an economic trade war, unfortunately, with neighbours south of the border and we need employment lands to attract businesses from around the world. I always tell my business community locally in Perth-Wellington, our competition in Perth-Wellington—and I am not that far from Sarnia and the border crossing there, and not that far from Buffalo as well in the other direction. Our competition is not Manitoba, or Quebec or our colleagues on the East Coast. Our competition is Michigan, Pennsylvania, New York, Kentucky, West Virginia—I could go on and on—the entire US Midwest. We are competing with them for jobs, businesses and investment, and we need to prepare employment lands to attract those investments.

I know the city of Barrie is working diligently to do that, but they need more land to be able to do that. I know they have identified—I believe it's 4,000 acres. And I know we have all been doing math this afternoon, so I will

not try to do that. I will just stick with 4,000 acres and I will not try to make the conversion to hectares because, being a younger member of this Assembly, I grew up under the metric system and I am not imperial at all, unlike the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane. But I know the 4,000 acres, colleagues. I know that sounds like a lot. That is a lot of land that is potentially being added, if passed, to the city of Barrie.

In the grand scheme of Ontario, I could figure out the stat. But in the larger picture of both Oro-Medonte and Springwater—not Simcoe county, which is a large county, colleagues, geography-wise—it is still only 2% less, colleagues. It's 2% of those municipalities, of their entire geographic land mass, to potentially be added to the boundaries of the city of Barrie.

I think that speaks to the fact that it's relatively, in the grand scheme of the geography of Ontario and even of Simcoe county, a small percentage. The ability to build thousands of homes, the ability to attract thousands of jobs, is really a testament to the planning system that exists in Ontario to create a robust system that will lead to attracting those jobs and those employment lands, ensuring that we can get large-scale projects off the ground.

I know I'm proud to serve under the leadership of Premier Ford because he really is advocating for nation-building projects, colleagues, whether that's today's announcement in Pickering or whether it's Bruce nuclear, close to where I represent. But it's also those large projects, those large housing developments. It's also those employment lands. It's also the manufacturing sector in Ontario. And it really is a focus of all members of our government caucus on ensuring that we're working with our municipal partners to attract that investment to build a strong Ontario.

As I mentioned, the process stalled, and it was not on the question of whether Barrie needed land. That has been decided more or less since the beginning of this process. Everyone agrees, Barrie needs land. But it was on the precise implementation of the boundary edges, conditions and provisions that extended far beyond the lands under consideration.

The differences, not totally insurmountable in themselves, create a risk of delay, a risk of litigation and a risk of derailing the planning. And so, as I mentioned, our government needed to take decisive action and be a strong leader in this case, working with our municipal partners.

We also have to keep in mind, colleagues, that next fall there will be a municipal election. A municipal election cycle begins shortly. Any of my colleagues who have served on municipal council know that it becomes a "lame duck", to use that language.

Council in early 2026, all municipalities—right now, I know many are working on their budgets for 2026—they will pass those budgets and then, more or less, it'll be in a caretaker mode on the staff side, similar to our great public service as caretakers when we have a provincial election.

They will begin that process and we need to ensure that we have these boundaries identified and solidified by that point, because it will also lead to extension, expansion or

addition, working again with the local experts around the wards in Barrie and obviously in Oro-Medonte and Springwater—their elected representatives at the municipal level.

And so, we need to ensure that this act protects local democracy from paralysis. Municipalities cannot plan, they cannot approve or budget effectively, when the foundational questions of jurisdiction—so literally the land they are to oversee—is unresolved, is tied up in the courts, is in dispute.

**1700**

I'm looking at my notes. I really should read my notes. It's actually 4,100 acres from the townships of Springwater and Oro-Medonte to the city of Barrie.

But these aren't arbitrary parcels. It wasn't Minister Flack drawing lines on a map. It wasn't the member from Essex, who I know was drawing a map earlier as well. It wasn't us drawing the map; it was ministry officials, the Provincial Land and Development Facilitator, working with the local municipalities in identifying those lands.

They are continuous with Barrie's current existing boundary. We're not going to see piecemeal, orphan pieces of the city of Barrie in the middle of Oro-Medonte or in the middle of Springwater. They are along the continuous boundary with Barrie. They contribute and align with the region's already functions, the major arteries, roadways and other developments.

And they appear in all local official plans as lands intended for eventual urban uses. Colleagues, that's important, because this land has already been identified by Oro-Medonte and Springwater as urban use in the near future. For those who are not planners—in my almost four years in municipal affairs and housing, I feel like I could almost write the planning test at this point, Speaker—urban use can also mean employment lands. It can mean residential as well. They've been identified already by the lower tiers for that use.

As the member from Beaches–East York mentioned, the member from Niagara Centre and I were in beautiful Barrie almost two years ago now for the Standing Committee on Heritage, Infrastructure and Cultural Policy. The consultation was around regional governance, but this did come up, as mentioned. I remember it very clearly, Speaker. The city of Barrie's Mayor Nuttall came to the committee and presented. He did provide maps, as mentioned, but he also provided something I found very telling as well. He provided two very large binders with letters of support for the expansion from the business community—very large binders. I mean bigger than the building code, and the building code is big, colleagues.

