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Lundi
8 décembre 2025

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Clerk: Trevor Day

Présidente : L'honorable Donna Skelly
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Monday 8 December 2025

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 8 décembre 2025

The House met at 1015.

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

Prayers.

REPORT, FINANCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICER

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I beg to inform the House that the following document was tabled: a report entitled Ontario's Credit Rating: Fall 2025 Update from the Office of the Financial Accountability Officer of Ontario.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

HOLIDAY EVENTS IN GLENGARRY– PRESCOTT–RUSSELL ÉVÉNEMENTS DU TEMPS DES FÊTES À GLENGARRY–PRESCOTT–RUSSELL

Mr. Stéphane Sarrazin: As the holiday season approaches, I want to recognize a strong community spirit in my riding of Glengarry–Prescott–Russell.

Au cours des dernières semaines, notre circonscription a été animée par des défilés de Noël, des marchés festifs et des événements communautaires.

Des personnes de tous âges se sont réunies pour admirer des chars décorés, écouter de la musique des Fêtes, savourer des gourmandises et profiter des traditions spéciales. Ces événements permettent aux voisins de se rencontrer, aux familles de célébrer et aux communautés de montrer leur créativité et leur générosité.

None of this would be possible without the hard work of many volunteers. Firefighters, service clubs, parade organizers, local businesses and residents all give their time to make the season brighter. Their dedication shows the pride and strong sense of community that defines Glengarry–Prescott–Russell.

Alors que nous concluons cette session législative cette semaine, je tiens à souhaiter à tous les résidents de joyeuses Fêtes. Que cette période vous apporte paix, bonheur et de précieux moments avec vos proches. Je vous souhaite également une nouvelle année heureuse, en santé et prospère.

Aux habitants de Glengarry–Prescott–Russell : merci pour votre gentillesse, votre esprit communautaire et votre soutien. C'est un véritable honneur de vous servir et de

représenter une communauté aussi dynamique et bienveillante.

CONSUMER PROTECTION

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Dynamic pricing is digital pick-pocketing. Maybe you haven't heard about it before, but soon it's going to be raising the cost of everything that you really need. Have you heard of the saying "Business isn't personal?" Well, it's about to get real personal now.

What is it? Dynamic pricing is when a company mines your online personal information to charge you—and I repeat, you—the absolute maximum it thinks it can get away with on a product or service you need. Let's say you're really excited about a flight to see mom in Vancouver. The more you google it the higher the price will get, because they know you really want that ticket. If they know you're a parent you'll pay more for school supplies in August. Stuff sitting in your online cart might start creeping up in price to force your hand to buy it. Some retailers are starting to remove in-store sticker prices so they can control the price at checkout.

During holiday shopping, you could pay more for the same gift than others because they tied your data to your identity at checkout. This is happening in the United States right now, and it's starting to rear its ugly head here in Canada. We have to put the brakes on it right now. People deserve transparency and fairness. That's why today I'm tabling a motion to protect people from dynamic pricing, this growing new form of gouging.

1020

SUPPORTIVE HOUSING

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: I rise today on behalf of Ontarians who are deeply concerned about the growing homelessness, addictions and mental health crisis facing our communities. Ontario's Big City Mayors have urged the province to declare a province-wide state of emergency as we enter the winter. My community of Ajax is seeing this first-hand: There's an encampment that's showing no signs of disappearing, and the region of Durham's plan for a 24/7 emergency shelter and hub fell through at the last minute, despite support from the town of Ajax. Residents are fed up, and they want governments to act and stop giving excuses.

The town of Ajax has endorsed the Solve the Crisis campaign, asking the province to appoint a responsible ministry and minister with the appropriate funding and powers as a single point of contact to address the full

spectrum of housing needs, mental health and addictions and wraparound supports.

At pre-budget consultations last week, we heard clearly from mental health providers and municipalities that supportive housing levels are nowhere near adequate, and the shortage has reached a crisis point.

In Ajax and communities all across Ontario, we're tired of band-aids—we're tired of shelters and temporary warming centres. Residents want to feel safe in their communities. To do that, we need supportive housing with wraparound supports so that people can access services and rebuild their lives. It's the smart thing to do, Speaker, and it's the right thing to do.

JASON DIXON

FIREFIGHTERS

Mr. Joseph Racinsky: Last week, I had the privilege of honouring Jason Dixon with the Ontario Fire Services Long Service Medal for his 25 years as a volunteer firefighter with Centre Wellington Fire Rescue, which is also celebrating its 25th anniversary. This is an honour that few achieve and, according to the chief, the next time someone reaches that milestone in Centre Wellington is at least six years away.

Jason Dixon has done so much for the community of Fergus, and this is just one example of what he contributes to our community.

Speaker, the work firefighters do is extremely difficult. Our catastrophe is their day-to-day. They are there for the worst days of our lives. That's why I'm proud to be a part of a government that supports and protects our firefighters. Our government has doubled the Fire Protection Grant from \$10 million in the program's first year last year to \$20 million this year. I'm proud to announce today that Wellington-Halton Hills's various fire departments will be receiving a combined \$153,338 this year. This important investment will help protect firefighters that protect our communities.

To all the firefighters in Wellington-Halton Hills and across Ontario: Thank you for your service. Thank you for keeping us safe.

To Jason Dixon: Congratulations once again on 25 years of incredible service.

HOLIDAY MESSAGES

Mr. John Vanthof: It's the Christmas season and, really, it's the season of volunteers. We all go to a lot of events. It's the season of parades, the season of telethons, the season of toy drives—people who want to help their fellow residents have a merrier Christmas. On all our behalf, we'd like to thank those volunteers who go out of their way to do everything they can so everyone has a merry Christmas.

It's also the season of people who often don't get thanked but who are working. The people who are working on the holidays: the health care workers, the OPP—

there's no one who works harder during the holiday season than the OPP.

I talk about the highways a lot in northern Ontario. I'd really like to give a shout-out to the people who are actually on those highways keeping them clean—with the rules that we have. To the people who are on the snowplow on Christmas Eve—when we're with our families and they're on the plow, and people are rushing past them making life dangerous for them—I wish everyone a safe and merry Christmas. We all want to get home to see our families. Please, let's all work together to make sure that everyone gets to see their families when they can.

HOLIDAY MESSAGES

Hon. Ernie Hardeman: I rise today to wish the people of Oxford and everyone across Ontario a very merry Christmas, happy holidays and a happy new year.

This time of year reminds us of what really matters: spending meaningful time with family, friends and the people who support us throughout the year. It's a chance to slow down, reconnect and enjoy simple moments together.

I was grateful to see so many friendly faces at my Cider and Cookie Social this past Saturday at the Woodstock Farmers' Market, sharing a treat and a chat with our great local vendors.

But the holidays are also about how each one of us can make a difference. Our organizations: the Salvation Army, Operation Sharing, the Christmas Place and Ingersoll and District Inter-Church do incredible work but it's the people behind them who truly shine—volunteers, donors and everyday neighbours—people like you and me who give their time, share their skills and offer help quietly when someone needs it. Even small acts can make a big impact, like checking in on someone who might be alone. We all have the power to make someone smile this season.

As we look ahead for 2026, let us carry that spirit with us and continue supporting one another. From my family to yours, merry Christmas, happy holidays.

VOLUNTEERS

MPP Jamie West: On the 14th, I'll be performing a stage radio play of the Charles Dickens classic A Christmas Carol. It's a Sudbury version that's been adapted by Sudbury resident, author and arts enthusiast Judi Straughan. I cannot but be reminded of the moral of this timeless tale as it relates to our world today: the importance of compassion and generosity and the emphasis on our social responsibility to care for each other in our community, and Sudbury is a community that cares.

I want to talk about some of the organizations that keep Sudburians warm, safe and fed:

- the CTV-Lions Children's Christmas Telethon;
- Canadian Tire and Our Children, Our Future's Tree of Dreams;
- the Salvation Army Santa Shuffle;
- YWCA's Adopt a Family program;

—Closet Share and Cooper Equipment Rentals winter clothing drive;

—Giant Tiger's Keeping Seniors Warm;

—Sudbury Outreach Services;

—Go-Give Project;

—Elgin Street Mission;

—Blue Door Soup Kitchen; and

—the Sudbury infant food bank.

I want to thank them, the volunteers and everyone who donates to them, but unfortunately, Speaker, affordability and the cost of living is something that's top of mind all year long. Nearly 20% of Ontarians are living in housing they can't afford. And last year, more than 6,300 people in my community used the Sudbury Food Bank and more than 2,200 of them were children.

So today, with affordability at top of mind, I ask that all members of the assembly heed to the moral of A Christmas Carol. Together, let's embrace compassion instead of greed and recognize the joy that comes from supporting and connecting with the community around you.

HOLIDAY MESSAGES

Mr. Ric Bresee: As we near the end of the year, I've already begun making my way across Hastings–Lennox and Addington at Santa parades and Christmas events, community celebrations, and I'm looking forward to even more and a full calendar in the days ahead.

I want to offer a heartfelt thank you to all the volunteers, service groups, churches and municipalities that make this season so very special. Your work brings joy to families and strengthens our communities year after year.

As we prepare to head home for the holidays, I want to share a small blessing for all of you and for the folks back home in Hastings–Lennox and Addington:

May your roads be plowed,
May your cookies be many,
May your gatherings be joyful,
And may your family feuds be ... minimal.
May your shopping be local,
Your lights stay untangled,
Your holidays peaceful,
And your heart a little more full.

To everyone in Hastings–Lennox and Addington, and to all members of this House, merry Christmas, happy holidays and the very best of the happy new year.

SPIRIT PARA SPORT ASSOCIATION

HOLIDAY MESSAGES

Mr. Deepak Anand: On this International Day of Persons with Disabilities, I want to recognize Spirit Para Sports with the remarkable founders, including Mohsin Watto and Mudassar—para-athletes who turned their hardship into hope for others.

The two top-ranked, fully qualified athletes lost their international ranking simply because they could not afford the flight to compete. Instead of giving up, they chose to stand up for the next generations so that they should not suffer. Without any support they opened up a para-sports club to provide coaching, opportunity and dignity for athletes thriving to represent Canada.

Their mission is inclusion. Their vision is empowerment. And the impact is already changing lives. I want to wish them continued success and thank them for their courage, compassion and unwavering dedication. Thank you so much.

I also want to say this is my last statement of the year. Thank you to the residents of Mississauga–Malton for their support, kindness, community spirit. You continue to make our community warm and bright. Together, we got Goreway bridge, the expanded youth hub, opened Lincoln's track and started Ascension's track. Thank you for the wonderful year.

Merry Christmas, happy Hanukkah, happy holidays. May the season be a time to cherish loved ones and build lasting memories. Together, we're building a stronger Mississauga–Malton and a stronger Ontario.

1030

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Members, if I could have your attention. Joining me in the Speaker's gallery today, I have some pretty strong, intelligent, powerful, influential women from my city of Hamilton—women who work hard to make a difference, to make the city that we have a great place to visit, to raise a family, to work. Of course, their work isn't done.

But joining us from Hamilton Health Sciences, Tracey MacArthur; from the Hamilton Club, Shendal Yalchin; from the Vantage Group, Cathie Puckering; from the Art Gallery of Hamilton, Shelley Falconer; from the Hamilton Police Association—who's also celebrating a birthday today—Jaimi Bannon; from LIUNA, Victoria Mancinelli; from Breakwater Investments, April Cotton; from Breakwater Investments, Kathy McKeil; from Theatre Aquarius, Kelly Straughan; from the Carmens Group, Heather Williams; from McMaster University, Susan Tighe; and from Theatre Aquarius, Mary Francis Moore. Welcome to Queen's Park.

The person that gets the first introduction today because it comes with toffee: the Associate Minister of Forestry.

Hon. Kevin Holland: Thank you, Speaker. I want to welcome to the House the love of my life, my best friend, my beautiful wife: Lori.

Mr. Joseph Racinsky: I am very happy to welcome my incredible parents, Tim and Glenda Racinsky, to the Ontario Legislature. Welcome, mom and dad.

M^{me} France Gélinas: J'aimerais présenter la sage-femme Geneviève Gagnon, d'Ottawa, qui est ici aujourd'hui.

I'd like to invite all the MPPs to join the Association of Ontario Midwives at noon today in room 230. See you there.

Mr. Chris Glover: I want to welcome all of the midwives, including one of my very good friends, Manavi Handa.

Manavi Handa, thank you so much.

Ms. Lee Fairclough: I want to wish Manélie Lavictoire, who's our page captain today, all the best, and welcome her many members of her family: her mom and dad, Azadeh and Guillaume Lavictoire; grandparents; brothers; and extended family. Welcome to your House.

MPP Billy Denault: I'd like to welcome the Tourism Industry Association of Ontario. They're strong advocates for the tourism sector. I want to welcome them to Queen's Park and hope they enjoy question period.

Hon. Rob Flack: I want to recognize two friends up in the gallery, John and Jeff Ferguson from Elgin county—great farmers, great food producers. Farmers feed cities, Speaker.

Hon. Stan Cho: Conveniently sitting next to Andrew Siegwart, who of course is the head of TIAO, is somebody who drives tourism in the entertainment scene here in Canada—a legend. He has done creative work, photography, for Post Malone, Drake, French Montana, Popcaan, Bad Bunny, Peso Pluma and Boi-1da, just to name a few. We have Adam Francis visiting, better known as Astral. Welcome to Queen's Park, my friend.

Mr. Deepak Anand: I'd like to introduce my friend Murtaza Jowia and international medal winners for table tennis para-athletes, Mohsin Watto and Muhammad Mudassar. Welcome to Queen's Park.

MPP Lise Vaugeois: I'd like to welcome Jacob Porter here today. He's an advocate for accessibility at post-secondary institutions. Welcome to your House.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: It gives me great pleasure to welcome Meagan Furnivall. She wears many hats. She's the founder and CEO of Empower Elle. She's also a registered midwife, a clinical researcher and is with the Western University department of family medicine, and here for the day of midwives. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: I'd like to welcome Pastor Fredrica Walters from the Christian Faith Outreach Centre in Ajax: Barry and Marla Walters, Janis MacDonald, Francine Kimasi, Paul Ivbarue, Charles de Guigné, Audrey Forbes, Ruby Woodward and Marsha Walters—congregants and team members there. Welcome to your House.

Hon. Nolan Quinn: I'd like to wish a happy birthday to my oldest daughter, Norah, 13—we have a teenager in the house. Happy birthday, Norah.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Good morning, everyone. I'd like to welcome clever Kevin Clowes—he's a dynamic dad in beautiful Beaches—East York and also the tourism industry. Thank you for making our province lively and vibrant.

Hon. Graydon Smith: There's no friend like an old friend. I'd love to welcome my old friend Dave Cosgrave to this House today.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Today I'm pleased to welcome Linda Reid and Shelley Black. Welcome to Queen's Park today.

QUESTION PERIOD

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Ms. Marit Stiles: Good morning. This question is to the Premier.

The Globe and Mail has reported that this Minister of Labour handed out \$1 million in skills development money to Connex Telecommunications for a project to train and test AI customer service chatbots that can replace workers.

Ontario is in the middle of a jobs disaster. We are seeing manufacturing, service and retail jobs leaving Ontario in record numbers. Why did your minister hand out skills development money to a company for projects that are just going to lead to more job losses?

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

Hon. David Piccini: Speaker, as I've said for weeks, every SDF project goes through a strict risk-assessment process: monthly reporting, visits, expenditure monitoring, spot audits and clear transfer payment agreements.

AI, we know, is increasingly disrupting the workforce, and that's why it's important to make investments to support AI. We committed to that in the budget; we've made investments to support AI adoption, how it can assist workers, and we've got a fund that can now train workers on AI adoption and automation.

I visited manufacturers. I reference them because they were here last week. We've seen AI and technology support the manufacturing workforce, and SDF programs have helped workers implement better training so that they can adjust and they can be supported. That's what we're doing: supporting better jobs for better training, and it's delivering better outcomes for the workers of this province.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: Look, if that wasn't bad enough, I've got to tell you, Speaker, the name sounded very familiar to me in this story. And do you know why? Because Connex technology's CEO, Sayan Navaratnam, used to head up Facedrive. Remember that? Facedrive, the company that your government gave \$2.5 million to during COVID—the same CEO, the same company, the same person who was hit with a three-year ban by the Ontario Securities Commission for the Facedrive scandal. Surely, the Minister of Labour would have known Mr. Navaratnam's history of misleading the public and investors and yet, still, this Minister of Labour decided to hand them millions of taxpayer dollars again.

Is this an issue of competence, or is it the other C-word again?

Hon. David Piccini: Speaker, as I said, every program, project and proponent are assessed prior to funding, and we've got AI—Speaker, 430,000 tech workers in Ontario. That's up 100,000 since we formed office—100,000 jobs since we formed office. Today we know, last month, over 55,000-plus jobs created—another 6,000 last month, and

it's because this Premier, this government are creating a competitive climate in which to attract investment. You've got to make sure you're ready for AI. You've got to make sure you have training programs to support both companies and workers with its adoption. That's exactly what the fund is doing, and we're supporting workers.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: My goodness, can you just resign? Honestly.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: Let me connect the dots for you—

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: Once again, Speaker: Is this gross mismanagement or is it just the fact that this minister has his hands all over these files? Mr. Navaratnam has donated over \$13,000 to the Progressive Conservative Party just in recent years, including to the member for Bay of Quinte by the way. I know he loves to get up and defend this minister.

1040

It looks like Mr. Navaratnam is getting good bang for his buck: \$1 million in a project to replace workers. Is this what the minister is calling skills development these days, standing up for workers these days? Is donating to the Progressive Conservative Party the one criteria for getting an SDF grant?