**Mr. Tyler Allsopp:** That's a big binder.

**Mr. Matthew Rae:** It is, yes. They are some big binders. He provided—

**Mr. Robert Bailey:** Mitt Romney.

**Mr. Matthew Rae:** I'm not going to say what the member from Sarnia–Lambton just said, but he did provide that. He demonstrated the need and the support amongst the business community, both within Barrie and the larger Barrie area, for this potential expansion.

This was, as I mentioned, right before the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing allocated a Provincial Land and Development Facilitator to this assignment. But he really identified, working with the Provincial Land and Development Facilitator, what specific pieces of land. I'm talking about the mayor of Barrie—and the mayor of Oro-Medonte and the mayor of Springwater.

This land is already identified for urban use. That means it would already be identified—potentially even zoned—for urban use, which wouldn't be zoned agriculture. So it would already not be captured in the agriculture statistic, because it's been zoned for development. That land was already zoned for, again, as I mentioned, urban use, and the potential there is for 8,000 new homes in the next quarter century for more than 23,000 people. That's just on the housing side, colleagues.

On the employment side, it's even more—a vital corridor for employment. We have Alliston, which is south of Barrie, with their Honda investment, a great investment in that region. To spin off from that, I know the Premier and Minister Flack were in St. Thomas last week where they announced an additional auxiliary business associated with the PowerCo development. We're going to see that the same investment in Alliston from Honda itself, but then all those part suppliers across, really, southern Ontario—in my riding, but especially in Simcoe county. We need to ensure that the land is there that can support this development further.

Speaker, I just wanted to say, this is not random. It's not sprawl; this is planned, serviced, infrastructure-led growth, because some of the land outside of Barrie is actually already serviced by Barrie. There are agreements, colleagues. Many of you may represent municipalities that have servicing agreements with a larger urban centre—and they may be a more rural centre—around water, hydro. They can decide at the local level.

Barrie, Springwater and Oro-Medonte had already begun these agreements and building infrastructure, putting pipes in the ground to build homes on some pieces of these lands already and attract investment. Speaker, it would be irresponsible for the government that has seen a municipality step up—municipalities, multiple, step up—and make those investments, taking hard-earned taxpayer dollars and investing in that infrastructure—it would be irresponsible, Speaker, to allow the investment to sit unused, simply because the municipal boundary lines have not kept up with growth.

Some residents in the surrounding areas may wonder what this means for their taxes, their services and their day-to-day lives, and those questions are understandable. It was great to see explicitly outlined in this piece of legislation how we will address those taxes and potential service delivery and their other day-to-day things they have required and rely on. This is important, colleagues. No homeowner will wake up facing a sudden tax change. No business will see their zoning change instantly. No farmer with existing agreements will lose protections. That's very important. Speaker, this is an orderly, respect-

ful transition, consistent with how Ontario has handled boundary changes for years.

Good planning means looking beyond the immediate horizon. As I mentioned, they are looking way further than 2030, which is in the next few years in a planning perspective. It means understanding where the region is heading and acting before choices become limited. Simcoe county is rapidly evolving into Ontario's most significant metropolitan regions.

In conclusion, Speaker, I think this bill before this House is a testament to, again, our government's leadership and willingness to make the hard decisions, because we have an opportunity to secure the future of Barrie, to secure the future of Springwater and to secure the future of Oro-Medonte today. If this House chooses to pass this bill, this will not only lead to a stronger Barrie, Springwater or Oro-Medonte—or even not just to a stronger Simcoe county—it will lead to a stronger Ontario, a stronger Canada, and it will ensure that we are planning for the future, Speaker. We will continue to make those difficult choices, continuing to put forward legislation that will ensure that we remain and become the most competitive place in the G7 to do business and a great place to raise a family and a place where those who have the dream of home ownership can achieve that dream if they work hard. I am proud to stand with a government that continues to do that day after day.

**The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell):** Question?

**MPP Lise Vaugeois:** This bill lists the properties to be annexed, but it also gives the minister the power to set aside this list and prescribe different lands to be annexed. Why does the minister need this unusual power and are the lands listed in the bill to be annexed or not?

**Mr. Matthew Rae:** Thank you to my colleague across the way for her question. The minister has this authority through official plans. It has now been brought into the bill. They can adjust official plans as required through that process from a lower tier or from a municipality, depending on what tier—the upper tier or lower tier—proposes those official plans. It is providing that flexibility because we have to step in, in this one instance, and legislate the boundary expansion, where in the past municipalities have been able to come to an agreement amongst themselves. It happens very often. It happens very, very often in the municipal world. We're stepping in to do that, and this continues and provides that same power that you would have through an official plan within this bill, if it is passed by this House.

**The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell):** Question?

**Mr. Robert Bailey:** Thank you to the member from Perth-Wellington. I have a question. I understand that the city of Barrie and that surrounding area invested millions of dollars over the years in infrastructure, sewage, water etc. Can you comment on how this legislation would ensure that those investments in the past will pay off in the future?

**Mr. Matthew Rae:** Thank you to the great colleague from Sarnia–Lambton for his very important question, because we want to ensure that the investments that the residents and the taxpayers of the city of Barrie have made in the infrastructure, whether that's waste water, water or roads and bridges and public transit, is utilized to its full potential. This bill will allow the city of Barrie but also the residents in those areas and future residents—as I mentioned, 8,000, potentially, new homes to come online—to take advantage and use that infrastructure to its full potential.