Hon. David Piccini: Speaker, no, it's not. And that member may want to reflect on her own score—a dismal rating from her own party because they abandoned labour. They abandoned labour. That's why that member faced the music when she went to her own members, promised to get labour back—but you can't get labour back when you oppose the very projects that put labour to work, like the 413, like the Bradford Bypass, like SMRs and new nuclear construction. When you oppose all of those projects and the training that puts those members to work, you stand against those workers.

On this side of the House, we're going to keep supporting those workers and keep making investments to build a stronger Ontario.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Ms. Marit Stiles: Speaker, the minister can't even address the gift anymore, right? He just has to go to petty insults.

But listen, back to the Premier, because that is quite the performance from a government that is failing on every single front. The EQAO results that we saw last week gave us another clear example of that. Now even our children are having to pay the price for this government's mismanagement. These kids in grade 3 and in grade 6, all they have ever known is a school system under this cruel and callous government, a government that doesn't believe in public education. All they have seen are cuts and crowded classrooms.

When is the Premier going to take responsibility for the mess that he has created in our schools?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: Look, obviously nothing could be further from the truth. The member will know, as I've said on many occasions, we are spending more than we ever have in education.

But ultimately, as I have said, I don't think parents care that we're spending more than any other government has ever. I think what they care about is what are the results that their students are having. And you know what? Under Progressive Conservatives, we see the highest graduation rates in the province's history. Under Progressive Conservatives, we see the best literacy—reading and writing scores are at the highest that they've ever been. Under a Progressive Conservative government, we are seeing increases in the math scores. But you know what the difference between Progressive Conservatives and the opposition is? It's not good enough for us.

So that is why we're going to double down, build on the success of the previous ministers and make sure that we give our kids every opportunity to succeed. Despite the opposition, who would like to take us back to the future, we're going to go back into the future stronger than ever before by focusing on students, parents and teachers and their needs.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Supplementary?

Ms. Marit Stiles: Wow, the minister said one thing that I agree with: This government is not good enough for our kids. It is darn well not good enough.

This government cut education funding by \$1,500 per student and now they are blaming, once again, students and teachers, and hiring so-called advisers for \$1,500 a day. I've got some free advice for this minister: Take that money and put it back in our classrooms.

The math here is very, very simple, Speaker. More students plus fewer resources equals worse outcomes.

So why is the government, once again, blaming students and teachers for the conditions that they themselves have created?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Madam Speaker, as you know, that's just simply incorrect. The reality is that we are at the highest level of spending ever, and it's just still not good enough in the sense that we want to have our students do even better.

I just highlighted for the member opposite—the member opposite would like to bring us back to what it was when the NDP and the Liberals combined to give us a system where parents were at war with their teachers, and students were failing, Madam Speaker.

Under a Progressive Conservative government, because of the work started by the former minister to stop and reverse the horrific things that the Liberals and the NDP were doing—Minister Lecce, who brought us through a global health and economic pandemic.

And you know what we're seeing in all of this? We're seeing graduation rates at the highest that they have ever been, literacy scores higher than they have ever been

before in the province's history. But we're not accepting of the fact that our students can't do better when it comes to math and that we can't do better in all facets of the education system. That's why we're going to see what it is that we're missing, look at other jurisdictions and look to ourselves. Where we have failed, we will do better. That's what our parents, students and teachers deserve, and we won't be stopped because the NDP—

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: Speaker, this minister needs to do his homework because students out there are struggling; families are exhausted. Our education workers—I mean, I'm meeting principals that are responsible for three schools in three separate locations in a city because there aren't enough people that they can find to fill those roles because everybody is burning out because of this government's incompetence and mismanagement.

Enough with the blame game. The government has spent millions on handouts and millions on self-serving ads, but our kids are struggling in crumbling and overcrowded classrooms. Instead of fixing the problems, the Premier just wants to create more chaos.

Why won't the Premier direct his education minister to put our kids first and put resources back in the classroom?

Hon. Paul Calandra: That's an interesting question coming from the Leader of the Opposition who, as a school trustee and, I think, a chair of the board in Toronto, brought more executive principals on the system than ever before. You know why there aren't more principals in the schools, Madam Speaker? When she was a trustee and a chair of the board, she took them out of the school and made them executive principals. You know what an executive principal is? Somebody who sits in the board office and isn't assigned to a school. So you know what we're doing? We're undoing everything that the Liberals and NDP did. We're doubling down by giving them more money, more resources. We're telling the principals, "Get back into the classroom."

And do you know what principals are telling me? They want to be educators again, and they're saying that when the NDP and Liberals were in charge, they took them out of the classroom, put them at war with parents and students and teachers. Do you know what we're going to do? We're going to end the divisiveness. We're going to double down and focus on student achievement. We'll let them be satisfied with students who don't pass, who are failing. We're going to be only satisfied when 100% of our students achieve the best—

Interjections.

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

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Ontarians learned on Friday that \$1 million of skills development financing—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Order.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman:—went to a company whose CEO has been sanctioned—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Order. I will allow the member for Don Valley West to begin her question again.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Thank you, Speaker.

Ontarians learned on Friday that this government gave \$1 million in skills development fund money to the company of a CEO who's been sanctioned by the Ontario Securities Commission for misleading investors.

That same CEO also misled this government, not too long ago. He promised to build pandemic response equipment here in Ontario and create jobs, and he was going to get \$2.5 million in taxpayer money to do that. But instead, he bought the equipment from China.

The government said the deal would create jobs, boost Ontario manufacturing when people in this province were scared and desperate for work. The deal did neither of those things, Speaker, but the CEO's company still got \$2.1 million in taxpayer money.

Speaker, my question to the Premier: Why did his government give another million dollars of taxpayer money to someone who's already proved he can't be trusted with taxpayer money?

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

Hon. David Piccini: As I said, investments go into organizations and into training for workers, Speaker. We've seen an increase of over 100,000 tech jobs in Ontario just recently, thanks to the work of this government.

In the Liberals' own campaign platform, they campaigned to leverage the best available Canadian technology and artificial intelligence. Yet now, their own interim leader says that AI investment is antithetical to the idea of worker training, Speaker. You can't have it both ways. That's why we're making investments to support worker training to support increased jobs, Speaker. Disruption is facing the manufacturing sector, and we're making sure we're making investments to support workers with training. We're going to continue doing it. And you have to do it, because we're creating the economic climate to attract investment, to make sure that Ontario is well positioned for the jobs of the future.

We're going to keep working on that, Speaker, and keep supporting a low-tax environment that attracts investment.

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

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: You know, this government gave a million dollars to a CEO caught misleading investors and this government. That kind of deal makes no sense, and it smells fishy.

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The Premier was a businessman, the Minister of Economic Development was an entrepreneur, the Minister of Finance worked in investments and the President of the Treasury Board was a corporate lawyer. I'm sure they're all familiar with something called a reference check. It's

the kind of thing where you say, “Hey, have you ever been found guilty of a securities violation? Have you ever breached a government contract?” So the real question isn’t whether this government should have known better; it’s why they deliberately ignored all the obvious warning signs.

Speaker, through you to the Premier: Why did this government give another million dollars in Skills Development Fund money to a company run by this CEO?

Hon. David Piccini: As I said, that’s incorrect. Through strict risk-assessment processes, monthly expenditure monitoring and spot audits, we assess companies, Speaker.

Over the last number of years, we’ve made improvements, linking our SDF programs through a centralized employment management system, which is able to track outcomes at six, nine, 12 months on.

We’re going to keep working to create an environment where we can attract jobs. They drove out 300,000 jobs when they were at the helm. They created an uncompetitive environment where nobody wanted to invest. Well, we’re turning that around and attracting investments: 55,000 jobs last month, another 6,500 jobs this month. We’re turning that around, embracing AI and supporting workers on its adoption so that we can create a more resilient workforce. We’re going to keep doing that, keep building and keep creating jobs.

I think about the 18,000 workers with the SMRs. I think about over 100,000 workers in my region alone. These are workers they would have given a pink slip to, Speaker—a pink slip—because they’re not interested in building a stronger Ontario; they just oppose it every time.

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

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Speaker, it’s clear why the minister can’t give an answer. It’s because something fishy is going on here. This is a very serious matter, and the people of Ontario deserve a real answer.

After being misled and burned once by this CEO, this government turns around and hands him another million dollars—a CEO who was fined and sanctioned by the OSC. The OSC said the CEO acted “contrary to the public interest” and that his company “published contradictory and misleading news releases regarding the capabilities ... of its COVID-19 digital contact-tracing platform” and “failed to correct forward-looking information ... after it had become clear that the information was inaccurate.”

Speaker, we know the CEO didn’t get a grant just because he gave money to the PCs. So back to the Premier: Which people close to Sayan Navaratnam benefit when he gets money from this government? Who is it?

Hon. David Piccini: As I said, we’ve made improvements to the program after each round—risk assessment, monthly monitoring—and we’ll keep doing that with this program. We’ve implemented the AG’s recommendations, linked it to our employment management system, and we’ll keep supporting AI.

I think to programs like Coding for Veterans that has enabled veterans who fought on the front line—who’ve

served our country both abroad and at home—to integrate into civilian life, and it’s supporting them. It’s supporting them with a coding program, enabling them to serve our country in a different way. We’re going to keep supporting this adoption—keep creating the conditions for job attraction and investment.

They voted against every single measure that has brought in billions in investments to this province. They have no leg to stand on when it comes to this.

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: The Skills Development Fund promised training, promised careers and it promised results. Instead, taxpayer dollars are going to the owner of a downtown strip club, the Ford family dentist, the minister’s hockey buddy, and now we’re learning about \$1 million to the CEO of Connex, who was banned from directing public companies for misleading investors.

That alone should have been a giant red flag and disqualified them from the Skills Development Fund, but, of course, there’s more to this story. The CEO also happens to be a self-described “partisan Conservative.”

Speaker, is the Premier’s loyalty to taxpayers, or is it to connected insiders?

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

Hon. David Piccini: Over 100,000 people have achieved employment within 60 days or less—100,000. I challenge anyone to find a single program under their tenure that did the same thing: 100,000 workers found employment within 60 days or less, Speaker. We’ve actually invited them out to meet some of these workers. They’ve shown no interest, Speaker. They’ve never visited a union training hall. They’ve never taken us up on our offer to visit some of the construction sites. Perhaps it’s because they oppose each and every investment. They opposed the 413. How did that work out for them in Brampton? They opposed the Bradford Bypass. How did that work out for them in Simcoe and Brampton? They’ve opposed investments that are going to get workers to work.

We’ve got a fund that’s going to support them with training, Speaker. We’re going to make investments that help them land better training for better jobs with bigger paycheques, and we’re going to keep working for workers of this province.

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

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: Ontarians deserve to know whether the \$1 million given to Connex even produced a single cent of value. So let’s talk about what this government refuses to make public:

- (1) How many people were trained?
- (2) How many actual jobs were created, and how long did they last?
- (3) What score did this application receive before the minister intervened?

Speaker, instead of answers, this government has built a disturbing playbook where connected insiders benefit,

Conservative donors gain an advantage and taxpayers are always stuck with the bill.

Speaker, how many times does this pattern have to repeat itself before the Premier finally stops directing taxpayer dollars to connected insiders?

Hon. David Piccini: I've addressed those questions. How many people trained? Over 700,000 people. How many people achieved employment? Over 100,000 people achieved employment within 60 days or less. That's what's working with this program, Speaker.

The member talks about this. We've already said in this House, programs led by former Liberal candidates have been supported through the SDF. We've received letters from their own members supporting programs with maxed-out donors to their leadership campaign. But that's not what we assess, Speaker. We assess the merits of the program and the impact it's going to have on workers, and 100,000-plus people have been impacted and have achieved employment within 60 days or less.

We're visiting the sites, on this side of the House, all over Ontario that are supporting workers in every corner of this province because those are the investments we're making. Building a stronger Ontario doesn't just mean GTA. It means rural Ontario; it means critical minerals and mines in northern Ontario. And we've got a fund that's going to support those workers, Speaker.

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

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: While this government continues to shovel out the cash to connected insiders like Connex, average Ontarians are suffering. Nearly 700,000 people are out of work. Two million still can't find a family doctor. Half of grade 6 students are falling behind in math. And this holiday season, more families than ever will have to rely on a food bank.

And what did this government just do? It gave \$1 million to a self-described partisan Conservative donor to test an AI chatbot that would put workers out of a job. Why does this government keep prioritizing connected insiders and donors over Ontarians who need their help the most?

Hon. David Piccini: The only one researching donations is them, but I did a little over the weekend, Speaker, and the same person has donated to the Liberal Party. That's not what this program is about—over \$10,000, Speaker, and that's not what this program is about.

We've talked in this place about supporting groups that used to protest this government—that used to protest them—and donate to organizations that fought PCs. Well, now they're supporting us. They're supporting us, Speaker, because their workers see a better future with this government.

We're building a stronger Ontario. They wanted to give pink slips to workers in the nuclear sector. We're building new nuclear. They did nothing for the Ring of Fire and mines, Speaker. We've unlocked the Ring of Fire. We've signed off on the terms of reference for mining in the north, creating more mining jobs. We're going to keep building a stronger Ontario, an Ontario that can stand on its own two feet. That's why organized labour abandoned the members opposite, Speaker.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Ms. Chandra Pasma: The Premier's cuts to education funding have put our kids in schools that can't even deliver the basic elements of education: paper and books, qualified teachers and now principals. Some schools are getting half a principal, creating risks to student safety, disruptions to learning and increasing the workload for already overworked teachers and education workers.

Our kids deserve the best, but under this government they keep getting less and less and, as the EQAO results show, our kids are struggling. Will the Premier reverse course, quit taking money out of classrooms for cushy Conservative jobs and properly fund our schools?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: It's interesting getting some questions from the opposition on education because I've been the minister for a year and the first time they actually ask questions is when I'm actually out of the House for the first time in eight years. So it's good to see that they're actually paying any attention to question period now.

So let me just say this, Madam Speaker: We're continuing to fund education, but the difference between Conservatives and the Liberal and NDP opposition is that we always expect more. It's not simply good enough to have the highest graduation rates in the province's history. It's not simply good enough for us that literacy rates are higher, that reading and writing scores are higher than they've ever been before. It's not good enough for us that math scores continue to increase year over year. What we want to do is what parents and teachers and educators are telling us: Remove the division from schools, focus on what matters by giving our teachers the ability to do what they do best, teach our kids, and that's what we're going to do.

We're going to continue to fund education at the highest levels it ever has before, but we're not going to simply say, "Great, that's good enough." It will not be good enough until every single student passes with the highest level of support and opportunity—

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Back to the member for Ottawa West—Nepean.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Well, the minister is getting an F for math, Speaker, but apparently an A for creative writing.

It's clear what the future holds under this minister, Speaker:

—supervisors who shut parents out of decision-making and restrict our access to public meetings;

—fewer parent council meetings because one principal has to run back and forth between different schools; and

—gaps in student safety and learning that put our kids at risk, and there's nothing we can do as parents because the Conservatives making the decisions don't care what we think.

Parents don't want this minister's dystopia, Speaker. We want our kids to be safe, cared for and supported, and we want to have a say in their education.

Will the Premier do what the minister won't, listen to parents and fund our schools?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Speaker, do you know what parents want? They want us to show the leadership that is necessary to make sure that our students, parents and teachers have the absolute best outcomes.

I'll let the Liberals and the NDP sit here and support and fight for school trustees who have failed our students year after year after year after year.

Do you know what happened in Ottawa when I was there, colleagues? I'll tell you what happened in Ottawa: Parents were coming up to me and saying, "Thank you for firing our trustees. They were not listening to us."

Do you know what's happening in Near North in North Bay and Parry Sound? I'm getting emails from grandparents who say, "Our students have been failing for years because of school trustees who could care less" about their kids, Madam Speaker.

I'm seeing the same thing in Toronto, the same thing at the Catholic board and the public board, the same thing at Dufferin-Peel. Parents are very clear, as are teachers: Stop focusing on division, stop supporting the very trustees that that party and the Liberals are supporting day in and day out, and focus on students, parents and teachers. That's what we're going to do. We'll let them focus on the one-room schoolhouse. We'll focus on—

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Question?

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: My question is for the Premier. With the holidays approaching, companies like Connex received an early Christmas present. Meanwhile, families across Ontario—and Tiny Tim—are wondering what it will take for this Premier to show a hint of compassion and support.

One million people in Ontario used a food bank last year, and instead of helping people through the toughest season, the Premier is acting more like Scrooge, clutching every dollar for his friends and insiders through the Skills Development Fund.

What will it take for this Premier to stop hoarding help for his well-connected circle and give the people of Ontario the support that they need this holiday season?

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

Hon. David Piccini: Speaker, I think Ontarians will be supportive when we create the conditions for jobs—55,000 jobs last month. In the US, a country exponentially larger than ours, they created over 100,000 jobs. We did almost half that here in this province alone last month—6,500 jobs last month.

That member should be supporting us on this side, voting for the fall economic statement, supporting our budget measures to build a stronger Ontario, because it's working, Speaker.

New nuclear will make us energy sufficient. Building SMRs, exporting that technology around the world makes us an energy superpower, and it creates good-paying jobs

for Ontarians here—90% of that supply chain is done right here in Ontario, creating opportunities for workers.

That's why organized labour is supporting this party, supporting these members, because we're investing in their training centres, we're investing in their workers to give them better pathways to jobs, and we're actually creating the opportunity for them to get jobs in every corner of this province.

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

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: In the story of Scrooge, it took three ghosts to make him face the harm he caused. I ask the Premier, if he were visited by the ghost of Christmas past, would he see the billions he lit on fire? If the ghost of Christmas present showed him the reality in communities all across Ontario, would he see families struggling for help? And if the ghost of Christmas yet to come showed him failing health care and education systems, would he change course?