1710

I agree we should use our taxpayer dollars wisely in ensuring that we are using it to its full potential. That's why, in my opinion—and I hope my colleagues in this place will agree to pass Bill 76 and to ensure that we continue to build a strong Simcoe county but a strong Ontario.

**The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell):** I recognize the member from Nickel Belt.

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** The member said clearly that the Municipal Act already provides a process for municipalities to change their boundaries. I would like to know, if the municipalities of Oro-Medonte and Springwater do not want this, why is the government giving itself the power to overturn decisions made by elected officials at the municipal level, when the Municipal Act already allowed them to do that?

**Mr. Matthew Rae:** Thank you to my colleague for the question. The Municipal Act does—and I mentioned it happens very often across Ontario. It happened in the city of Stratford and Perth county many years ago, but they came to an agreement.

These municipalities, after 18 months of a provincial land development facilitator—colleagues, that is a full-time employee of the government. There are usually multiple development land facilitators who are involved working around the clock to come to an agreement. They were close to agreement, but unfortunately, they were not able to reach the agreement. And because of the municipal election and municipal cycle beginning post-haste, we need to come to an agreement to ensure that—as I've mentioned and the member from Sarnia–Lambton asked around the infrastructure already in the ground—we have that used to its full potential. We do not want to see that wasted, or the paralysis, as I mentioned, set in as well.

**The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell):** Question?

**Hon. Sam Oosterhoff:** I appreciate the chance to ask the member just about the need for housing. He's talked before about the incredibly important measures that this government is taking to build out housing, and how this boundary change really aligns with that vision of ensuring that every person in the province of Ontario has a home that they can call their own, that is affordable, that is within reach—and that ultimately also has a wide variety of types of homes. We know not everyone wants to live in a condo building; not everyone wants to live in a detached home.

Can you talk a little bit about how this is going to help address that missing middle of housing that we have here in the province of Ontario and why it fits in with a broader vision of ensuring affordability for the hard-working families and workers of this province? Because I know you've done a lot of work in that area. I've appreciated that work, and I would love to hear how it ties in with this legislation this afternoon.

**Mr. Matthew Rae:** Thank you to the great member from Niagara West for his question. It is important. We want all types of housing; we just don't have one preference, Speaker.

As was mentioned already, the infrastructure is in the ground already in some of this land that has been identified in this piece of legislation. But it's not just housing; it's also long-term care and senior residences that may be potentially built as well. I know that has come up in the discussions as well, so it's really for our seniors to ensure they have a place to age in place.

I know the member from Orléans talked about, earlier today, the ability to downsize. This bill, if passed, will allow seniors in Simcoe county and Barrie—the places they helped build—to remain in the communities that they love, be close to family and be close to their health care. This bill will help them achieve that, leading to more homes that they can move into.

**The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell):** Question?

**Ms. Doly Begum:** I listened to the member, actually, quite intently. One of the things I heard was the broader vision. I think we all agree here that we want to build housing. We want to make sure that we have accessibility, we have transit—all of those things, and I quite agree.

However, what I did not hear in his speech was who asked for this bill, if it was the people in those 4,000 acres, and why.

**Mr. Matthew Rae:** The city of Barrie was one who asked for it. At committee, he brought two very large binders, as I mentioned—the mayor—expressing support for that, but, as well, it has been other businesses and local residents seeing that, being a part of a large urban centre, you do have more access to amenities and resources. I've only got one gym in Mitchell. You've got many gyms in Barrie, for example. That's actually what people look for when they move to a community—the rec centres, the arenas. There's only one arena in Mitchell. I live in a very small town.

That ability to have access to those facilities, to be able to have more of those facilities is, I'm sure, something we'll see if this bill is passed.

**The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell):** I recognize the member for Kingston and the Islands.

**Mr. Ted Hsu:** My honourable colleague spoke of residents who were looking forward to benefits. I was wondering if we could hear from one of these residents in committee.

**Mr. Matthew Rae:** Thank you to my colleague from Kingston and the Islands for his very important question.

The Standing Committee on Heritage, Infrastructure and Cultural Policy did travel to Barrie on the part of regional governance, and this was actually discussed at length; it was actually one of the main discussions in the Simcoe county meeting there. I know the member from Beaches–East York, as a permanent member, at the time, on that committee for, then, the independents, now the Liberals, in this place, attended and was there to witness, again, the 400-plus businesses supporting this potential expansion.

**The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell):** Question?

**M<sup>me</sup> Dawn Gallagher Murphy:** I'd like to note that I actually lost one of my great businesses from Newmarket; they moved up to Barrie. This company employs more than 500 people. They moved their business to Barrie for a reason; they felt it was a growing area. I see they've increased their population by 13%, thanks to my business, as well, moving up there. I say that kind of sarcastically.

But at the end of the day, can you tell us about the stability that this would bring to an employer like my business from Newmarket?

**Mr. Matthew Rae:** Thank you to my colleague for that question. [*Failure of sound system*] locally. The municipal election is next year. The ward boundaries and the municipal boundaries will change and would affect that. So we don't want to see paralysis, and that's why we put forward this piece of legislation.

**The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell):** Further debate?

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** I don't know what's going on in this place these days. I have never seen a government operate the way that you are right now—it is like Russian roulette of legislation for us, as the opposition. It's like grade 7. This is not a mature government—it's like, "What are we going to be debating today?" "Oh, you'll find out when I stand up and pull it out of a hat."

So here we are. This legislation was just introduced yesterday, and the urgency behind it is unknown, quite honestly.

I will answer my colleague from Kingston and the Islands; he asked a very legitimate question: Will this legislation be going to committee? I think all of us know that this bill is not going to committee for consultation. There has been no consultation, thus far, on the bill. So why consult afterwards?

This democracy thing—I know it's so messy for you, and you really dislike it. In fact, your disdain for democracy is quite astounding. I've seen a lot of things in this place—but the rushing through, the lack of committee, the lack of consultation, the time allocation. You find this democracy that you are elected to participate in and represent people in—I see that you have no respect for it.

1720

I'm actually reading this book called *On Tyranny*, and it's by Timothy Snyder. He's a US political writer. The opening line is, "In politics, being deceived is no excuse." I feel like it's a very timely read for me, because not only is this legislation not going to go to committee for its due

course in our democracy, there has been no consultation. This legislation was crafted behind closed doors. It is bypassing local democracy's duly elected councillors.

When I asked my last question of the member from Beaches–East York, I said that I had no idea last night that I would be reading the meeting minutes from the city councils for Oro-Medonte and Springwater. I can tell you that; that was a surprise for me. I think that there are so many important lessons to be learned, but of course, this government is so unwilling to learn or to pay attention or to listen.

For those of you who are tuning in, this bill is Bill 76, the Barrie — Oro-Medonte — Springwater Boundary Adjustment Act. If you listen to the government, they're like, "There's nothing to see here. We annex land all the time. It's nothing to see"—really, a very paternalistic view of the municipalities.

I will acknowledge that municipalities are creatures of the province. But you and this government, since 2018, have created a special kind of chaos, I would say. The strong-mayor powers are really at the crux of this issue, in many respects, because you have duelling city councils and municipalities. You have a big municipality—who has a lot of power and a lot of influence and a mayor who spends a lot of time with the Premier—wanting land and annexing land from Oro-Medonte and Springwater.

Let me just go on the record here that, as I mentioned, I had no idea I would be reading the minutes from the Springwater meeting. This was passed on November 5, 2025, from Springwater council, and it reads as follows: "Be it resolved that the official position of Springwater council remains and continues to be ... Springwater council opposes the Barrie framework proposal." And then you've got a mayor using strong mayor powers, over-riding a bylaw.

Then you have another council, on the other side of Barrie, and they're looking for some clarification, I would say, which is a fair thing to say. They actually—and this is also another quote. This comes from ward 5 councillor Richard Schell, who feels the entire process has been driven by the need for more housing. Of course, we are in a housing crisis. This government has been a housing disaster. He said, and this I quote: "I said it a long time ago, if we need to build more houses, don't change the boundary line. Build them in Oro-Medonte. If they take our property and our land, it's still going to be built on our land, but the boundaries changed. The tax dollars go to Barrie."

So you follow the money, right? You follow the money in these decisions. As part of the agreement, the township is only going to receive \$15,000 per acre. We went to bat in Wilmot when they were offered \$35,000 an acre. I would say that this is very poor value. This is \$15,000 per developable acre from the city of Barrie, or \$10.1 million to be paid in a lump sum on January 1, 2026. In comparison, though, 26 properties in Oro-Medonte would be impacted by Barrie's proposal, which provides just over \$43,000 in municipal tax revenue. The playing field here is not equal, and the playing field is definitely not level.



“The report”—this came from staff to Oro-Medonte—“warned that an outright rejection of the proposal could ‘negatively impact the township’s relationship with the province.’”

So you’ve created a culture of fear. We saw it from the Premier this week when he threatened to do audits of charities, because those left-wing charities helping people find housing, helping people find food, helping people find clothing—that requires extra eyes and a forensic audit on it.

But we’ve seen this. This government has interfered in municipal elections, beginning in 2018—in the middle of an election, no less. This government has overridden municipal elections of duly elected municipal councillors. This government then decided to give mayors strong-mayor powers to override duly elected, locally elected representatives.

So not only do you have a disdain for democracy, but you clearly do not like the municipal level of government. It’s so ironic; many of you came from the municipal level of government. Now, you certainly don’t like trustees at all either, I can tell you that much. And destabilizing the education system in the province of Ontario is not the strongest economic plan, I would say, as well.

So here we are. I mean, this is their job: to consult with the people that elected them and bring those opinions and that information and that consultation to the decision-making table, which should be in public, should be transparent and should be accountable. These are the very basic building blocks of a democracy, right? That’s how people hold us to account. But that’s not what happened here with Bill 76.

It goes on to say that next up in the boundary batting cage is Springwater township, where they were just making a decision just a week and a half ago, I think. Simply put, the report gives councillors the option of rejection or acceptance, in theory, until you drop a piece of legislation yesterday which overrides the entire process.

We’re in a very interesting place in Ontario right now with a government that is clearly on the ropes. Certainly, if you read the FAO report this morning, the economy is in dire straits.

The government, when they brought in Bill 5, which was enabling legislation to override planning, environmental protections, the appropriate authority and oversight on municipal laws—that you can override all of that, including the duty to consult. I’m sure there’s going to be a duty to consult with regards to Bill 76. Why not be hopeful at this dire strait of time?