Speaker, through you to the Premier: Will he finally learn the lesson Scrooge learned and stop funnelling money to friends and failed companies and instead give real support to people who need it now?

Hon. David Piccini: It's one of my favourite Christmas movies. Let's talk about Scrooge and the Scrooge that was the previous Liberal government, chasing out 300,000 manufacturing jobs—300,000—taxing Ontarians. People were choosing between heating or eating. It literally is like A Christmas Carol. They were choosing between heating or eating. How about the schools or hospitals that they closed?

That's all turning around. We're building a new school. That member took time to have lunch with the Liberal candidate I ran against. Maybe she reminded him they closed Liberal schools in our riding. They closed them. They didn't deliver on Campbellford Memorial Hospital. We did, Speaker. We're building a brand new hospital.

We're creating the opportunity for men and women to join the lines of our energy industry with new nuclear in my riding, SMRs in the riding next door and refurbishing Pickering in that member's own riding. Maybe he should talk to those workers he would give a pink slip to. They know a better Christmas is upon them because we're refurbishing the Pickering plant, which is going to give them jobs and prosperity.

ONTARIO ECONOMY

MPP Silvia Gualtieri: My question is for the Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade. President Trump's tariffs shift the global landscape for investments. Ontario is stepping up to attract investment and create good-paying jobs for Ontario workers. Across every corner of our province, our government is driving job creation and creating new opportunities for businesses to invest in Ontario's future.

As we continue to build a more competitive and resilient economy, our government must look for ways to reduce reliance on the US in critical sectors such as agri-food, mining, advanced manufacturing and tech.

Speaker, can the minister share what he is doing to ensure Ontario becomes more self-reliant, strengthens our own industrial capacity and continues to attract investment and create good-paying jobs for generations to come?

Hon. Victor Fedeli: Last week, five days, five cities: \$1 billion in new investment in Ontario. In Ottawa, Marvell Technology: a \$238-billion investment and 350 new jobs, expanding their semi-conductor research and design operations. In Morrisburg, Japan's Alinova: \$24 million and 15 jobs. They're going to build the very first soy milk powder processing plant in Canada. In Hamilton, AtomVie: a \$138-million investment and 70 new jobs, expanding domestic manufacturing capacity to support increased clinical trial activity.

Speaker, with these investments we're strengthening our supply chain, reducing our reliance on the US and adding to the one million new jobs created since we took office.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Back to the member from Mississauga East—Cooksville.

MPP Silvia Gualtieri: I want to thank the minister for that response. As we continue to attract new investments, we are seeing more companies choosing to expand, hire and build their futures right here in Ontario. These announcements mean new facilities, new production capacity and new opportunities for workers and communities across our province.

But with the economic pressures growing demand for made-in-Ontario products and rapid changes in manufacturing and technology, we must remain focused on strengthening domestic production, growing our industrial capacity and ensuring businesses have what they need to compete and succeed.

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Speaker, can the minister expand on how these investments help strengthen Ontario's industrial base, drive innovation and ensure that workers across our province benefit from good-paying jobs being created today and to the next generation?

Hon. Victor Fedeli: These projects are creating new opportunities for workers in every corner of the province. In Mississauga last week, Lee Li invested \$533 million, creating 275 new jobs as they build and expand their beverage packing, bottling, warehousing and distribution hub. We had a great time on Friday in Sudbury, where Sweden's Sandvik invested \$85 million—created 60 new jobs—to build a maintenance, repair and overhaul facility.

Five days, five cities: \$1 billion in new investment here in the province of Ontario. Madam Speaker, we are not stopping there. We're going to continue to ensure that companies have the confidence, the talent and the support they need to grow, expand and hire people right here in Ontario.

HEALTH CARE

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour le premier ministre.

Speaker, medical laboratories are a cornerstone of our health care system. In August, Quest, a US company,

purchased LifeLabs. To increase their profit, they are laying off medical technologists in Sudbury. Now, lab samples from Timmins, North Bay, Algoma, Hearst and Sudbury will be driven to Toronto. When the highways are closed, those samples will age out, and the people will have to redo them.

Where was the Premier three months ago when he agreed to let an American company purchase Ontario's biggest medical lab provider?

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

Hon. Sylvia Jones: When I listen to the member opposite talk about how she would like to limit access to community diagnostics, I question where her values are. We need to make sure that we have access, and that includes, absolutely, in northern Ontario.

As we expand the access for diagnostic and for labs, we've worked very hard with our partners to make sure that, as they expand, they make sure that they have additional offers in communities. We've talked for, literally, months about how important it is to have care closer to home. When we work with our lab partners, when we work with our diagnostic centres and make sure that as the expansions happen, they happen in communities that have been historically under-served—it is exactly because of the philosophy the member has, which is, "Don't let anybody do anything in Ontario unless it's perfect." We are making sure those expansions are happening.

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

MPP Jamie West: I don't understand how we're debating a bill about Buy Ontario, and the Minister of Health is applauding an American company buying a Canadian company.

The root of this, Speaker, is that the Premier is a jobs disaster. There are 40 medical laboratory technologists in Sudbury who will lose their jobs, and they're joining 40 health care workers in North Bay, and they're joining 192 health care workers in Niagara, and they're joining 62 health care workers in Hamilton. Wait times for specialists and at hospitals are already too long. There are thousands of people without a family doctor or primary care. Ontarians can't get the access to health care they need. And now, with more health care job losses, there will be less care and longer wait times for Ontarians.

Speaker, my question is, when will the Premier finally start fighting for health care workers so Ontarians can get the jobs, get the care they need?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Since 2018, under the leadership of Premier Ford, 100,000 new nurses have been registered in the province of Ontario, working in our communities. We have expanded access so, no matter where you live in Canada, you have access to quickly being able to be registered through the College of Nurses of Ontario and through the CPSO, the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario.

By doing that work proactively almost two years ago, we now have a system where within 10 days, if you have a complete application, you can actually get licensed in the

province of Ontario—unheard of—where literally people had to wait years to find out if they were going to be able to get licensed in the province of Ontario.

New medical schools in Brampton and where we've announced in Vaughan—literally, new learners, new residencies who are now working, practising and learning in Brampton. Why? Because under the leadership of Premier Ford, we've made sure those investments are there so that people have the opportunity to not only learn, not only train, but work in the province of Ontario.

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I will ask the member for Orléans to put the book down.

I recognize the member for Don Valley East.

Mr. Adil Shamji: Madam Speaker, this morning I want to talk about promises. The Premier promised that he'd protect jobs and then let a thousand go at Algoma Steel. He promised a family doctor for everyone and then left over two million people without one. He promised he'd make life affordable, and now he's taking away our rewards points. So if you're an everyday Ontarian, then the Premier's word isn't worth the breath it takes to make them, unless you're the CEO of Connex.

Last week, we learned a discredited CEO sanctioned by the Ontario Securities Commission was awarded \$1 million from the Skills Development Fund to train an AI chatbot that will take jobs away from everyday Ontarians. His highest qualification: being a donor to the Premier.

Madam Speaker, the Premier always prioritizes his promises to his donors over his promises for the people. Why did he give \$1 million to this discredited CEO?

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

Hon. David Piccini: Speaker, let's talk about what that member just said. Jobs in health care: 100,000 new nurses registered; more doctors, residency positions that were slashed under that previous government; nursing spots slashed in communities like mine under the previous government.

Through programs like SDF, through investments in health, through investments in the Ministry of Colleges and Universities, we're expanding training for PSWs, expanding training for nurses, expanding training for doctors.

Where are they going to work, Speaker? They're going to work in the new hospitals we're building in communities like mine and all over Ontario. That's creating good-paying construction jobs. And where are they going to train, Speaker? In newly expanded training halls in every corner of this province thanks to the Skills Development Fund.

That's what we're doing for Ontario, building pipelines for people to get better employment—over 100,000 people achieving employment in 60 days or less. We're going to keep working hard to build a stronger Ontario. We'll take no lessons from the members opposite.

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

Mr. Adil Shamji: Despite what the member across said, health care workers cannot count on this government, but I will give you one group that reliably can—that group is its donors.

Here's a question for the House, Madam Speaker: What does the Minister of Labour sitting with his best friend in the front row of a Leafs game have in common with the sanctioned CEO of an AI chatbot company? One thing: a payday. That's because the CEO and senior executives of Connex gave tens of thousands of dollars to the Premier, having figured out a winning formula: When you give, you get—\$1 million from the Skills Development Fund so that an AI chatbot can take human jobs.

To the Minister of Labour: Why did Connex get a massive, million-dollar payday when the CEO's last company already blew its shot and lost provincial funding after failing to deliver jobs or production?

Hon. David Piccini: Speaker, 400,000-plus jobs in the tech sector; over 100,000 new jobs—opposed by that member; the manufacturing jobs that we're creating; foreign direct investment, up from \$8 billion to now, I think, over \$40 billion or \$50 billion under this government—opposed by that member.

All they offer Ontarians is higher taxes. They'll drive manufacturing jobs out, and they don't have a plan to nation-build. They oppose each and every bill that we bring forward to nation-build, from nuclear to critical minerals, the Ring of Fire, new highways and hospitals. If they had their way, we wouldn't build another road. We wouldn't build another bridge. We wouldn't build another highway. That's why they lost every seat in Brampton.

We're supporting those workers, Speaker, putting them to work, building a stronger Ontario that can be more self-reliant, more dependent on itself. We'll keep working hard to support the workers of this province with training to get them there.

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ENERGY POLICIES

POLITIQUES ÉNERGÉTIQUES

Mr. Stéphane Sarrazin: My question is for the Associate Minister of Energy-Intensive Industries.

Speaker, we all know that protectionism measures by Donald Trump have created uncertainty and disruptions in our global economy, directly affecting Ontario jobs and workers. At the same time, Ontario's population is growing rapidly, and with that, we are seeing a significant increase in energy demand.

Our industries and workers need assurance that our government has their backs and that we will protect their jobs and livelihood today and for generations to come.

Speaker, can the associate minister tell the House how our government is carrying out a much-needed expansion of Ontario's energy sector to limit our reliance on foreign sources and drive economic growth?

Hon. Sam Oosterhoff: I have to thank the member for Glengarry–Prescott–Russell for this question because he has been such a fierce advocate for workers and industries in his community and in every corner of this province and has shown such leadership.

Speaker, after question period this morning, we're going to have the opportunity, all members in this House, to vote on Bill 40, the securing affordable energy for generations act. And this legislation is really driven by the need to continue building out our energy system in a way that prioritizes made-in-Ontario jobs. What does that look like? This bill will help us expand over 30,000 jobs at the Pickering nuclear site, contributing \$41.6 billion in GDP growth, which keeps over 90% of those funds directly here in the Ontario and Canadian economy, supporting 2.2 million homes—

Interjection.

Hon. Sam Oosterhoff: —with the power that they need to survive.

It will also help us build a \$10.9 billion—

Interjection.

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

Hon. Sam Oosterhoff: —for 7,500 megawatts through the LT2 program.

Those supply chains are built here in Ontario by proud Ontario workers, who we want to support. All members will have a chance to do so after question period.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Supplementary?

Mr. Stéphane Sarrazin: Thank you to the associate minister for his response.

Speaker, the people of Ontario remember the damage that the Liberal policies caused on our energy sector, chasing hundreds of thousands of jobs out of this province. Now, with added threats and uncertainty from Donald Trump, we have even more reason to support local and to build Ontario's energy self-reliance.

Our government has been at the forefront of prioritizing the made-in-Ontario energy supply chain and building on our competitiveness.

Speaker, can the associate minister further explain what our government is doing to support Canadian procurement and protect Ontario jobs and industries?

L'hon. Sam Oosterhoff: Absolument. Je remercie encore le député pour cette question et son travail. Les dispositions que nous avons introduites dans le projet de loi 40 visent à mieux permettre aux services publics de l'Ontario d'acheter canadien et de bâtir un système énergétique plus sûr.

Again, Speaker, this is really about supporting industries and the workers in those industries: 90% of Pickering's refurbishment expenditure will stay here in Canada, supporting jobs; 80 cents to the dollar for the G7's first SMR is going directly to Canadian businesses alone. Bruce Power's Life-Extension Program will spend approximately 98% of those dollars directly here, in Canada, and 93% of Hydro One's \$2.9-billion procurement spend went to companies based in Canada, 76% here to Ontario

and over 90% of OPG's annual expenditure went to suppliers based in Ontario.

But we know there's more that can be done. Bill 40 will allow for provisions to ensure that we're able to better support domestic supply chains, and I hope all members in this House will vote for it immediately following question period.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Ms. Doly Begum: Speaker, here are a few things that took less time than it has taken Metrolinx to get the Eglinton LRT built: Japan built the first Shinkansen bullet train in less than five years. The Panama Canal took 10 years. The Americans actually put a man on the moon in eight years. The list is long and I could go on.

Yet the Premier and the minister have made it clear that they don't actually know what is going on with Metrolinx. But Ontarians deserve answers. I don't know why they have such love for Metrolinx. Ontarians deserve to know why billions of their hard-earned tax dollars—you know, people are struggling, and you're using people's hard-earned tax dollars—were mismanaged for more than 15 years.

So will the Premier launch a public inquiry into Metrolinx's financial mismanagement?

Interjection.

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

The Minister of Transportation.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Here's a fact: From 2003 to 2018, not a single line of public transit was delivered in this city. But guess what? This Sunday, we marked the opening of the Finch West LRT, the first new LRT, the first new line in the city of Toronto since 2002, under this government's leadership. Do you know why, Madam Speaker? Because we got shovels in the ground and we were building.

For 15 years, the Liberals did absolutely nothing to improve public transportation—not a single line completed in this city. That is why we continue to work day and night to get these projects built. No matter how much opposition we get, every time we table a piece of legislation in this House, from the NDP or Liberals when we're trying to speed up projects, we continue to work through the noise, get the projects done, get them completed and built. That's why we've got shovels in the ground on the Ontario Line. That's why we've got shovels in the ground on the Scarborough subway extension and all of our other projects across the city.

We're going to continue to build public transit. We're going to continue to invest in it, and we're going to continue to get the job done.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Supplementary?

Ms. Doly Begum: The Liberals created the problem, but you have had more than seven years now.

Billions of tax dollars have been mismanaged by overpaid executives, self-serving private consultants with total impunity by this Conservative government. Businesses

and families along Eglinton lost their livelihoods, while a handful of Metrolinx executives made fortunes of a lifetime. People across the province are calling for transparency to this disastrous project so that this doesn't continue to happen.

Again, to the Premier: Will he listen to the people and launch a public inquiry into Metrolinx today?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Madam Speaker, what is disappointing is the NDP's record on public transit in this House. Let's take a look at every single one of the projects that this government has put forward.

The funding for the Finch West LRT that opened this Sunday, that is going to move over 50,000 people—the members of the NDP couldn't get up and support that project because they believe in too much of their own partisan stripes.

When it came to One Fare, saving commuters \$1,600 every single year, the members of the NDP couldn't stand up and support that policy.

When it comes to building rapid transit like the Ontario Line, which is going to move 400,000 people every single day, or when it comes to delivering all-day, two-way GO to places like Kitchener, where we started the first weekend trip, the members opposite voted against that every single time.

Every single time they had the chance to step up in this House, support public transit, which isn't a partisan issue, they refused to do so. That's why we're going to continue to build in this province, and that's why we're getting it done. We're getting shovels in the ground.

For 15 years—

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Question?

SUPPORTIVE HOUSING

ADDICTION SERVICES

Ms. Lee Fairclough: Speaker, municipalities and local property taxpayers are at a breaking point. On Friday, Ontario's Big City Mayors' caucus asked the province to declare a provincial state of emergency—to step up to provide the funding and programs needed to address the Ontario-wide homelessness, mental health and addictions crisis.

Local property taxpayers pay half of the \$4 billion a year in the cost of shelters, affordable housing and preventing homelessness, yet average wait times for substance use treatment: 253 days. You wait 345 days for bed-based residential treatment, and the average wait time is five years for the over 36,000 people on waiting lists for supportive housing.

To the minister of housing and municipalities: When will this government take responsibility and provide the sustained provincial funding needed to address this crisis?

Hon. Rob Flack: As I think everybody knows, we have an obligation collectively to protect our most vulnerable in this province, and that is exactly what we're doing under this Premier and this government.

Speaker, it's very important to note that, while we have to protect our most vulnerable, we also have to protect the

communities in which they live. That is why, when we talk about funding and working with our municipal partners, we've invested \$1.7 billion to support affordable housing and homelessness. That includes a 40% increase—\$700 million—to support homelessness with our municipal partners; \$529 million through HART hubs; and last year, \$76 million to help with encampments.

1130

We have a significant role to play here. We continue to invest, we continue to support and I thank our municipal partners in helping us get the job done.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Back to the member for Etobicoke–Lakeshore.

Ms. Lee Fairclough: Well, I can understand why municipalities are concerned. The Auditor General found that the government's new HART hubs were announced without any needs assessment or consultation. Now, many are months late, and there are no uniform standards and no clear measures of success. She said, "The ... opioid strategy is outdated and does not address ... risks and needs, even with the new hubs."

The opioid crisis is hitting Ontario's communities, families and our economy hard. A recent study found the risk of an opioid poisoning was 57% higher for a construction worker than others who had received workers' compensation, with both terrible human and economic costs.

To the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing: When Ontario's Big City Mayors are pleading, why is the government still downloading the consequences of an effective opioid strategy to cities and local taxpayers instead of delivering a province-wide response that communities desperately need?