I will say that the outstanding questions on Bill 76 are so long. We’re starting to receive questions from these communities because no consultation happened. You heard the member earlier from Timiskaming–Cochrane talk about the fact that he was with folks, with farmers from Oro-Medonte, from Springwater, from the Barrie area yesterday, and they didn’t even know that this legislation had dropped. They were finding out. Of course, they were aware of the idea of annexation and of boundary changes, but they had no idea that the provincial govern-

ment just decided to bring in the hammer and drop the hammer and override everything.

There’s going to be some interesting backlash, I think, for some of the members on the other side of the House. But really, I think that when a government interferes in this manner and in this way, you actually destabilize economic growth. You destabilize decision-making. You create chaos.

I chair the leader’s advisory council on the tariff response, and when we are meeting with sector leaders—be it in steel or aluminum or farm or forestry—all they want from this government is rational ideas, evidence-based decision-making, and clear and honest communication. They are tired of being blindsided by whoever is writing up the legislation and laws on whatever back of napkin happens to be on the desk.

This very much feels like a piece of legislation that, because you did not consult, because there was no transparency with it, because it has one goal—just to override, and I would say, undermine local municipalities—then of course this piece of legislation is already deeply flawed, right? I mean, what kind of legislation would somebody craft that says—it lists the annexation of roughly 4,100 acres of land from the townships of Oro-Medonte and Springwater, and the annexed lands are listed in the bill schedule, but, of course, the minister also has the authority, then, to prescribe the annexed lands by regulation, in which case the prescribed lands are deemed to be annexed as of January 1, and the lands in the schedule are deemed to have never been annexed. This is like a Monty Python piece of legislation we’ve got here. They can’t decide: Is it going to be annexed, is it not going to be annexed? Is it in, is it out? Who decides? Who’s making the decisions over there?

1730

**Mr. Chris Glover:** The donors.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Oh, the donors, or the developers. We’re already following the money on this piece of legislation. I mean, who’s going to benefit? Because it certainly isn’t going to be the taxpayers of Springwater or Oro-Medonte. And when the government member stands in his place and says, “Don’t; just trust us. This is not going to cause”—just trust you? For the love of humanity, you have driven the economy down into the dirt. We used to be a manufacturing powerhouse. We have now had two quarters of declining jobs. To be fair, last quarter was 38,000 jobs; this one is only 1,900, but they’re good jobs. People are staying unemployed longer to the tune—the fact that they have tracked how long people are unemployed for is a really important indicator because it tells how hard it is for a skilled worker to get back into the workforce. And it doesn’t matter how many times the Premier says, “Work harder,” or, “Go out there and work harder and get a job.” You can’t get a job that does not exist, okay?

When the government says, “You know what? Come on, trust us. This is going to be good. There’s going to be more housing; there’s going to be more services”—to date, you have no record whatsoever of following through on

any of these words. I will point to the Peel region fiasco that you created. Now, I will say, it was the best press conference I've seen here, when Bonnie and the Brampton mayor, Patrick Brown, and the Caledon mayor were all up there, and they found out in real time that the government was going to consolidate everything. But they didn't quite work out the math or the taxation or the services. They hadn't talked to the unions. And then people started leaving Peel region because they didn't know what was going on because the government didn't know what was going on. I remember the mayor, the regional chair, saying, "Listen, we're losing people. Can you get the government to do their job?" Sometimes it feels like a full-time job trying to get you to do your job in this place. And all the while, you have these pieces of legislation that are basically crafted for a stakeholder somewhere. Listen, it's just a matter of time before we find out who that stakeholder is, and then the skills development fiasco will seem like nothing, honestly.

Somebody, obviously, at some point, is going to go to jail, right? I mean, an RCMP criminal investigation—over two years now. We obviously have a money trail on the Skills Development Fund which leads to very shady and questionable sources. It's very well-documented. And now we have direct correlation towards donations to funds and then to the return on investment for this particular party.

Power in this place has become incredibly transactional. They might as well just put a big sign out on the front lawn saying, "How much you got, and what do you want?"

*Interjections.*

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** That was pretty good.

I will say, you even messed up signs. They ripped out these speed cameras from the schools and from communities because the people were breaking the law and they were having to pay fines. Imagine a law-and-order government saying, "You know what? Those people can't pay the fines. So they broke the law."

Anyway, I digress. They ripped out these speed cameras, and then they ordered these signs. The signs are too big to go on municipal infrastructure. This is the latest big story, okay, Madam Speaker? It's a big sign. The signs are too big. Maybe they're the biggest signs, I don't know. You tell me. They're big signs, the biggest signs in Ontario—never mind the \$10,000 signs talking about infrastructure projects that will not be built for 25 years, all the layup.

That actually is a connection here with this particular piece of legislation, Bill 76. This is very much connected to the Bradford Bypass. You follow the Bradford Bypass, and you follow the developers that go along that Bradford Bypass. I would respectfully suggest to you that they got what they wanted with Bill 76. I would also say to you, Springwater and Oro-Medonte are the losers in this equation.

I don't know. I mean, I'm willing to put down some money that this is going to have to be reversed because the cost of this particular piece of legislation on the infrastructure and on service delivery, which no one has prepared for, Madam Speaker—it has not been done. You have not done your due diligence. It is a sloppy, sloppy piece of

legislation, which will not even follow through on the key issues that we're facing as a province on the economy, on health care, on connectivity with transportation, on infrastructure projects like waste water and water delivery.

We just saw Bill 60, which opens the door to privatization of our water services. We are not going in the right direction. I know there are smart people on the other side there. I know that this can't sit right with you—I know that. I know that some of you were city councillors. Can you imagine doing your due diligence as a city councillor and then just having the government just wipe it all away? You want to talk about waste? That's incredibly wasteful, Madam Speaker.

At the end of the day, our democracy requires time, and it requires consultation. I believe in servant leadership. Servant leadership is where you lead with the people that you're elected to serve, which means you have to have a conversation. You have to open that backroom door. There's a news flash for people in the government: These things matter. People care about their communities, and it's not just about taxes. They care about how their community is going to grow, and they care that their voices are part of that vision for that community.

What you have done here with Bill 76—and I think that I've clearly outlined who is driving this—is that you have shown your disdain for our democracy in real time.

**The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell):** Question?

**Mr. Ted Hsu:** What a wonderful speech by my colleague from Waterloo. I, too, believe in servant leadership. What do you know?

I wanted to ask about something that's in the compendium of this bill. I'll just read it out here: "The minister is authorized to make regulations prescribing the annexed area." That's just one phrase from the bill. I don't know. To me, this means people should get in line to lobby the government to make favourable changes.

Could the member please tell us what danger that poses?

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Thank you very much. I think that we're seeing in real time this very transactional form of democracy. I said it in a statement not that long ago: We think that our democracy is safe from these kinds of controls. We think that we're better than the United States, but in the United States, they have increased their lobbyist fees as well and their donation fees—which this government has done, which this Premier said he would never do; \$5,000 per donation.

It's very clear that you pay and then you get to play, and that leaves the people who really need housing and jobs and a sense of hope in this province not feeling very positive about this particular government.

**The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell):** Question?

**Mr. Billy Pang:** I appreciate that the member keeps emphasizing democracy. Democracy is a system of government where people have the power to choose their leaders, their governments, often through voting. They are sitting there; that's democracy.

1740

Speaker, my question to the member: We often debate how to achieve infrastructure-led growth, but in this case, we already have a city that has invested hundreds of millions in water, waste water, transit and major roads. Does the member agree that when the land directly adjacent to a fully serviced area is available, it makes far more sense to grow this than to push development farther outward to unserviced rural spaces? If not, could the member explain why they would justify bypassing existing pipes, roads and transit in favour of more expensive and less efficient greenfield agreements?

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** I'd like to thank the member for defining and sharing the definition of democracy with me. Perhaps you can share it with the Premier and also your own caucus, because what is going on here right now with Bill 76, amid many other concerns—local councils are being overlooked; insufficient public consultation; potential impacts on the protection of farmland and natural heritage.

I would say that in a democracy, you would take these factors into consideration as you were crafting a piece of legislation. I think that that would be basic, basic due diligence. I think that at the end of the day, when you craft a piece of legislation like this, ram it through this house, call an election in winter, 18 months early, because we've got to get our elbows up, but then shut us out of this, the people's House, I would say that that is very undemocratic, Madam Speaker.

**The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell):** Question?

**Mr. Chris Glover:** I want to thank my colleague from Waterloo for her comments today. I fully agree with her: The Conservative member read a definition of democracy, but this government's track record on democracy is absolutely appalling. Their interference in our supposedly democratic municipal elections has meant that the Supreme Court has ruled that we do not have the right to democratic municipal elections.

They've also passed three pieces of legislation that strip us of our freedom of speech, which is one of our charter rights. They've also started to appoint Conservative judges. The Premier said openly that he wants to appoint Conservative judges, and this is a violation of our charter right to an impartial judiciary.

This government does not respect democracy, and the bill before us is another example of them overriding the democratic will of the people of Oro-Medonte. Would you like to comment?

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** I would. I appreciate the member raising the judicial system here in Ontario because it is very true that the Premier has thrown a lot of shade towards judges, especially when those judges disagree with the Premier. This is also playing itself out in the United States, to a very frightening level.

Why language and why it's important for the Premier and for us to listen really carefully in these moments is that he's sending a signal out there that is meant to undermine the judicial system. It is meant to undermine the court

system. Because, boy, for a long time, we've only had the court system defending human rights right here in Ontario, because it hasn't been this government.

**The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell):** Question?

**Mr. Ted Hsu:** I wanted to continue along the same line of questioning, following my honourable colleague's mention of transactional democracy and how politics here is getting way too transactional.

Actually, it was a former leader of her party here in this Legislature, a former Premier, who warned me, because we both served, Mr. Bob Rae and I, in the federal House of Commons at the same time. But when I went into provincial politics, he warned me. He said, "Watch out. Provincial politics is a little more transactional than federal politics." But this government is taking it way, way too far.

I noticed that this bill, the annexation, comes into effect on January 1, 2026, and that happens to be the same day that the donation limits go up to \$5,000. I wanted to invite my colleague to comment on that strange coincidence, if it's a coincidence.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** There's no coincidence. This is a truly populist Premier. It's truly a populist government. Nothing—well, except when he gets really emotional here in the House and he loses his temper and he yells at our leader. But for the most part, everything is very intentional. But it's not coming out of the Premier's office; it's coming out from all the people who have access to the Premier's office.

This is a serious thing to say in this House, Madam Speaker, that the Premier is running at the direction of people who have a huge amount of influence in this province, who have a huge amount of money, and who make very generous donations. The fact that the Minister of Labour got \$400,000 in the year that he started doling out the Skills Development Fund is really a very telling story.