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

Hon. Sylvia Jones: I'll tell you what's outdated: Outdated is when you continue to provide access to illicit and illegal and, yes, deadly drugs to people instead of offering them hope. And we have offered hope through a \$550-million investment in 28 HART hubs that were application-based. Municipalities stepped up and brought together their community agencies and said, "We want to do better. We can do better. And we know, by working together, we will do that."

Do you know what happened when we ended up changing a consumption and treatment site model that, frankly, was not helping people and not working, and invested over four times more in HART hubs that ensure that people absolutely have access to primary care, access to mental health and addiction support, access to supportive housing and, ultimately, to job supports? That's the hope that people are expecting and demanding from the government, and that's what they're getting through their government.

SMALL BUSINESS

Ms. Jess Dixon: My question is for the Associate Minister of Small Business. As the holiday season is

approaching, small businesses across Ontario are looking for more opportunities to reach more customers and grow. We all know how important they are to our economy, especially at a time when many are feeling the pressure of an uncertain global landscape. With ongoing US tariffs adding to that uncertainty, supporting small business owners and workers has never mattered more.

Speaker, can the associate minister please explain how our government is helping Ontario's small businesses through the busy holiday season and positioning them for long-term success into the future?

Hon. Nina Tangri: I'd like to thank the member from Kitchener South-Hespeler for the wonderful work she does in her riding with her small businesses, which I visited.

Speaker, as a former small business owner, I know firsthand the risks and hard work it takes to start and to grow a business. Ontario's more than 500,000 small businesses are the backbone of our communities, employing over 2.5 million Ontarians.

This holiday season and all year round, our government is encouraging consumers across our province to help support and protect Ontario's economy by shopping local. And 66 cents of every dollar spent at a small business stays local. That is a significant contribution to our communities.

We're also ensuring those same small businesses have the tools and resources they need to succeed in this challenging economy by making key investments in programs that support their growth.

Our goal is to make Ontario the most competitive place to create jobs and to do business within the G7.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Supplementary?

Ms. Jess Dixon: The associate minister is absolutely right: They are the backbone of our community. They create excellent jobs and help families across the province make ends meet. They also add considerably to the vibrancy of our downtown cores, something that I think we all especially notice around the holiday season. I certainly do in my own area.

However, for far too long under the previous Liberal government—propped up, of course, by the NDP—small businesses were ignored, and Ontario and Ontarians paid the price. Today, many long-term business owners are preparing to retire, and without proper planning support, too many of those businesses could close instead of being handed down or sold. We need to make sure that they have the tools to plan for the future and to keep our communities vibrant.

Speaker, can the associate minister please outline how our government is helping small businesses plan for succession and build long-term stability across Ontario?

Hon. Nina Tangri: Thank you again to the member for the question.

Our government understands that small businesses are vital to our economic success and essential to regional communities across our province. That's why when an owner decides to retire, we need to ensure there is some-

body there to take over and keep those businesses in our economy.

This past week, I was pleased to announce that our government is investing \$1.9 million over three years to establish a succession planning hub led by the Kingston Economic Development Corp.

Succession in Ontario will feature centralized free resources and tools for buying and selling a small business in Ontario with a focus on preparing businesses for smooth ownership transitions.

Under the leadership of this Premier, our government will continue to ensure small businesses have the resources they need to stay in our economy and help make certain that Ontario remains the best place to live—

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Thank you.

NOTICE OF DISSATISFACTION

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Pursuant to standing order 36(a), the member for Don Valley East has given notice of dissatisfaction with the answer to the question given by the Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development regarding Connex. This matter will be debated on Wednesday, December 10, following private members' public business.

DEFERRED VOTES

TIME ALLOCATION

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): We have a deferred vote on government notice of motion number 12 relating to allocation of time on the following bills: Bill 45, An Act to make statutory amendments respecting the transfer of jurisdiction within The Regional Municipality of Peel and the appointment of Deputy Provincial Land and Development Facilitators; 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; and 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.

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

The division bells rang from 1138 to 1143.

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

On December 4, 2025, Mr. Clark moved government notice of motion number 12 relating to allocation of time on Bills 45, 72 and 76.

All those in favour of Mr. Clark's motion will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Allsopp, Tyler

Gualtieri, Silvia

Pirie, George

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

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

Nays

Armstrong, Teresa J.	Gates, Wayne	Schreiner, Mike
Begum, Doly	Gélinas, France	Shamji, Adil
Bell, Jessica	Gilmour, Alexa	Stevens, Jennifer (Jennie)
Blais, Stephen	Glover, Chris	Stiles, Marit
Bourgouin, Guy	Gretzky, Lisa	Tabuns, Peter
Bowman, Stephanie	Hsu, Ted	Tsao, Jonathan
Brady, Bobbi Ann	Kernaghan, Terence	Vanthof, John
Cerjanec, Rob	McCrimmon, Karen	Vaugeois, Lise
Clancy, Aislinn	McKenney, Catherine	Watt, Tyler
Collard, Lucille	McMahon, Mary-Margaret	West, Jamie
Fairclough, Lee	Pasma, Chandra	Wong-Tam, Kristyn
Fife, Catherine	Rakocevic, Tom	
French, Jennifer K.	Sattler, Peggy	

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Trevor Day): The ayes are 69; the nays are 37.

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

Motion agreed to.

PROTECT ONTARIO BY SECURING AFFORDABLE ENERGY FOR GENERATIONS ACT, 2025

LOI DE 2025 POUR PROTÉGER L'ONTARIO EN GARANTISSANT L'ACCÈS À L'ÉNERGIE ABORDABLE POUR LES GÉNÉRATIONS FUTURES

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

Bill 40, An Act to amend various statutes with respect to energy, the electrical sector and public utilities / Projet de loi 40, Loi modifiant diverses lois en ce qui concerne l'énergie, le secteur de l'électricité et les services publics.

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

Interjection: Same vote.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Same vote? Same vote.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Trevor Day): The ayes are 69; the nays are 37.

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

Be it resolved that the bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

Third reading agreed to.

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

The House recessed from 1147 to 1300.

HOUSE SITTINGS

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Members, I have a bit of a mea culpa. I did not recognize the government House leader just before we rose for lunch recess. So I do recognize the House leader on a point of order.

Hon. Steve Clark: Thank you, Speaker. No need to apologize. I'd just like to advise members that the night sitting scheduled for this evening has been cancelled.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): You're too predictable.

NOTICE OF DISSATISFACTION

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Pursuant to standing order 36(a), the member for Scarborough Southwest has given notice of dissatisfaction with the answer to the question given by the Minister of Transportation regarding Metrolinx. This matter will be debated on Wednesday, December 10, following private members' public business.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Hon. Michael Parsa: Joining us today is my good friend Anthony Garramone. Congratulations on the unveiling of your new film, my friend. He's one of the most talented individuals, right from the town of Aurora. Thanks for joining us, my friend.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): We must support our artists.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

MEREDITH ACT (FAIR COMPENSATION FOR INJURED WORKERS), 2025

LOI MEREDITH DE 2025 SUR L'INDEMNISATION ÉQUITABLE DES TRAVAILLEURS BLESSÉS

MPP Vaugeois moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 86, An Act to enact the Meredith Act (Fair Compensation for Injured Workers), 2025 and to repeal the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997 / Projet de loi 86, Loi édictant la Loi Meredith de 2025 sur l'indemnisation équitable des travailleurs blessés et abrogeant la Loi de 1997 sur la sécurité professionnelle et l'assurance contre les accidents du travail.

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

First reading agreed to.

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

MPP Lise Vaugeois: The act is a product of years of work by injured workers advocacy groups. It returns the WSIB to its original purpose, as laid out in the original Meredith principles: to support injured workers through WSIB premiums, so that a worker made ill or injured on the job does not become a financial burden on their family or on the public.

It also establishes the requirement to have 50% of the board of commissioners be made up of representatives of injured workers.

ONTARIO WILDLIFE HOLDINGS & SANCTUARY CORP. ACT, 2025

Mr. Riddell moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill Pr38, An Act to revive Ontario Wildlife Holdings & Sanctuary Corp.

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

First reading agreed to.

PETITIONS

HOMELESSNESS

MPP Alexa Gilmour: I'm proud to rise on behalf of the members of Parkdale–High Park. Today I'm bringing a petition that is by the Faith Communities of Halton Advocates for the Unhoused. I'm really proud of the United Church of Canada, which has begun this petition.

The churches in our communities do so much to address homelessness, whether that's through their soup kitchens or through their Out of the Cold programs, but they really are saying that enough is enough and that we really need to enact the policies that lift the burden off of these institutions, off of the economy, and often off the people who are experiencing homelessness themselves.

So I'm pleased to be tabling this petition, affixing my name to it.

In addition, they're saying that it costs \$50,000 or more to have emergency shelters and only \$14,000 to have supportive housing. Let's do that instead.

I'll be signing my name, and I'll be handing it in with page Oskar.

VISION CARE

MPP Jamie West: I want to thank Guntas Jhand. He's a student at Lockerby Composite School and a participant in the STEP program there.

He formed a petition entitled "Prescription Eyewear and Pharmaceuticals." This is a petition that raises concerns about the rising prices and the rising rates of prescription pharmaceuticals as well as glasses. They point out that approximately 2.8 million Ontarians lack prescription eyewear insurance, and that rising costs create a rising concern for individuals as well as for individual and public drug plans. The payment out of pocket means that people are incurring a higher expense at a time of financial instability. The effect of this really is hitting people in the pocketbook at a time when people just can't afford to fill their prescriptions.

So they petition the Legislature to create a rebate for low-income individuals to access eyewear and ensure pharmacare for all Ontarians.

I support this petition. I'll affix my signature and provide it to page Shriya for the table.

TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE

Hon. Steve Clark: I have a petition that calls on the Legislative Assembly to call on the Canadian government to restore full navigation to the Rideau Canal by installing a structure that will enable all marine traffic to pass through the LaSalle Causeway in time for the 2026 boating season, which I want to say is the 200th anniversary since the construction of the Rideau Canal began. Public Services and Procurement Canada has not established a clear timeline nor a plan, nor have they demonstrated that there is an urgency in replacing the temporary structure with a permanent bridge that restores full navigation.

Speaker, the Rideau Canal contributes about \$309 million annually to the economy of eastern Ontario—it has already been a negative by this temporary bridge that doesn't allow all marine traffic. So I'm hopeful and optimistic that this petition will spur the federal government, the Canadian government, to move on this. It's a very important economic driver in eastern Ontario.

I'm pleased to sign the petition, and I'll send it to the table with page David.

EDUCATION FUNDING

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: I'm proud to rise on behalf of the residents of Toronto Centre, including many of the students, including the children who are here today to present this petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. It is entitled "Stop Cuts to Education!"

"Whereas more families, students and teachers are experiencing first-hand the effects of" Premier "Ford's cuts to education.

"Whereas schools are so understaffed and overrun with crowded classrooms, creating unsuitable environments for children to learn. Schools are dangerously overpacked and they have fewer one-on-one supports."

Therefore the undersigned petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to call on the Premier and his government “to prioritize children’s and workers’ safety by investing in education, hiring more teachers and education workers, and keeping class sizes small.”

I’m happy to sign this petition and return this to the centre table with wonderful page Ojas.

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank Dr. Jane Cox and the Canadian Federation of University Women for these petitions. They’re called “Declare Intimate Partner Violence an Epidemic.”

Intimate partner violence impacts every community across Ontario.

The Renfrew inquest’s number one recommendation is to declare intimate partner violence an epidemic in Ontario.

Gender-based violence is a human rights violation, and no one should be harmed or killed due to their gender, race, nationality, ethnicity, religion or sexual orientation.

1310

The province should join the hundred municipalities in Ontario that have already declared intimate partner violence an epidemic. Advocates, survivors and municipalities have called on the government to take this step.

The Indigenous Chiefs of Ontario passed a resolution declaring intimate partner violence an epidemic way back in 2005.

So they petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to save lives across the province by respecting experts in the field who have years of experience, knowledge and research; accepting the Renfrew county inquest’s number one recommendation; declaring intimate partner violence an epidemic, joining the nearly hundred municipalities that have already done so; and immediately passing Bill 55, the Intimate Partner Violence Epidemic Act.

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

YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT

MPP Jamie West: This petition is entitled “Lower the Youth Unemployment Rate.” I want to thank Brock Brisson. He’s a student at Lockerby Composite School and a participant in the STEP program. This petition pertains to youth unemployment.

This year, roughly 914,000 youth were unemployed—not in education and not in any kind of training.

Since 2023, the youth unemployment rate has increased by approximately 200,000 people.

At Lockerby secondary school—a riding, actually, that I went to a high school at—students in the STEP program did a survey of their school and found that many of their classmates were having trouble finding a job.

So the petition raises concerns about some of the statements the Premier made about youth being able to find employment if they just look hard enough.

They’re calling on the Legislature, by the spring of 2027, to lower the youth unemployment rate of Ontario.

I support this petition. I’ll affix my signature and provide it to page Thridev for the table.

HEALTH PROFESSIONS

MPP Alexa Gilmour: In my hands, I have petitions from members of my own riding, Parkdale–High Park, as well as across the province.

These people have written to us because they are concerned about the changes to the entry-to-practice registration requirements for psychologists and psychological associates that the College of Psychologists and Behaviour Analysts of Ontario has approved. In particular, they’re speaking about the doctoral degree requirements that are going to be removed, the four years of supervision training for master’s candidates being removed—the critical licensing exams, and the collapse of practice areas.

What they’re really saying is that they would like the Ministry of Health to direct the college to halt the changes and undertake a transparent and collaborative comprehensive consultation with the membership, with the stakeholders, that will ensure that our training and our registration remain aligned, evidence-based, and protect the public. I am fully supportive of a halt and a collaborative process like this.

I will affix my name and send it with page Oskar down to the table at the front.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I want to recognize the tireless efforts of Dr. Sally Palmer—someone you know at McMaster University—for her efforts to urge the Legislative Assembly to raise social assistance rates.

At this time of year, we all know the affordability pressures that all Ontarians are facing, but it is particularly hard for people who are living on Ontario Works or ODSP. The social assistance rates in this province are well below established poverty lines, and far from adequate to cover basic needs like groceries, rent and transportation.

Over 230 community organizations in this province have sent a letter to the Premier and cabinet ministers recommending that social assistance rates be doubled for both Ontario Works and the ODSP.

I support this petition. I want the Legislative Assembly to double social assistance rates for OW and ODSP. I will affix my signature and send it to the table with page Lucas.

CYCLING INFRASTRUCTURE

MPP Jamie West: This petition is entitled “Prioritize Cyclist Safety Over Reduced Traffic Congestion.” This petition was collected by Gwynne Edwards, a student at Lockerby Composite School—go Vikings—and a participant in the STEP program. This petition is in regard to the limitations of municipal jurisdiction over bike lanes and bike infrastructure.

Notably, the recent Bill 212, the Reducing Gridlock, Saving You Time Act, 2024, they say, is not beneficial to

cyclists. The act puts decision-making in the government's hands, which limits the ability of the municipalities to increase and improve existing cycling infrastructure, which is currently insufficient, especially in the north.

The lack of the cycling infrastructure, the petitioners explain here, affects the cyclists and the drivers alike, because fewer people cycling means more people on the roads. It also affects the environment and the economy because it discourages a green travel method and a proven economy-boosting activity.

They are petitioning the provincial government to not prioritize fast traffic and reducing congestion over people's safety, which was allowed by Bill 212, Reducing Gridlock, Saving You Time Act, 2024. They also petition that the act should be amended—excluding any mention of the bike lanes and laws that promote cycling that should be passed—and also that information around cycling should be actively distributed, and that laws should ensure that it is necessary for bike lanes to be connected, and ensure that new road projects include bike lanes, and ensure that funding is provided for our roads.

I want to again thank Gwynne for this petition and for collecting the signatures.

I support this petition. I'll affix my signature and provide it to page Andrew for the table.

HEALTH PROFESSIONS

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank Dr. Andrew Ekblad, as well as 5,000 other psychologists, for signing this petition.

The petition basically says that the College of Psychologists and Behaviour Analysts of Ontario is looking at changes to entry-to-practice registration for psychologists and psychologist associates. The changes would see a cut to the minimum training by 75%, removing the doctoral degree requirement and the four years of supervised training for master's candidates. It would also remove the critical licensing exam, collapse practice areas, and abandon nationwide controlled program approval. Those changes, they find, threaten to undermine the safety and quality of psychological care for Ontarians and place Ontario's entry-to-practice from the highest to the lowest in the country.

They petition the Legislative Assembly to ask that the Minister of Health undertake a transparent and comprehensive consultation process in conjunction with the membership and stakeholders to ensure that the training and registration requirements remain aligned with evidence-based standards that protect the public.

I support this petition and will ask my good page Raj to bring it to the Clerk.

YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH

Ms. Catherine Fife: I have been working with a Dr. Alison Yeung out of Kitchener-Conestoga, who is a family doctor and who has seen an uptick in mental health issues because of social media use—which is now very much embedded in research and evidence. I've asked the

government to work with us on this issue to create some protections for youth who are on excessive screen time.

I'm also asking the Ontario public health units in the province of Ontario to implement a health warning on social media platforms about the risks of excessive social media use by youth. I'm not sure why Public Health Ontario is not issuing a directive, given the body of evidence and research. Perhaps it's because they are underfunded and have been undermined by this government.

I just want to leave you with one stat before I go to my next colleague: The new report by the Canadian Centre for Child Protection provides unprecedented details and evidence on the online sexual victimization many teenagers in Canada and Ontario face on popular social media platforms and other online services.

This is a very serious issue. For a government that pretends to be so strong on law and order, why are you not protecting youth online? Do something.

YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH

Ms. Doly Begum: Speaker, I also have a petition in support of the MPP from Waterloo's call to have social media and online safety for youth. It is something that I hear in my riding, especially from parents and parent councils and a lot of teachers who are very concerned about youth safety and what's happening online right now, with the lack of precautions that we are taking.

Research shows strong links between excessive screen time and mental health concerns, particularly among youth. Young people have become so dependent on social media, and some actually experience some very harmful effects related to its use. We know that very well. I have had multiple conversations with our police service about that as well.

Several school boards in Ontario are pursuing legal action to hold social media companies to account.

Australia approved a social media ban for children under the age of 16 in November 2024.

Ontario can do much better. We need clear guidelines on how much screen time and what kinds of content may negatively affect children's development.

It's crucial to support young people in developing healthy relationships with technology to help them prevent long-term societal challenges.

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

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PEEL TRANSITION IMPLEMENTATION ACT, 2025

LOI DE 2025 SUR LA MISE EN OEUVRE DE LA TRANSITION DE PEEL

Resuming the debate adjourned on December 3, 2025, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 45, An Act to make statutory amendments respecting the transfer of jurisdiction within The Regional Municipality of Peel and the appointment of Deputy Provincial Land and Development Facilitators / Projet de loi 45, Loi apportant des modifications législatives en ce qui concerne le transfert de compétences dans la municipalité régionale de Peel et la nomination de facilitateurs provinciaux de l'aménagement adjoints.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Pursuant to the order of the House from earlier today, I am now required to put the question.

Mr. Flack has moved second reading of Bill 45, An Act to make statutory amendments respecting the transfer of jurisdiction within The Regional Municipality of Peel and the appointment of Deputy Provincial Land and Development Facilitators.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Pursuant to the order of the House from earlier today, the bill is ordered for third reading.

BUY ONTARIO ACT, 2025

LOI DE 2025 VISANT À ENCOURAGER À ACHETER ONTARIEN

Resuming the debate adjourned on November 27, 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): Pursuant to the order of the House from earlier today, I am now required to put the question.

Mr. Crawford has moved second reading of 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.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Pursuant to the order of the House from earlier today, the bill is ordered for third reading.

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

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

Resuming the debate adjourned on December 1, 2025, on the motion for 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 Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Pursuant to the order of the House from earlier today, I am now required to put the question.

Mr. Smith, Parry Sound–Muskoka, has moved second reading of 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.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

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

All those opposed to the motion will please say “nay.”

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

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

The division bells rang from 1324 to 1329.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): On November 26, 2025, Mr. Smith, Parry Sound–Muskoka, moved second reading of 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.

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

Ayes

Allsopp, Tyler	Gualtieri, Silvia	Racinsky, Joseph
Babikian, Aris	Hamid, Zee	Rae, Matthew
Bailey, Robert	Hardeman, Ernie	Riddell, Brian
Bethlenfalvy, Peter	Holland, Kevin	Rosenberg, Bill
Bouma, Will	Jones, Trevor	Sabawy, Sheref
Bresee, Ric	Jordan, John	Sandhu, Amarjot
Calandra, Paul	Kanapathi, Logan	Sarkaria, Prabmeet Singh
Cho, Raymond Sung Joon	Kerzner, Michael S.	Sarrazin, Stéphane
Cho, Stan	Khanjin, Andrea	Saunderson, Brian
Clark, Steve	Kusendova-Bashta, Natalia	Scott, Laurie
Cooper, Michelle	Leardi, Anthony	Smith, Dave
Crawford, Stephen	Lecce, Stephen	Smith, David
Cuzzetto, Rudy	Lumsden, Neil	Smith, Graydon
Darouze, George	McGregor, Graham	Smith, Laura
Denault, Billy	Mulroney, Caroline	Tangri, Nina
Dixon, Jess	Oosterhoff, Sam	Thanigasalam, Vijay
Dowie, Andrew	Pang, Billy	Thompson, Lisa M.
Downey, Doug	Parsa, Michael	Tibollo, Michael A.

Dunlop, Jill	Pierre, Natalie	Triantafilopoulos, Effie J.
Firin, Mohamed	Pinsonneault, Steve	Vickers, Paul
Flack, Rob	Pirie, George	Wai, Daisy
Gallagher Murphy, Dawn	Quinn, Nolan	Williams, Charmaine A.

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

Nays

Armstrong, Teresa J.	Fife, Catherine	McMahon, Mary-Margaret
Begum, Doly	Fraser, John	Pasma, Chandra
Bell, Jessica	French, Jennifer K.	Rakocevic, Tom
Blais, Stephen	Gélinas, France	Sattler, Peggy
Bourgouin, Guy	Gilmour, Alexa	Schreiner, Mike
Brady, Bobbi Ann	Glover, Chris	Shamji, Adil
Cerjanec, Rob	Hsu, Ted	Stevens, Jennifer (Jennie)
Clancy, Aislinn	Kernaghan, Terence	Watt, Tyler
Collard, Lucille	McCrimmon, Karen	West, Jamie
Fairclough, Lee	McKenney, Catherine	Wong-Tam, Kristyn

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Trevor Day): The ayes are 66; the nays are 30.

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

Second reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Pursuant to the order of the House from earlier today, the bill is ordered for third reading.

BUY ONTARIO ACT, 2025

LOI DE 2025 VISANT À ENCOURAGER À ACHETER ONTARIEN

Mr. Crawford moved third 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): I recognize the minister.

Hon. Stephen Crawford: It's an honour to rise in the House at third reading to speak to Bill 72, Buy Ontario Act (Public Sector Procurement), 2025. At its heart, this bill is about turning the power of public purchasing into a practical engine for Ontario jobs, supply chain resilience, and value for taxpayers. It builds on the work this House has supported across multiple sessions—work that mod-

ernizes procurement, protects consumers, and strengthens the economic foundations of our communities.

Bill 72 establishes a clear framework for public sector procurement that prioritizes Ontario-made goods and services first and Canadian-made second, while preserving open competition and value for money.

Concretely, it authorizes the Management Board of Cabinet to issue directives that set uniform, public rules for ministries, provincial agencies and designated broader public sector organizations, with regulation-making powers to prescribe additional entities in the future. These directives may require a preference for Ontario or Canadian goods and services, set reporting requirements, mandate vendor performance standards, and specify compliance tools, all within a documented, auditable process.

The act also modernizes compliance and accountability: Public sector entities must co-operate with reviews; findings can be posted publicly; corrective action can be directed; and, with MBC approval, funding can be withheld in cases of continued non-compliance—paired with an obligation on the entity to minimize service impacts to the public. That is a practical balance, with real consequences for ignoring the rules and real safeguards for patients, students and families.

Finally, Bill 72 repeals and replaces the Building Ontario Businesses Initiative Act, 2022, not because its intent was wrong, but because stronger, clearer and more adaptable tools are needed now. This bill gives us the tools and makes their use transparent—directives are publicly posted on a government of Ontario website—so people can see the rules and auditors can test them.

Over the course of debate, colleagues across the aisle have raised thoughtful concerns and, equally important, encouraging points of agreement. Let me speak directly to both, not with jargon, but with plain words about what this bill means, why it's needed, and how it will work for the people of Ontario.

What Ontarians expect from their government isn't power for its own sake; they expect rules they can see and results they can trust.

That's exactly what this bill delivers. The resulting regulations will be posted publicly before decisions are made. And when something doesn't meet the mark, independent reviews can shine a light and fix it.

We're not just centralizing Buy Ontario; we're standardizing fairness. That's how a big system with hospitals, schools, municipalities and more can start rowing in the same direction for Ontario workers and Ontario businesses.

Speaker, you may recall that the member from Etobicoke–Lakeshore asked whether we could do this under existing directives. We tried. We moved the ball with earlier policies, especially around domestic content and government fleet procurement.

This bill will harmonize the procurement directives. It doesn't ask anyone to take the government's word for it; it asks us to post the rules, record the choices, and correct what needs to be corrected in the open.

Second, my ministry team and I have heard from many members and stakeholders that hospitals, schools and

municipalities could be punished for non-compliance without support. Nobody wants to see any services suffer. That's why this bill puts help before penalty. Institutions will get guidance, templates, training, and time to get it right. If a review finds a problem, the first step is a corrective plan, not a hammer. And if there's ever a last-resort consequence, the institution must minimize any impact on patients, students and families. That's practical, and that's responsible.

The member from Guelph raised the point that small businesses find procurement complicated, and while my ministry and Supply Ontario have worked day and night to consult and offer informational sessions to potential vendors, more can always be done. So I hope I can count on his support so we can address that together through this legislation.

1340

We are proposing common rules to simplify the maze. Clear definitions put an end to mailbox companies pretending to be local. Vendor performance standards reward reliable Ontario suppliers—and public posting of the rules, so entrepreneurs aren't guessing; they're spending their time competing.

Our government—along with every member here—was elected to the House to lead by example. As we deliver Ontario's historic capital plan, we will give real weight to domestic supply chains so that when a proponent shows a strong Ontario plan and their price and schedule are within reasonable bounds, Ontario workers and Ontario products don't get crowded out. That's the change people have asked for. That's the change we're making.

I heard from the member from Don Valley West on trade and fairness—and I can say that that is the preference in this bill. It's not arbitrary. It's rules-based, documented and reviewable. It's designed to work alongside our obligations, not to invent excuses.

Our aim is simple: Where it's prudent and lawful, use public dollars to build Ontario's capacity, without closing the door on fair competition or value for taxpayers. That's not a slogan. That's a system.

Many colleagues—from Ottawa–Vanier, Nickel Belt, Ajax, and others—asked us to make Buy Ontario inclusive of Indigenous-owned businesses, Franco-Ontarian enterprises, and social-purpose suppliers. That's not just possible; that's desirable, because when all communities see themselves in the economy, the economy is stronger.

This framework lets us define classes openly, set verifiable criteria, and apply them transparently. Inclusion isn't just an afterthought; it's part of how we build capacity here at home.

I heard from the member for Kitchener Centre that energy sovereignty and supply chain resilience is paramount, so procurement can help us rely less on foreign inputs; on this side of the House, we could not agree more. By weighing domestic content where it counts, we strengthen Ontario's hand across materials, technology and services, while keeping competition and value for money at the core. We're not promising businesses the moon; we are building the ladder.

I also want to speak to cost, because Ontarians expect prudence and financial accountability from our government. This week, we got our eighth straight clean audit from the Auditor General, and in the midst of a trade war, value for money is our anchor. The change here is that "value" finally reflects reality. Resilience matters. Local jobs matter. Shorter, safer supply chains matter.

In capital projects, we will respect price and schedule guardrails while allowing a better Canadian or Ontario content plan to secure an award, when it's reasonable to do so. That's how you grow capacity and protect the taxpayer at the same time. It's how you build a stronger Ontario without risking financial irresponsibility.

On enforcement: Good suppliers who deliver get recognized; those who don't face consequences—with fines, even barring from future work where warranted.

On the public sector side, we start with help and correction. That's accountability that works in the real world.

Now let me bring this back to first principles. This bill is not about picking favourites. It's about picking Ontario when it makes sense to pick Ontario—openly, fairly and effectively. It's about realizing that in a world of uncertainty, we cannot be casual about our supply chains, our jobs, or our public dollars. It's about choosing the common-sense proposition that when hospitals buy beds, when schools buy desks, when we build subways and bridges, the first question we ask is, can Ontario workers and businesses do this? If the answer is yes, let them.

To the member from Beaches–East York, who spoke about transparency, youth unemployment and the need to avoid undue burdens: We agree. The transparency is baked in. The youth pathways open when domestic suppliers grow. And the burden is managed by phasing and guidance, not by one-size-fits-all edicts.

To the member from Humber River–Black Creek, who said you welcome Buy Ontario but want real enforcement: This is exactly what this framework will deliver—rules on paper, decisions on record, and consequences when promises are broken.

To the members for Sudbury and for University–Rosedale, who urged for clarity, so members know that the steel in the bridges we build and the gravel in the roads we pave or the wood in the supportive housing we build is Ontario-made: We will define, verify and publish—because clarity and honesty are the foundation of trust. I hope I can count on your vote.

To the members from Hamilton West–Ancaster–Dundas and from St. Catharines: You also called for guarantees on Ontario steel and Ontario workers. This bill gives us the tools—scoring, contract terms, and performance monitoring—to make the ambition measurable and real.

To the members from Waterloo and Don Valley West, who pressed for credibility, transparency and guardrails: The bill is built around those ideas—public rules, documented decisions, published findings, and value for money that is tested, not assumed.

Speaker, I want to take a moment to reflect on the AMO MOU meeting I attended last Thursday with my col-

leagues the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing and the associate minister. It was a powerful reminder that when we talk about building a stronger Ontario, we are talking about every community, every region and every local government that makes up this great province. I was grateful to see so many municipal leaders around the table—mayors, chairs, councillors, senior staff—who represent the front lines of service and delivery and economic development right here in Ontario. Their message was very clear: Municipalities are not just stakeholders in this conversation; they are absolutely critical partners. They invest \$68 billion annually in Ontario, and nearly \$24 billion of that goes directly into procurement—buying the goods and services we need to keep our communities strong. Municipalities, like our government, have already been moving towards buying-Ontario as they already source a large amount of their non-construction procurement from Canadian vendors. It speaks to the commitment of local governments to support homegrown businesses wherever possible.

These insights are not just numbers on a page; they are a road map for Ontario's industrial policy and a call to invest in local alternatives where possible.

Speaker, what I heard from AMO was not resistance, but willingness and readiness. Municipalities are eager to continue supporting Ontario and Canadian businesses. They want to be part of the solution, but they also ask for flexibility—flexibility that recognizes the realities of local markets, the diversity of municipal needs, and the importance of timely, cost-effective procurement. I made it clear that this government will continue to work with the municipalities to ensure “Ontario-made” and “Canadian-made” definitions are flexible to meet procurement needs, and that industry is supported in matching production with demand. To them, the Buy Ontario Act is not just technical points, but the foundation of a partnership that will make Buy Ontario real and effective for every single community in this great province.

AMO also welcomed the liability protection built into our framework, ensuring that municipalities are shielded from trade challenges under agreements like CETA. This is absolutely critical because it gives local governments the confidence to prioritize Ontario and Canadian businesses without fear of legal repercussions from international vendors.

1350

We also discussed the interaction with other funding sources, like federal and municipal grants. Municipalities need assurance that compliance with the Buy Ontario procurement rules will not jeopardize non-provincially funded projects. That's a fair concern and one we're committed to addressing in collaboration with our inter-ministerial colleagues.

We will ensure municipalities are not unfairly penalized for cost increases or project delays resulting from new procurement requirements, especially for capital projects.

The data is clear. As I said before, according to the financial information return, municipalities invested \$68 billion in Ontario in 2023, with over \$23.6 billion of that

spent directly on procurement. AMO's March 2025 survey showed that almost 98% of municipal non-construction procurement was sourced from Canadian vendors. Those numbers are not just impressive; they are a testament to the commitment that our local governments feel in supporting the Ontario economy. But numbers alone don't tell the whole story. What matters is the spirit of partnership, the willingness to adapt, and the shared goal of building a stronger, more resilient Ontario. Municipalities are ready to work with us, but they need a framework that is flexible, practical and responsive to local realities. They need definitions that make sense, protections that give confidence, and collaborations that ensure no community is left behind.

As we move forward with the Buy Ontario Act, I am committed to ongoing consultation with AMO and every municipality in this province. We will listen, we will adapt, and we will build a procurement framework that works for everyone, from the largest city to the smallest town here in Ontario.

Speaker, this is how we stand together on the right side of Ontario's history—by working in partnership, by respecting local expertise, and by ensuring that every public sector dollar strengthens our communities, supports our workers, and builds a future we can all be proud of.

Colleagues, we have a choice here today that goes beyond talking points. Under this Premier, we realized that we cannot have procurement as a patchwork of inconsistent practices and hope for the best. We must choose a path where public dollars do more than buy things; they build things: capacity, confidence, resilience and pride. We can choose to stand with Ontario's workers and entrepreneurs, who don't ask for handouts. All they want is a fair shot and clear rules.

Speaker, I said at second reading that this was an inflection point. At third reading, this is now a moment of decision. The easy path is to delay and to doubt. The right path—the path that puts us on the right side of our province's history—is to say yes to a practical, transparent, accountable Buy Ontario Act that takes good ideas from all parties and turns them into work for Ontario families.

Let us vote not as partisans, but as stewards for the neighbours and communities that we all ran for. Let us vote for the welders in Hamilton, the coders in Kitchener, the francophone entrepreneurs in Hearst, the Indigenous-owned businesses building capacity in the north, the small machine manufacturer in Windsor, the start-ups in Ottawa, and the students who will see, in concrete terms, that we believed in them enough to invest right here at home.

To every member who spoke with conviction, even when we disagreed: Thank you. Your support can make this bill possible. Now let's finish the work.

Speaker, I ask all members in this House to join me in voting for Bill 72, so that when the history of this Legislature is written, we can say together, “We chose Ontario.”

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

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's an interesting day here in the province of Ontario, I will say this.

I want to thank the minister for his work on this bill. I will also say that it—because I think you genuinely care about buying-Ontario, and this is a time in our history where we should be more united.

I will also say, though, I think that Bill 72 is necessary to protect the government from itself, given your track record on buying-Ontario.

If you heard the story this morning around LifeLabs and the Minister of Health standing in her place, talking about access and priority access at the expense of Ontario health workers and Ontario health jobs, which, actually—we didn't even get into the fact that that information from LifeLabs then becomes very public and commodifiable, which means that our health information as Ontarians becomes the purview of LifeLabs and therefore an American country. This is a corporation that is very well entrenched in the government of Ontario. We saw firsthand today who your priorities are in this regard, and it's a very serious issue.

I will also say that given the tariff war that we are currently in—and it is an aggressive tariff war; in fact, it's history-making.