I've been seeing it in this House for 13 years: You follow the money and you'll follow the real priorities of the government. Right now, we're losing.

**The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell):** Question?

**M<sup>me</sup> Dawn Gallagher Murphy:** Thank you to the member from Waterloo for your comments.

Speaker, to the member: There has been a concern that was raised about protecting residents from sudden tax or servicing disruptions. This legislation that has been tabled actually enables phased-in tax rates, compensation mechanisms and continuity of services. Those all seem to be important things to meet for a municipality.

Does the member agree that this type of clarity actually protects residents during transitions?

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** That's an interesting question. I quoted a city councillor for Oro-Medonte who said his reservation is that if we're going to build housing and you have a housing crisis, let's build the housing within our own boundaries, because they also need the taxable revenue. He says, "It's still going to be built on our land,

but the boundaries changed”—when the annexation happens—and “the tax dollars go to Barrie.” You can’t say that this is going to be a revenue-neutral decision. That would be an inaccurate thing to say, Madam Speaker, because the taxable revenue will go where the houses are built within those boundaries.

You guys are shifting the boundaries, so you are benefiting Barrie over Oro-Medonte and Springwater.

**The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell):** Question?

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** I’d like to thank my friend from Waterloo for an excellent presentation. My question really is about: Does this government—are they able to figure out where they’re going, or are they simply hiding their tracks? I mean, we had licence plates that didn’t show numbers, gas pump stickers that didn’t stick, signs that don’t fit. Can this government—they can’t even do cash-for-access effectively. This government is, within this—

**The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell):** Response.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Well, I don’t know. I think I might disagree. I think they’re doing cash-for-access aggressively. Certainly, there is a very transactional nature, more so than anything that I’ve ever seen.

But I just want to say to my colleagues that the people don’t win in these equations, when you’re tailoring legislation based on donations.

**The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell):** Further debate?

**Mr. Ted Hsu:** Thanks for the opportunity to speak to this bill. I want to start out by saying this bill was tabled just one day ago, so the government is expecting the elected members of this Legislature to be able to address this bill and have all the information available in just one day. I’ll also remind the government that not only was this bill only tabled one day ago, but there hasn’t been a technical briefing about this bill from the public service—no chance to ask questions to find out exactly what is going on. The government has been trying to hide, because they haven’t said who is driving the bus here. Who is driving this change?

I’ll just tell the people of Kingston and the Islands: With this Premier who has this dream of building a fantasy tunnel under the 401, maybe in Kingston we should be worried about Toronto annexing Kingston someday. Unless there’s some rationale that’s guiding this government, we have to worry about—I mean, it sounds crazy, but we do have to worry about things like that if there’s going to be a tunnel under the 401 that’s going to cost everybody in Ontario like \$15,000, by some estimates.

I want to talk about this bill, the Barrie — Oro-Medonte — Springwater Boundary Adjustment Act, 2025. The way I’m going to approach it is to talk about what happened when Pittsburgh township, just east of the old city of Kingston, was amalgamated and became part of the city of Kingston back in 1998, and some of the things that happened and some of the concerns that followed this amalgamation—which was imposed by a previous Conservative government here, in fact.

1750

Let me give you some background first of all. Pittsburgh township is located on the east side of the Cataraqui River, and it is now part of the city of Kingston. It happened in 1998, and there were certain complaints and concerns that the residents of Pittsburgh township had. I want to go over them, but I also want to say that the city of Kingston actually had to do something to address these concerns.

Naturally, of course, there was a concern about the lack of a political voice for their local community, for the concerns of the local community. I’m a little bit worried when I listen to the debate here and I’m finding out that the municipal councils around Barrie, representing the areas that are going to be annexed, are not 100% in agreement with this change of municipal boundary. I wonder about the people who are residents or nearby residents of the areas that are going to be annexed and whether they are in full agreement or not.

One of the concerns—and the bill tries to address this—is that taxes are higher in the big city. Back in 1998, taxes were higher in Kingston and people in Pittsburgh township would have to pay higher property taxes. That is the case even in this annexation by Barrie. It is phased in over several years, but I think that just begs the question: Have the people in the surrounding municipalities agreed with this higher tax rate and do the people who live in those municipalities, but outside the annexation area, consent to the loss of revenue that might come from development on those lands that are being annexed?

What is going to happen with the assumption of debt? If you become part of a larger city with debt, you’re responsible for that debt as a citizen. That’s something that happened in Pittsburgh township.

There was also concern about what cost savings and efficiencies there would be with municipal services for the entire enlarged municipality back in 1998. That was a concern. When the service gets harmonized, because now it’s all going to be managed by one municipality—residents in Pittsburgh township very naturally wondered whether the harmonized services would result in a reduced level of service or increased costs.

When you join a larger municipality, I think the worry is that the new, larger municipal council would be dominated by the larger city and their attention would be focused on the needs of the larger city. What assurances are there that this urban core, Barrie—that those issues would not overwhelm the issues that the people in the surrounding areas, the annexed areas, would care about?

These are the kinds of concerns that came up with the amalgamation of Pittsburgh township to the greater city of Kingston, but I haven’t gotten to the bigger concern. The biggest concern was that Pittsburgh township had accumulated a reserve fund with several million dollars. This was money to be saved for future local projects—could be infrastructure; could be a community centre.