For those of you who don't follow American politics—perhaps we all should be paying very close attention to what is happening in the United States.

There is an author that I read, Paul Krugman, and he talks about when America stood for freedom—because we are in an unprecedented time in the history of this country and of global politics. “There was a time,” he wrote, “not so long ago, when America was the leader of the free world. It was the first among equals within an alliance of nations bound together by shared values—above all a commitment to a democracy and civil liberties.” This time is passed.

“MAGA”—we all should be familiar with MAGA—“however, doesn't want to be part of that world. In fact, it doesn't want a world of democracy, civil liberties and the rule of law to exist. The Trump administration has become especially hostile to Europe, precisely because the Europeans are trying to hold on to the values MAGA is trying to destroy at home.”

This all plays itself out in our economy here in Ontario and in this province.

And if you are paying close attention, as we all should be, as politicians and as public servants—“Last week the Trump administration released its updated” so-called “National Security Strategy for the United States. Much of the document is vague, meandering and self-contradictory” much like the President. “But it becomes clear and focused when it turns to Europe. Quite simply, Trump and those around him hate Europe. And they hate it because it still honours the ideals they're abandoning in America.”

The language in this document, we should all be paying close attention to. “Europe, the document warns, faces ‘the stark prospect of civilizational erasure.’ Why? Because ‘it is more than plausible that within a few decades at the

latest, certain NATO members will become majority non-European.’ I don't know why they bothered with the euphemism: ‘Non-European’ clearly means ‘non-white.’”

This is the global economy that we are debating essentially in this House. This is a global debate right now. It isn't just about your riding or your city or your community; it is about global unrest. And protecting Ontario, of course, should be at the centre of this debate.

For those of you who are just tuning in, we are debating Bill 72, Buy Ontario Act, 2025, and, given the contradictions that we see with this current government, you could be forgiven for questioning whether or not your own principles and values will play themselves out in this legislation. We, however, have a very clear idea of how to ensure that our economy is strengthened—how our jobs are protected, and how we have a sustainable economy here in the province of Ontario.

We have put forward a number of policies, including Ontario's first procurement strategy.

I will mention also, with respect, I did bring forward a piece of legislation, back in 2021, to deal with the fact that we had not protected ourselves from an uncertain global economy. This relates to the pandemic; it relates to our inability to generate vaccines, to generate personal protective equipment. We had no sick day policy in place to protect workers from contributing to a pandemic, and we had not even given any consideration to the diversification of a procurement strategy which was inclusive of the talent, skills and leadership that Ontario entrepreneurs and corporations had been very successful in, in other jurisdictions, but not here in Ontario.

1400

Nowhere else can we see this play itself out with greater clarity than with our life sciences strategy. There's no reason why our research, our technology, our ideas and solutions on health care cannot be found in our hospitals just down on University.

I always reference Intellijoint, because it took 10 years for this amazing company out of Waterloo, out of the research campus and the ecosystem there, as a pilot project, to get into our hospitals—10 years.

Any acceleration of our innovation and our ideas to benefit the people we're elected to serve should be first and foremost.

We still continue, though—you saw the Auditor General's report, Madam Speaker, where we've learned that this government is incinerating N95 masks because you continually overbuy, and not distribute or have no strategy whatsoever to distribute what most people would consider as a very strong preventive health strategy, where you don't get sick. Given the fact that public health has been so undermined and so under-resourced, it's really survival of the fittest out there for people in Ontario. At least, instead of burning the masks, get them to people who can't afford them, who could use them. What a concept. If you're procuring them, make sure that they actually benefit the people of Ontario. Is that so much to ask, on behalf of the people we're elected to serve? I think not.

We do know that Ontario spends approximately \$30 billion each year on goods, services and infrastructure

through public procurement. Ministries, agencies, Infrastructure Ontario, the LCBO, hospitals, municipalities, school boards, colleges, universities and more use public spending for procurement.

I do want to say, it was interesting to hear the minister talk about his meeting with AMO. We also had a meeting with AMO. I do chair, on behalf of the Leader of the Opposition, the tariff response council, and AMO raised some very good and valid points. In Ontario and in Canada, we do not make electoral tabulation machines. There are going to have to be some carve-outs for technology and for resources that we do not have the in-house capability for.

What we would ask, though, is to ensure that there's a grandfather clause on that so that we as a province and as a country can adapt and build up our own capacity to do this work—including, ironically, the making of fire trucks. In Ontario and in Canada, apparently, we do not make fire trucks. We should start making fire—

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Not true.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Well, this is what AMO told me.

If you've got something to say, wait for your debate. Now you're just perking up—this is interesting—on fire trucks.

Also, if you want a more relevant example, how about this? We just signed onto a massive long-term energy policy around nuclear. I will say it took the NDP, the official opposition, a long time to get to a good place on nuclear. But make no mistake about it: We support nuclear, and we support Canadian nuclear.

Interjection.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Oh, but you can't applaud yourself. Do you know why, the member from Niagara? Because you just signed on to SMRs that are US-designed, that are US steel, that are US enriched fuel.

So we actually do need Bill 72. We do need Bill 72 to protect us from you. That's what we need Bill 72 for.

It was interesting that the minister talked about promises broken.

Yes, this is a broken promise—that you signed on to US design, US technology and US fuel for future nuclear use. You have tied our hands for decades. One could hope, in the sincerest manner whatsoever, that the government would adhere to their own laws that they're creating to protect us from you. This is one of the goals that we see, because—just on the record, Candu technology is Canadian, it is on time and it is on budget. And that is where we would be investing our time and energy. I note that there's not a lot of heckling on this point.

I will also say that this is a piece of legislation that for sure should have gone to committee. It's a huge piece of legislation. It's a change in economic policy—because apparently, you don't know how to “buy Ontario.” We wanted this to go to committee. We wanted to help you help Ontario—help yourselves.

At the same time, this government didn't even give us the heads-up on what piece of legislation we're going to have today. It's like grade 7 times 10.

I had to actually pull out this book by Dalton McGuinty of all people, and it reads as follows: “When the leaders choose to make themselves bidders at an auction of popularity, their talents, in the construction of the state, will be of no service. They will become flatterers instead of legislators; the instruments, not the guides, of the people.” This is a quote from Edmund Burke, from 1790, and it certainly applies to this government.

Do better for the people of Ontario.

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

M^{me} Lucille Collard: It's my turn and my pleasure to speak about Bill 72, the Buy Ontario Act. I have to say that I do this with a mix of hope and deep concern as well—hope, because the idea of strengthening Ontario's economy and empowering our public sector to choose local suppliers is a worthy one; concern, because this bill, as drafted, lacks the safeguards, resources, transparency and fairness necessary to ensure that the Buy Ontario Act actually helps Ontario workers, Ontario institutions and Ontario small businesses.

Slogans do not build economies; good legislation does.

Bill 72, in its current form, is far more of a slogan than substance.

There are legitimate reasons to pursue a stronger domestic procurement strategy:

(1) The global trade landscape is shifting. We've seen it. Supply chains are more fragile because the US, one of our largest economic partners, is increasingly being unpredictable. It makes sense to build greater economic resilience at home.

(2) Public procurement represents billions of dollars in annual spending. If used smartly, that spending can support Ontario workers, Ontario manufacturers and Ontario service providers.

(3) Many public sector institutions would like to buy more locally but are restricted by actual rigid procurement rules. Allowing flexibility is not only reasonable; it's actually overdue.

On principle, I support a thoughtful, well-constructed buy-Ontario strategy, but Bill 72 is not exactly that. The government is demanding new procurement obligations but providing no additional money to help hospitals, schools, universities, long-term-care homes or municipalities to comply.

Hospitals have already asked for another billion dollars this year just to keep up with inflation and demand. And now, what are we telling them? We're saying, “Buy Ontario, and if it costs more, then do it on your existing budget.” That is not leadership. It is cost-shifting. And it risks cuts, service reductions and staffing pressures.

In addition, Bill 72 gives cabinet the power to penalize institutions that don't comply—including cutting funding. This is not a gentle incentive. It is a threat. Imagine a school board or a hospital that cannot meet procurement rules because local suppliers don't exist or can't meet volume or compliance requirements. Under this bill, they could lose funding—harming students, patients and communities.

Public services should never be endangered by procurement experiments.

There's also a problem with oversight in this bill. All the power sits with the Management Board of Cabinet, a small, insular group of ministers. Cabinet decides who must comply, what "Ontario-made" means, what standards apply, and what penalties exist, all without meaningful legislative oversight.

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Given recent scandals like the greenbelt, ministerial zoning orders and the Skills Development Fund, Ontarians have every reason to be wary of insider access and opaque decision-making.

If procurement becomes a tool to reward friends of government, small businesses and honest operators will be the first to suffer.

Madam Speaker, I want to spend a little bit of time talking about small businesses, particularly cultural businesses, because under Bill 72, they could stand to lose. The bill assumes that all Ontario businesses are equally positioned to compete for public sector procurement; they are not. Large companies have entire teams to navigate complex RFP requirements, certifications, compliance audits, and bulk volume demands; small businesses do not.

I'll use a concrete example, something we discussed in this chamber not a very long time ago: Franco-Ontarian bookstores. They are small and community based. They are cultural enterprises. Under Bill 72, if public institutions must meet new Ontario-made or Ontario-based criteria crafted by cabinet insiders, bookstores could be shut out of eligibility simply because they don't have the administrative capacity to navigate large bureaucratic procurement systems. Larger companies, including big-box retailers headquartered in Ontario, may more easily qualify for procurement contracts even if they carry fewer Ontario-produced cultural products. Small businesses that operate on thin margins cannot absorb new paperwork, new audit requirements, or the cost of meeting expanded compliance standards. Instead of supporting local bookstores, this bill risks pushing them aside in favour of big players that can meet those requirements, even if they are not culturally rooted in the communities they serve.

This is ironic because this government voted against my own private member's bill, Bill 58, which would have required public institutions to purchase French-language books from Franco-Ontarian bookstores. They said that it would "restrict procurement flexibility," create "administrative burden" or "limit competition." Now, today, they bring us a bill that does all of that, but with far less transparency and far greater cabinet control. The difference? My bill strengthened cultural institutions and supported small Franco-Ontarian businesses. This bill empowers cabinet and risks concentrating procurement in the hands of large corporations.

We need to be mindful that Ontario supply chains do not stop at the border. Interprovincial collaboration could give us better pricing, stronger supply chain resilience, more diverse suppliers, and broader economic benefits. A strictly Ontario-only approach may actually reduce

competition and increase costs for schools, hospitals and municipalities.

If the government is serious about helping Ontario businesses, what we need is:

- real funding, so public institutions can transition without cutting services;

- support programs for small and medium enterprises—grants, simplified procurement, and training;

- clear definitions of "Ontario-made," developed with public consultation;

- transparent oversight, with legislative accountability—not just cabinet;

- protection for essential services, and no funding cuts for non-compliance; and

- an exploration of a pan-Canadian strategy for true supply chain resilience.

Madam Speaker, "Buy Ontario" can be a powerful idea, but with no funding, no oversight and no fairness, it becomes a threat rather than a prize. If we want procurement to strengthen Ontario's economy, preserve cultural businesses like Franco-Ontarian bookstores, and ensure our public institutions can continue delivering high-quality services, we need safeguards, not slogans. Without those protections, Bill 72 risks doing real harm to the very people and institutions it claims to help.

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

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: It's an honour to rise today in support of Bill 72, the Buy Ontario Act, 2025. This legislation, if passed, is grounded in the premise that the government should protect Ontario—protect our workers, protect our businesses, and protect the communities that keep this province moving along. And nowhere is that felt more strongly than in rural Ontario.

Rural families, small businesses on our main streets, and manufacturers tell me the same thing in every community that I visit: They want their government to stand with them in the face of global uncertainty.

Just on Saturday, I was in Seaforth, and a business owner was telling me how the tariffs are negatively impacting her business—and she had so many people who stand with her, with that threat of uncertainty. She appreciates that our government understands that small business matters.

For instance, when a mill in northern Ontario slows down or when tariffs hit our farm equipment suppliers, it's entire communities that feel the shock.

Speaker, across Ontario, small businesses in rural Ontario and manufacturers and farmers and families alike appreciate that our government is putting Ontario first. And that's exactly what Bill 72 does.

When Ontario is facing real economic pressures—unfair US tariffs, volatile global markets, and supply chains that can no longer be taken for granted—rural communities throughout Ontario are ready to be called upon. There are 268,000 businesses that are proud to call rural Ontario home, and they are ready.

I just met last week with the Canadian manufacturers, and they had a very important message, and that is, "We

are here to stand with your government. We're ready to protect Ontario and build a strong economy on a strong foundation."

I'm really proud of the fact that it's our government, led by Premier Ford, that is on the ground every day, fully understanding the impact of what our reality is in terms of our economy.

If Bill 72 is passed, our government will issue clear procurement directives that apply to government entities, the broader public sector and, when prescribed, municipalities. It ensures that when school boards, hospitals, agencies and local governments spend money on goods and services, they look to Ontario-made products and Ontario-based suppliers before looking anywhere else.

This bill sets out predictable rules, strengthens our local supply chains, and reinforces economic stability in communities that have too often been left behind by other governments.

The whole essence of buying local isn't lost on municipalities, and there are some that are already leading by example.

Earlier this fall, I had the occasion to meet with the mayor from Perth East, and she was very pleased to share that all the municipalities in Perth county actually work with their upper tier to realize purchasing efficiencies, focusing on Ontario first.

So this is not an abstract policy. It's deeply personal in rural Ontario.

When a hospital purchases Ontario-made medical supplies, that supports a manufacturer in a small town. It matters.

When a municipality chooses an Ontario aggregates producer for a road project, that supports local truck drivers, fabrication shops, and local welders as well, just to name a few.

When a school board buys Ontario-made furniture, that means there are shifts that are going strong in our small towns, and young apprentices get their start close to home.

This legislation reflects the very heart of our modernized Rural Ontario Development Program as well as our rural economic development strategy, Enabling Opportunity—and Bill 72 is indeed enabling opportunities.

The economic impact of this bill cannot be overstated. Ontario's public sector spends over \$30 billion annually on procurement. For too long, too many dollars left Ontario. But Bill 72 proposes to replace the older framework with a stronger, more flexible approach that directly responds to today's challenges, from global uncertainty to supply chain risk.

Speaker, hand on heart, I can tell you with every confidence that small towns throughout rural Ontario have the capacity to host big business. Tiverton, Ontario, is a perfect example of that. Tiverton is home to Bruce Power, and Bruce Power has made it very, very clear for years upon years that if you want to do business with Bruce Power in rural Ontario, businesses need to also consider calling rural Ontario home. Honestly, there's no better example to be said than that.

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I want to share with you that I feel very strongly that Bill 72 also provides a clear structure for accountability. Public sector organizations must comply with procurement directives, document their decisions, and demonstrate that Ontario preference has been considered. If they do not comply, the act allows for corrective action—including, when necessary, withholding funds—ensuring transparency and reinforcing trust in public spending.

In closing, Bill 72 is not just a procurement bill. Premier Ford—and our entire government—is leading by example. Bill 72 is actually a commitment—a commitment that this government will protect Ontario, and protect rural Ontario, as well.

I urge all members in this House to support the Buy Ontario Act, 2025.

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

MPP Wayne Gates: It's always a pleasure to rise in the House—particularly on Bill 72.

I think it's interesting that just a couple of weeks ago, the NDP brought forward a bill to buy local, buy Canadian, and the Conservatives voted it down—and here we are just a few weeks later, rushing through time allocation, which makes no sense to me.

I can talk about myself, going back years in the labour movement—we were always saying to municipalities, saying to companies, "Make sure that you're spending Canadian tax dollars."

And it was already said during this debate—\$68 billion could be used, creating good-paying jobs locally, with local companies, local engineers. We could do that.

I want to talk about the hospital in Niagara Falls. In 2014, they got a planning grant—after they closed six hospitals, by the way. People forget about that. We closed two in St. Catharines. We closed Niagara-on-the-Lake. We closed Fort Erie. We closed Port Colborne. We closed Welland. To say that we're going to get a hospital in Niagara Falls—people forget about that being done, and it was done under the Conservatives.

I want to say what happened with the planning grant. We got the planning grant, and right away, we were all saying the same thing. We're going to have this new hospital; it's going to be eight, nine, 10 floors—whatever it is. We were saying back then, "What should we do with that hospital? We should make sure that every tax dollar is being used for local workers, local engineers, local businesses." That's what we should have been doing. We shouldn't need a bill in this house to say we're going to spend our tax dollars creating jobs for our kids and our grandkids and ourselves, and protecting jobs. That should have been done automatically.

I sat on city council, and I can remember the arguments, where they would say, "Oh, no, we're not going to support the local business, because we're going to go to the lowest bidder." What a mistake that has been.

As we saw, and we saw today more than ever, we need to support—we've got 800,000 people on unemployment today, right here in the province of Ontario, the richest

province in the country. But do you know what's even more concerning about that? Speaker, 20% are our kids, our grandkids and young people who can't find jobs.

The number one issue that's facing young people today is affordability. Think about that. Why is that? They can't afford to buy a house; they can't buy groceries; they can't pay for their rent, because they can't find a good-paying job.

So buying local is probably the easiest thing we should be doing with our own tax dollars. Instead, we're the Boy Scouts of the trading world, whether that be in the wine industry—no matter what it is. Where other countries support their industries, whether it's agriculture—the wine industry is a good example. To their credit, they got rid of the 6.1% tax—that we brought forward, to say that would help the small and medium-sized wineries. There is so much we can do on buying Canadian and buying local.

I want to say, my colleague raised this—and this is an important thing. I have a LifeLabs in Niagara. Luckily, my colleague from Sudbury raised it this morning. LifeLabs is being sold to an American company, which is jeopardizing Canadian and local jobs. Today, the minister stood up and defended that. That made no sense to me. Why are we going to throw people out of work? LifeLabs is working really, really well. I know a lot of people in here probably—although we don't like the fact that it was privatized in the first place. Again, that was done under the PC government. But at the end of the day, it was working. So why are you giving it to an American company? It made no sense. My colleague is right on the money. They're the type of examples that we can say create great jobs, protect our own jobs.

You can blame Trump all you want, but if we were doing this for years, just buying local, using tax dollars—\$68 billion creates a lot of wealth, a lot of jobs, and right in Niagara.

The minister stood up during his speech—I listened very carefully, because I raised this in this Legislature; so did my colleague from St. Catharines, about the Garden City Skyway and the fact that they were using a foreign company and maybe doing a foreign company for steel, when we have steelworkers who are crying for jobs. What he said—and it's interesting to me, because I asked the question to the Premier, and I believe my colleague from St. Catharines asked the question as well—they never made a commitment that they'd use Ontario steel. They never made that commitment on the Garden City Skyway. If you listen to what he said—and he can correct me if I'm wrong—he said that they put in place in this bill a scoring mechanism that they can control. I've got one minute left, but I want to say this: We don't need a scoring mechanism for steel. These are steelworkers. These are workers who deserve a job right here in Ontario—with what? Anybody can yell it out. The Conservatives are listening intently over there. What they should do—we could use our own tax dollars to create jobs in Ontario for steelworkers, which are going to be good-paying jobs. They're then going to get a paycheque, and then they're going to do what? They're going to spend that same money—what

they earn every day—back in their local economy, back into the local business. That's why we support local workers. That's why we should be buying steel from steelworkers—and autos. All those things can be done.

When you've got \$68 billion, let's start spending it where it should be spent, and that should be right here in Ontario, creating good-paying jobs for our young people, our grandkids, and people who currently have jobs.

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

Mr. Stephen Blais: It's always a pleasure to get up and debate in the Legislature—and Bill 72, the Buy Ontario Act, is another one of those wonderful opportunities. I think the goal behind the bill is the right one. Protecting Ontario jobs, strengthening Ontario's industrial base, and making sure public dollars support Ontario workers—these are principles that I believe in deeply. Every member of this House should share the conviction that when we invest in Ontario, when Ontario invests its money on behalf of the residents we represent, Ontario workers should benefit. When we build, we should build here. And when we use tax dollars to create opportunity, it should be for young people, for families and for small businesses here in Ontario first. I don't think that goal or that desire should be in dispute. But agreeing with the goal of the bill does not mean accepting the bill as it is written, especially when the government's own record shows that they can't deliver on the outcomes that they promise.

Let me start with the economic reality today in Ontario that the government refuses to acknowledge: Ontario's job market is not strong. It is stagnating. And in some cases, it's falling behind the rest of the country.

Ontario now has the highest youth unemployment rate in Canada. Our young people are waiting, on average, three and a half months to find work—the longest it has been in 29 years.

Full-time job creation has barely moved.

The government touts the recent increase in jobs in Ontario without mentioning that the overwhelming majority of those jobs were part-time jobs—there's nothing wrong with that. They also failed to mention that that bump happens every fall as the hospitality sector, the retail sector and others staff up for Christmas and the holidays. That is not something that is unique to this year; if you look at it, almost every September and October, part-time job stats go up. It's businesses responding to what is the most important sales season of the year.

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Madam Speaker, private sector investment has slowed. Municipalities are drowning under infrastructure pressures. And Ontario's debt has ballooned to levels not seen since the NDP were last in government.

These are not the economic foundations of a strong buy-Ontario strategy; they are the foundations of a government scrambling to put a slogan on a problem that they have been involved in creating.

I want Ontario businesses to succeed—I want that desperately; I'm sure that we all do. I want Ontario workers to benefit, and to benefit first, from public contracts. I want

Ontario's industrial and health care capacity to grow, not to shrink.

For seven long years, this government has had every opportunity to create the environment required for Ontario companies to thrive. And yet, we are seeing, instead, that Ontario is losing domestic capacity, not strengthening it.

Let me offer one of the most striking and recent examples from just this past year. It has been mentioned earlier: LifeLabs, one of Canada's largest medical laboratory providers, a major player right here in Ontario. If I understand correctly, it was owned largely by OMERS, the Ontario municipal pension plan, and it was sold to a US-based company, Quest Diagnostics, for \$1.35 billion, or something like that. I'm sure at the time it sounded like a great deal. It was, I'm sure, a very good deal for the pension fund. But Quest is still a US-based company. Despite their promises to maintain their headquarters in Toronto, despite their promises to keep health data stored in Canada, the fact remains that Ontario health care data, Ontario health care capacity—a critical aspect of Ontario's health care system is no longer Canadian-owned. And that happened under this government's watch. That should give every member in this Legislature a moment of pause, because if Ontario can't maintain ownership of something as fundamental as our medical diagnostic capacity—a system that millions of our friends and family and neighbours use every single year—how can anyone believe that this government has a serious strategy to rebuild and protect Ontario's broader industrial base?

The government keeps saying that they want more "Ontario-made," but the evidence shows very clearly that what we're actually seeing is "Ontario-sold." And that trend didn't happen by accident. It happened because this government has not created the economic stability, the confidence, or the investment environment required for Ontario companies to stay competitive, let alone to help them expand.

So, yes, we all support Ontario jobs; we all support Ontario procurement.

But a bill, especially a vague one, cannot replace the economic leadership that has been missing for seven straight years.

Even if we can be convinced to accept the government's stated intentions, Bill 72 has serious flaws. It writes a promise into legislation but leaves enforcement entirely to the government's discretion. Think about that: The writer of the rule is also the enforcer of the rule is also the policer of the rule is also the verifier of the rule. That's problematic, especially when the government's track record is not as good as they might like it to be. There are no clear thresholds; there are few, if any, transparency measures; few, if any, reporting requirements; and no accountability mechanisms. And there is no guarantee that Ontario companies will actually benefit in the way that the bill suggests.

This government's track record with regulation-by-regulation bills is not very good.

They gave themselves the ability—or they're about to—to let loyalty points expire, even as Ontarians told them that they didn't want that to happen.

They gave themselves the power to rewrite environmental rules behind closed doors, and then we ended up with the greenbelt scandal. The Premier said he was going to protect the greenbelt, publicly, then he told a closed-door meeting of donors that he was going to open up the greenbelt—and then, "Oh, no, I wasn't honest about that. I'm going to protect it. Oh, but then I'm going to open it up and let it be sold off," and then now, oh, my God, here we are. We're not entirely sure what's going on with the greenbelt, but as sure as the sky is blue, the government is looking for ways to sell portions of it.

The government gave themselves flexibility on infrastructure project standards, and now municipalities are paying more for less. I don't believe, in Ontario, there is a municipal infrastructure project of any size or scope that is even remarkably close to being on time—and certainly, likely, not close to being on budget.

Giving this government broad discretion and hoping that they use it wisely is not a legislative strategy; it's wishful thinking, because there is, in fairness, just no track record of that actually coming about.

Ontarians deserve better than a bill that sounds strong but delivers nothing.

If this government were serious about strengthening Ontario's economic capacity, they would take the steps that we have been calling for.

They would address the youth unemployment crisis with a targeted jobs program for young people.

They would help small businesses hammered by US tariffs and high costs by cutting small business taxes, as we've proposed.

They would further support families and businesses by taking HST off home heating and electricity costs. I think now that it has finally started to get cold here in Toronto and across the province, we can all agree there is multi-partisan support—that paying your heating bill is not an option. It is not a luxury. In our climate, it's a necessity, and taxing someone on a necessity is just wrong. This government could have—multiple times, at our request—cut HST from heating and electricity, and instead of voting yes, they voted no and decided to write the federal government a letter.

They could be supporting Ontario's colleges and universities so that we can continue to create and attract world-class talent. Instead, Ontario remains last in per capita university funding. Just to meet the Canadian average, they would have to increase funding by 60%—just to meet the average. Ontario, the economic engine of the country, is behind PEI, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Newfoundland, and the other seven provinces that aren't Ontario in investing in university education.

They could fix municipal infrastructure and how subdivisions are funded so that housing construction doesn't outpace roads, transit and emergency services. That is a problem that we have not yet, in many parts of the province, really had to face, because all of their strategies on accelerating new home construction have failed. But only because those strategies on home construction have failed have we not run into the problem of houses being built without the supporting infrastructure to support them.

They could, of course, create procurement rules that are tight, that are transparent and that are automatic, not optional. They could do all those things, but they're choosing not to.

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Protecting Ontario jobs doesn't start in a bill or with legislation; it starts with creating conditions where Ontario is best placed to hire, build and invest. The government has not done that.

Madam Speaker, I want to end where I began: I support buying Ontario. I support creating jobs in Ontario. I support using public dollars to strengthen our province, to create those jobs and to build our province. But Bill 72, as drafted, does not guarantee any of these things. It is legislation that is designed to generate headlines without creating or even really allowing us to measure any progress and outcomes.

After seven years, Ontarians deserve results—not slogans, not empty announcements, not bumper-sticker bills. Ontario Liberals will always be there to support Ontario workers. We will support legislation that actually strengthens Ontario's economy, that actually protects Ontario workers and actually brings investment home. That's why, again, Madam Speaker, we support small business tax cuts, we support a youth jobs strategy, we support taking HST off of heating and electricity, and so much more, including investing in colleges and universities to create that world-class talent, that Ontario-made talent right here at home. Those are the kinds of strategies this government should be pursuing.

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

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I'm going to steal a line from my friend from Niagara Falls and say I'm always honoured to speak here in the chamber.

I do want to thank the government because I know this is a good-spirited bill, right? You've heard the calls from municipalities across the province saying we want to have the flexibility, the permission and the support to invest more in Ontario companies. And I do know that that money is coming. I'll be looking to the budget to see how many dollars we put behind this bill to give people that flexibility, so they have a choice under tight economic times.

I come from a tech sector. We're one of the largest tech hubs. They call it the Toronto-Waterloo corridor, but it's actually Kitchener and Waterloo that are at the other end of that corridor. We have so many start-ups, it's unbelievable—innovators that come from our local universities and colleges that are looking to commercialize their ideas. We fund them and their colleges and universities to come up with these amazing products and technologies that improve health care, improve congestion and more, and really save us from the effects of climate change—which is real, I might add.

But the thing that we don't do is we don't support these businesses to buy here. Universally, unsolicited, when I go from Intellijoint to Nicoya to Alert Labs—it doesn't matter which start-up I visit, but the MPP for Waterloo and

I always hear that 95% of their sales are to the United States because they can't sell in Canada; it's almost impossible. We have a procurement system that is really set up for the big players with the big bucks. So while we like to talk about innovation, and I know there are lots of ways in which the government supports it, we need to support it by buying their products.

If you talk to anybody in the health tech sector, which we talk about all the time in this place, we need to also address the barriers to being covered under OHIP. We can't fund these technologies with bake sales anymore. That's not a sustainable business plan. No, in my riding it's the foundation, through their fundraising branch, that's able to buy those pieces of equipment that improve hospital stays and cut down the amount of time they're in bed, that improve the amount of time it takes them to recover, make surgeries less invasive using optics—so many ways in which this would improve the lives of Ontarians.

I know this government likes to attack bike lanes as a way to address congestion—"Let's get rid of the bike lanes; it will improve congestion." Miovision, in my riding, sells all over municipalities in the United States. They're using this technology and it cuts down congestion by 20% to 30%. We could be supporting municipalities to be using this technology right now to improve congestion. And guess what? It is evidence-based, but if that means you don't want it, I will retract that statement and say, you'll love it, it's a great product and it will make your life easier—but they do have the evidence to back it up.

So we do need to cut the red tape and the high, high bar it takes to qualify for some of these procurements because that kills our innovation. It stops it right in its tracks and people have stopped trying. I talked to a procurement expert—actually, I've referred them to the government, so you could have a great chat. She said, "I give up. We don't even try to sell to government, because it's impossible."

So yes, let's buy Ontario, but let's talk about that red tape. Let's talk to these procurement experts. Let's talk to the tech sector and say, "What do you need so that we can use your innovation here in Ontario?" Because they're selling all over the world. It breaks my heart that for this wonderful technology that has been created in my community, I have to go to Saudi Arabia or India or Germany to benefit from it, when it's right here in my community. People have chosen to stay in my community because they love Kitchener, because it's awesome. But they shouldn't have to worry all the time that they can't stay afloat, and they should have the back of Ontario taxpayer dollars to support them selling here. We shouldn't make it impossible.

We have to work on what makes a good local economy. Raise your hand if you have a Dollarama in your community. Thank you. It is one of the fastest-growing corporations in the United States and it is the best way to shut down your local grocery store—that and Walmart. These are two American corporations that have deep, rotten roots that kill our local economy, because we've made it easy for them to come in, put their prices

artificially low, kill off local business, and then prices go up. This has happened again and again over the whole province.

And so we need to look at which companies are here that keep dollars local. Aside from Dollarama, if you spend a dollar in your local grocery store, independent grocery stores, it cycles seven times in the community, because you're paying people here, the profits stay local and people spend their monies locally. Check out the Strong Towns Podcast on Dollarama if you want to learn more.

That's what Toyota was saying. They said, "We have made a commitment to the Waterloo region that we're going to stay." They haven't cut a single job. They've made a commitment to their workers that they're going to stay put. But the problem is—they say, "Where's the love?"

For example, I was a city councillor. We need to green our fleet. And so, we always look at, "Oh, it costs a little bit more," even though it's cheaper in the long run because you save 80% on your servicing fees, and you save a crap ton on not having to buy gas. But they say, "Support Toyota vehicles because we are here in your community employing local people." So how can we support local automakers and encourage our municipalities to green their fleet? It would save our municipalities. Municipalities are starving—if you haven't heard already—and they need a win. So let's support our local municipalities to buy these electric vans. We just saw an automaker shut down their electric van fleet. So we could do better by supporting them, to make sure these automakers keep these lines going by greening their fleets, just like FedEx and all the other delivery groups are doing right now.

Finally, I'd like to talk a little bit about energy. I know everybody kind of shirks and doesn't want to look at the realities, but we know that our new nuclear is an American company, GE. We chose GE; we don't have Candu. And it means that we are dependent for the next many, many decades on enriched uranium from the United States. Candu reactors run on non-enriched uranium that we can get from Ontario, and these GE reactors run on enriched uranium that comes from the United States.

Let's really give a bit of thought. Don't get me wrong; I know solar technology comes from China, but it's the difference between renting and buying. That's the big difference. Whenever you're using a fossil gas, whether it's enriched uranium—which is not a fossil gas—when ever you need a fuel for energy, whether it's American gas—we import so much American gas. We are dependent on them there. If anybody studied business, it's called a SWOT analysis. This is a weakness of ours, that now we are dependent on the United States even more by doubling down on American nuclear fuel and nuclear technology instead of buying the house.

When you buy solar, when you build wind turbines using Ontario steel, when you build batteries here in Ontario, you are capitalizing on a \$2.2-trillion economy. We have the minerals here. We should be benefiting from the green transition instead of tying ourselves to the United

States for decades and decades to come. This is not energy sovereignty at all; this is energy dependence. If you've looked down south and seen our not-friend Donald Trump, he's a scary guy. I don't want to have to rely on him on whether the price of my electricity will go up or down—no, thank you.

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I would rather that we invest in a green economy, that we build wind turbines with Ontario steel. This would really help those folks right now, if we would double down and invest in this kind of technology and use our Ontario products but also that we make those batteries here in Ontario. We could be the next superpower if we weren't so blind to the evidence, if we weren't putting a thumb down on the fossil gas industry because we're in bed with Enbridge. Enbridge will be gone with you tomorrow if they stop making money. They don't love you. They don't care about you. They're just in it because they make a ton of money with you in power right now.

So let's democratize. Do you know who makes renewables in this province? Small and medium businesses. Enbridge: Their bucks are spent on Louis Vuitton. When I was in business school, I studied luxury items. The really wealthy right now, like the Galen Westons, the Drakes and the CEOs of Enbridge, they're not spending their money in your small rural downtown. They're flying overseas somewhere. They've got a private jet, and they're spending all their money on fancy stuff that's not made here; I guarantee you that.

When we build renewables, we create co-ops, we create healthy economies in our local community where everybody can benefit. These small and medium businesses—guess what? They go to your kid's school, they spend their money at the local grocery store and they live in your neighbourhood.

So, yes, you might have a world view or an emotional reaction to renewable energy because of what you see on X and the lies you're hearing from Enbridge, but it's time that you looked at the evidence on how this benefits communities, because we don't have to rent from the United States for decades to come. We can buy the house, be free and ensure that everybody can benefit.

In Australia today, one community gets money back. They get \$15,000 back. In parts of Melbourne, energy is free because they have solar panels. They've paid them off. Imagine that: free energy. We are paying 30% more this year than we did the year before because we have an emotional reaction to renewables that is not evidence-based and because we have a very cozy relationship with Enbridge, which, again, doesn't help any of our local communities.

Yes, there are jobs in gas. Yes, there are jobs in nuclear. But there's way more to be had and way more to be gained by investing in the green economy—because we should be going to where the puck is going—for hockey metaphors. Let's do like Ken Dryden says and don't "be so stupid." He said that. In 10 years, you'll look back, and what will you think? He'll say, "How could we be so stupid" to not recognize the writing on the wall, where the economy is going?

So if we really want to be sovereign, if we really want to protect Ontario not just from climate change but also the cost of high electricity or the dependence on the Americans for their up-and-down yo-yo games with the fuel that we have to buy from them now, let's invest in renewables.