What happened at first was that, with amalgamation, this pot of money that Pittsburgh township had been setting aside got absorbed into the general city of Kings-

ton's treasury. The residents of Pittsburgh township were worried that this would simply become a multi-million-dollar windfall for Kingston, and something that they had carefully saved up for over years and years and years would not benefit them. So this was a serious issue, but there was a resolution, fortunately.

But I don't see that kind of planning here. In fact, the government whip actually talked about how important it was to rush this legislation through. He was unwilling to answer my question about whether this bill would go to committee, the implication being that this bill would skip committee stage because the government is in such a rush to pass this bill before the donation limits go up on January 1, 2026.

What happened in Kingston and Pittsburgh township is that a special fund was set up, the Pittsburgh Community Benefit Fund. The purpose of this fund was to hold the money that Pittsburgh township and the taxpayers there had saved up over the years. That fund would only be spent to benefit the community east of the Cataraqui River. Amalgamation was in 1998. And in 1999, the city of Kingston transferred about \$5.7 million to this new special fund, the Pittsburgh Community Benefit Fund. Those funds were set aside for the benefit of the residents in the former township of Pittsburgh. In fact, there is a new community centre; that's one of the things the money was spent on. There is a nice, new community centre off Highway 15, on the east side of Cataraqui River.

There were many concerns, and many concerns that needed some additional actions to be addressed when Pittsburgh township amalgamated with the old central city of Kingston. I don't see that happening with the rush to pass Bill 76.

Let's talk about Bill 76 and some of the concerns that I see just from reading the compendium. I haven't studied the bill line by line because it was only tabled yesterday, but I have read the compendium. And since at second reading we're only debating the principles of the bill, I will

just comment on the compendium. Maybe the government will change its mind and actually send this bill to committee, so we can find out why this bill is needed, who's in favour of it and what are the different arguments.

Actually, this reminds me of something that the Honourable John Gerretsen told me. He said, "You know, when somebody comes to you and they want the government to do something, one of the questions you should ask is, 'Why hasn't this been done already?'" The reason why that's a good question is that sometimes the answer tells you who is opposed to that action and their reasons for being opposed to that action. You shouldn't just have somebody come to you and say—and I'm going to paraphrase what the chief government whip said because he gave a speech that I was listening to. You can't have somebody coming to say, "Oh, we've got to do this, and we've got to do this quickly. There's municipal elections coming up next year. We've got to do this quickly." You always should be asking: Why hasn't this happened already? Who is driving this, who might be opposed and what might their reasons be?

Let's talk about one of the sections in the compendium, and that's bylaws, official plans and procedures, because the official plan and the bylaws and so on of the annexed areas eventually will have to be harmonized with those of the city of Barrie. The experience in Kingston was that when amalgamation occurred, there were several—I think at least three—official plans and all sorts of different bylaws, multiple sets of bylaws, that had to be harmonized. I will tell this Legislature that it took about 25 years for Kingston to finally harmonize everything and come up with a new official—

**The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell):** Thank you.

*Second reading debate deemed adjourned.*

**The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell):** Orders of the day?

*Report continues in volume B.*









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<b>Lumsden, Hon. / L'hon. Neil (PC)</b>	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
<b>McCarthy, Hon. / L'hon. Todd J. (PC)</b>	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
<b>McGregor, Hon. / L'hon. Graham (PC)</b>	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	
<b>Mulroney, Hon. / L'hon. Caroline (PC)</b>	York—Simcoe	President of the Treasury Board / Présidente du Conseil du Trésor
<b>Oosterhoff, Hon. / L'hon. Sam (PC)</b>	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	
<b>Parsa, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (PC)</b>	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
<b>Piccini, Hon. / L'hon. David (PC)</b>	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	
<b>Pirie, Hon. / L'hon. George (PC)</b>	Timmins	Minister of Northern Economic Development and Growth / Ministre du Développement et de la croissance économique du Nord
<b>Quinn, Hon. / L'hon. Nolan (PC)</b>	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	
<b>Rickford, Hon. / L'hon. Greg (PC)</b>	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	
<b>Sarkaria, Hon. / L'hon. Prabmeet Singh (PC)</b>	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	
<b>Skelly, Hon. / L'hon. Donna (PC)</b>	Flamborough—Glanbrook	Speaker / Présidente de l'Assemblée législative
Smith, Dave (PC)	Peterborough—Kawartha	
Smith, David (PC)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	
<b>Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Graydon (PC)</b>	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
<b>Surma, Hon. / L'hon. Kinga (PC)</b>	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	Minister of Infrastructure / Ministre de l'Infrastructure
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto—Danforth	
<b>Tangri, Hon. / L'hon. Nina (PC)</b>	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
<b>Thanigasalam, Hon. / L'hon. Vijay (PC)</b>	Scarborough—Rouge Park	Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions / Ministre associé délégué à la Santé mentale et à la Lutte contre les dépendances
<b>Thompson, Hon. / L'hon. Lisa M. (PC)</b>	Huron—Bruce	Minister of Rural Affairs / Ministre des Affaires rurales
<b>Tibollo, Hon. / L'hon. Michael A. (PC)</b>	Vaughan—Woodbridge	Associate Attorney General / Procureur général associé
<b>Triantafilopoulos, Effie J. (PC)</b>	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	
<b>Williams, Hon. / L'hon. Charmaine A. (PC)</b>	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	