I welcome any of you to Kitchener-Waterloo. Talk to our tech companies. We'll tell you what red tape needs to be gone, what we need to sell to our hospital and health care sector, what we need to sell to municipalities, because we can cut red tape. We can invest in local communities, but we have to cut out those big corporate profits that are holding us back.

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

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: It is an honour to rise today to support Bill 72, Buy Ontario Act, 2025. This legislation is about protecting Ontario jobs, supporting local businesses and building a more resilient, self-reliant provincial economy.

Ontario faces real challenges from US tariffs creating global economic uncertainty. Our workers and business owners need to know that their government will stand with them through these trying times.

Bill 72 is our commitment to use every public sector procurement dollar to support Ontario businesses and workers first. This act authorizes the government to issue directives requiring public sector organizations, including municipalities and broader public sector entities, to give preference to Ontario-made goods and services. It sets clear rules for procurement, strengthens local supply chains and ensures public dollars are used to support Ontarians.

Every year, Ontario spends over \$30 million on goods and services. By prioritizing Ontario businesses, we keep jobs here, support innovation and help our communities thrive here in Ontario.

I think of the Ontario Power Generation plant in Wesleyville just down the shoreline and the \$26-billion refurbishment of the Pickering station. Ontario is leading the charge in delivering cutting-edge nuclear energy. We are on the path to becoming an energy-sufficient province and an energy superpower. This energy will produce upward of \$500 billion in GDP and create more than 100,000 construction jobs right here in Ontario.

That vision requires processing the uranium refined at the Port Hope Conversion Facility. It requires the nickel, copper and critical minerals we are going to extract from the Ring of Fire. And it requires Ontario's skilled labour force—from boilermakers to pipefitters to cement finishers. That's what a self-reliant Ontario looks like.

This bill is about more than just buying local. It is about economic development, responsible governance and building public trust. It replaces and extends on previous initiatives like the Building Ontario Businesses Initiative Act, giving us a stronger tool to respond to today's challenges.

Industry leaders like the Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters have welcomed this legislation. They know that

prioritizing Ontario-made goods in public procurement strengthens local supply chains and safeguards manufacturing jobs.

This past summer, I was in Sudbury—a community on the front lines of the tariff war and at the epicentre of our buy-Ontario initiatives—to announce support for SDF capital and training projects. These projects are preparing the surrounding areas for in-demand jobs in boilermakers, welding, mining and ironworking.

Northern communities understand that buying Ontario isn't possible unless we make critical labour investments in the very communities that will pull the minerals out of the ground, the minerals that will build our roads, our hospitals and Ontario's future infrastructure. The workers we are training at Agnico Eagle Mines, UBC Millwright Local 1425, Ironworkers Local 786, and NORCAT, just to name a few, of our partners who understand this better than anyone.

Buying Ontario means working together with one shared goal in mind. Public sector entities must comply with procurement directives favouring Ontario and Canadian goods and services. Supply chain managers and contractors must follow this rule. This act allows for compliance reviews and corrective actions if organizations don't follow the rules. Funding can be withheld from entities that don't comply, ensuring accountability. This legislation helps level the playing field for Ontario businesses, supporting jobs creation and building supply chain resilience. It is about making sure our public sector buys from Ontario businesses first, then Canadian businesses, supporting local jobs and economic growth.

1500

Buying Ontario also means supporting and revitalizing the communities we call home, bringing them back to life so that people choose to spend their money here instead of vacationing in the USA. An example of this would be South Common Community Centre in my riding, Erin Mills, a \$52-million project. If we make sure that we prioritize a business from Ontario, that means businesses from Mississauga will have a good deal, a good prioritization, to make business in their local Mississauga and keep jobs in Mississauga.

Another example would be the restoration of buildings in downtown Port Hope. Using these buildings, which are in need of restoration, as a canvas for workers is transformative. This work is giving people in communities accessible opportunities to pursue careers in the skilled trades, careers that come with bigger paycheques and lifelong careers. It is also breathing new life into Port Hope's downtown, boosting tourism, a critical source of income for the local community.

Speaker, Bill 72 is more than a policy; it is a promise to protect Ontario jobs, empower local businesses and build a province that thrives in the face of global challenges. With the US tariffs causing challenges for businesses in Canada, in Ontario, we see many factories closing. I think it makes sense that we prioritize our local companies, our local factories and our local manufacturing industry to make sure that they have the opportunity to keep their

doors open, to keep the dollars belonging to Canada and Canadian taxpayers in Canada. Every single investment we bring from outside is to help manufacturing in Canada, so again, it makes sense that we keep our dollars that are in Canada to stay in Canada, within Ontario to stay in Ontario.

I urge all members to support this bill and help build a stronger, more self-reliant Ontario. Please choose Ontario first.

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

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: I'm pleased to rise today on behalf of the residents of St. Catharines to speak to Bill 72, the Buy Ontario Act, 2025—legislation that touches directly on Ontario's capacity to support its own workers, manufacturers and innovators. For me, as a representative for St. Catharines and the Niagara region, this bill speaks to a long-standing demand from our community: Public dollars should create Ontario jobs, support Ontarian supply chains and ensure that major infrastructure investments actually strengthen our economy here, right at home.

Bill 72 gives the managing board of cabinet power to issue directives requiring public sector entities to prioritize Ontario-made—and then Canadian-made—goods and services in procurement. It applies across ministries, provincial agencies, hospitals, universities and municipalities, setting up a framework for compliance, enforcement and potential penalties for vendors who do not meet these standards.

We know all too well what happens when government policy sounds good on paper but falls apart in practice. We've seen it in Niagara—loud and clear.

For years, the NDP has been calling for a real buy-Ontario strategy—one that both supports our manufacturing and prevents billions of public dollars from flowing to foreign companies. And yet, despite announcing procurement rules meant to favour Ontario businesses, this government has repeatedly carved out enormous loopholes—loopholes that allow foreign firms to qualify as local simply by having 250 employees here; loopholes exempting entire classes of projects like P3s; loopholes allowing existing foreign contracts to continue untouched.

This is not theoretical, because it impacts Niagara directly. In June 2025, contracts for the Garden City Skyway twinning project—one of the largest infrastructure projects in the whole region in decades—were awarded to a consortium made up almost entirely of foreign-owned companies, even though Niagara manufacturers, steel fabricators and engineer firms were and are fully capable of doing the work. All the steel for the skyway is being made—or could be made—right in Niagara, at the base of the project, yet local companies were totally passed over. If this government calls it “buy Ontario” while billions go to foreign firms and Niagara workers are left on the sidelines, then it's not a plan; it's actually a betrayal of Ontario jobs. Workers in Niagara are looking at the cranes in the sky, the trucks on the roads, and the enormous investments being made, and they ask,

“Why wasn't this work done here? Why wasn't this an opportunity for good-paying local jobs?” They deserve an answer from this government.

In St. Catharines, we know the potential of local industry. We've seen companies innovate through economic downturns and global competition. Take Biolyse Pharma, a homegrown Niagara pharmaceutical company that has been trying for years to expand production and strengthen domestic drug supply. This is exactly the type of Ontario manufacturing that should benefit from buy-Ontario policies—firms with deep community roots; highly skilled, in-demand workers; and the ability to fill, obviously, gaps in the domestic supply chain.

However, instead of supporting innovators like Biolyse, this government has spent years putting up roadblocks. The consequences became painfully clear during the pandemic, when we discovered just how vulnerable Ontario was because of lack of domestic manufacturing capacity in critical sectors.

If Bill 72 is going to be more than just empty branding, then it must ensure that companies like Biolyse and all innovators in Niagara are positioned to grow, to thrive and to serve the public interest.

Speaker, as we consider Bill 72, there is another essential piece to this conversation: community benefits agreements, or CBAs.

Just a few days ago, I met with the Niagara benefits network, an impressive coalition of labour, community organizations and workforce planners working to secure a CBA for the Garden City Skyway twinning project. They know CBAs work. They have seen how they drive local hiring, apprenticeships and economic development when they are built into the procurement process right from day one. Ontario has a shining example: the almost-completed Gordie Howe International Bridge between Windsor and Detroit. That project includes one of the most comprehensive CBAs in the country, covering local job targets, apprenticeship pathways, environmental protections, neighbourhood investments, and commitments to support groups historically excluded from the trades. The CBA on the Windsor-Detroit bridge created hundreds of jobs, expanded training opportunities, and ensured the residents actually benefit from a massive public investment happening in their backyard. Why shouldn't Niagara receive these same benefits?

The Garden City Skyway project is a once-in-a-generation investment. It is expected to take years, employ thousands, and reshape the fiscal landscape of the area. Without a CBA, we are risking and repeating exactly what happened with the original contract awards—foreign firms winning major components of the project, while workers in Niagara look on from the sidelines. This is totally unacceptable.

Bill 72 lays out a framework for prioritizing Ontario goods and services; however, the government should go further and embed CBA requirements directly into the procurement directives. Doing so would ensure local hiring is not just a hope, but a direct requirement. It would guarantee apprenticeships for young people across Niagara.

It would also help create opportunities for equity-seeking groups, newcomers, and workers who need clear pathways into the skilled trades.

Niagara is ready. Our workforce is ready. The Niagara benefits network is ready. Now we need the province to show it's ready, too.

1510

Bill 72 may give the government the tools to finally deliver a meaningful buy-Ontario approach, but tools are only useful when they are actually used. We cannot repeat the pattern we have already seen, like:

- a \$140-million hospital facade contract in Mississauga awarded to a US-based firm;

- WSIB jobs outsourced to an American corporation; and

- foreign firms pre-qualified for major hospital builds.

If Buy Ontario still sends contracts overseas while Niagara workers wait, then this is not policy; it's politics. St. Catharines and Niagara deserve a lot better.

If this government is serious about Buy Ontario, then let us work together to ensure this bill lives up to its name—including all of Niagara, where the need is real and the opportunity is there.

Residents of St. Catharines are not asking for special treatment. They are just asking for fairness. They are asking for a government that believes in Ontario workers. They want a government that believes Ontario workers right here at home are the best there is—not overseas or in other countries. Let's give them a buy-Ontario strategy that's worth considering.

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

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: It's an honour to rise today to speak to Bill 72, the Buy Ontario Act. I have to say it's a little bit ironic, coming from this government.

This is a government that gave a sole-sourced contract to Staples. They closed down locally run ServiceOntario small businesses in my riding of Don Valley West and across the province, to put them into Staples, an American-owned company.

It's also the government that has given a mega-billion dollar deal—who knows how much it will really cost us all—to a foreign-owned spa to develop Ontario Place. In fact, they're closing the Ontario Science Centre, which still is upsetting residents in my riding of Don Valley West and in Don Valley East and surrounding areas, who used that beautiful building, when it was open, for education and for recreation. Now they won't have that chance, because it's moving to the lake, again, to benefit a foreign-owned company—a 95-year lease too, by the way. Let's not forget that.

I find it really ironic that this government is now introducing this Buy Ontario Act, but I get why they want to do it: because they want to distract from their failure on job creation. This government promised 300,000 manufacturing jobs in 2018. It has become a joke. They've delivered less than 10% of that—less than 10% in almost eight years in government. So, yes, it seems like a good strategy to try something new, try a shiny bauble over

here—“Let's put something out called the Buy Ontario Act.”

I want to thank my colleagues from Ottawa–Vanier and from Orléans, who did a great job highlighting the flaws in this bill and why it's really difficult to support, even though we do support, of course, Ontario businesses across all of our ridings. We want them to succeed.

It was less than two weeks ago that I rose for the first time to debate this bill on first reading. At that time, I expressed concern—not because the government says they want to support Ontario businesses, but about how this government proposes in this bill to do that. This government is once again going down a legislative path without adequate consultation or due diligence.

Here we are again, today, with a major bill that gives this government unchecked power. It's not going to committee. It's going to go straight to third reading. I think that's really troubling. But of course, it's not surprising, because, as my colleague from Ottawa–Vanier pointed out last week while debating time allocation on this bill and others, the government has used time allocation on 19 out of the 23 bills it has introduced. That's got to be a record, and that's a bad one.

There are no hearings before committee—no expert testimony, no engagement with municipalities, businesses, labour, or the public. If the government were really concerned about helping Ontario businesses, they would actually invite them to the table. They would invite them to committee and say, “Tell us what you think about this bill. Will it really help you? How might it hinder you?” That's the idea—go to committee and get ideas, get feedback, so you don't have unintended consequences from a bill. We could have actually strengthened this bill at committee. There are many stakeholders who have yet to have a chance to comment on this bill, because it is a complex bill, and they haven't had time to do their homework—yet, here we have the government going to pass the bill anyway, without giving them that time.

A few groups have spoken up about this bill. The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives describes the Buy Ontario Act as a missed opportunity. Here's what they said:

“The Ontario government is justified in pursuing procurement localism, but the Buy Ontario Act is fraught with execution and implementation challenges....

“The Buy Ontario Act is largely a rebranding of an existing policy”—the BOBI Act, which this bill repeals. “While there are a couple of improvements, it is thwarted by existing trade commitments, data gaps and public sector deficiencies. It leaves the impression the government of Ontario wanted to repackage existing initiatives for the symbolic benefit.”

One of the central concerns with this bill is that it gives cabinet the ability and the power to pick winners. We know what happens when this government has that kind of power.

We see with the scandal-plagued Skills Development Fund that even when this government says it has criteria for how they will pick winners, they don't use that

criteria—and the outcome wasn't fair, wasn't transparent and wasn't accountable, according to the Auditor General. In the Skills Development Fund, the government is overlooking hundreds of highly qualified applicants in favour of low-scoring ones, many of whom are connected to government insider friends and lobbyists. News stories are breaking every day, as we talked about this morning.

Now we have the direction for creating procurement policies to be dictated by the Management Board of Cabinet. When did they become experts in procurement? I don't think they're experts in that. So why would the government do that? I think, again, it's unchecked power.

This bill says that the board may “issue directives requiring public sector entities to comply with specific procurement policies, procedures or standards.” And what can these directives require? They can “require a public sector entity to which it applies to take any measures respecting the procurement of goods and services.” So the government can tell any one of these entities that it deems to be a public sector entity exactly what it wants it to buy, and maybe from whom. That is not fair, not transparent, and absolutely not accountable.

This act represents massive government power over spending in this province. While the language suggests directives should be used to focus the public sector on local procurement, it gives the government the power to direct those entities to spend—again, as I say—how the government wants them to spend. Maybe they will have a friend who's doing business in Don Valley West and say, “You should get this business over another local business”—that might be equally or better qualified, and maybe with a lower price, but they might give to their friend. That's not what we want. We want all businesses to have a fair opportunity to do business with this government.

We know that organizations that do not comply with the directives face some serious consequences. Again, the red tape that's going to be created by this bill is going to make it very hard for small businesses to actually understand how they would comply—even for public entities deemed to be public sector agencies.

I think about a children's aid society, for example. They are stretched as it is. How are they going to find the resources and staff to dig through and understand the complexities of this kind of bill; to make sure that they are complying, at risk of getting their funding cut off?

How can we be expected to believe that this time, the government won't use this massive power to pick the winners that it wants? We just can't.

1520

Instead of creating a level playing field, this bill will risk strengthening the position of large, well-established players, while squeezing out smaller businesses. We heard earlier in the debate how many small companies—innovative companies—in Ontario have just thrown their hands up, because they can't get a government contract. We don't really understand all the whys. They say it's complex; it's hard to get on the list. This is not going to make it easier. It's going to make it harder for them. There

are so many layers and people in cabinet who can say, at the stroke of a pen, “Oh, we're going to change the directives next week to look like this,” and that could favour a completely different company, unfairly.

We know that the Association of Municipal Managers, Clerks and Treasurers of Ontario—these are the people who run our city, who oversee the city budgets and manage spending and procurement. These are the people who know. They're dealing with these people every day. They've said that these smaller firms may find themselves unable to meet rigid supply chain requirements or certification demands that favour those with deeper pockets and broader reach.

This is a system that will result in rewarding size, not innovation. It will entrench market concentration rather than encourage healthy competition. And, ultimately, that hurts all of us. That hurts Ontario's economy. It reduces opportunity. It stifles growth and forces many small and medium-sized enterprises to watch from the sidelines as government procurement processes continue to remain inaccessible.

Based on past performance, it's difficult to have confidence that the entity that could be tasked with managing part of this process, Supply Ontario, is equipped to handle it responsibly. The Auditor General's report on personal protective equipment procurement and inventory management revealed deep problems at Supply Ontario. They can't even manage the basic inventory of masks, and they wasted a billion dollars of taxpayer money because of it.

There's also a serious issue regarding our obligations under interprovincial and international trade agreements. We want to be doing business in Canada, with our partners, with the provinces across this great country, so that we are all stronger. Several of the measures contemplated here appear to conflict directly with those agreements. If we proceed with the procurement rules that violate the terms of our trade commitments, we open ourselves up to legal challenges, trade disputes and potential retaliatory measures from our closest partners and friends—our provinces and territories across the country.

To close: This bill gives too much power to this government, with no transparency or accountability. We can't trust this government with \$2.3 billion in the Skills Development Fund. We couldn't trust them with the science centre and Ontario Place, where they gave a mega deal to a foreign-owned company. We couldn't trust them with the greenbelt. And we certainly can't trust them with this latest Buy Ontario Act.

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

Hon. Nina Tangri: With 30 seconds on the clock, I just want to say that Bill 72 is more than just a policy; it's a promise to protect Ontario jobs, empower local businesses, and build a province that thrives in the face of global challenges.

With that, I urge all members to support this bill and help build a stronger, more self-reliant Ontario.

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

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I am glad to have some time on the clock and to be able to speak to the Buy Ontario Act, Bill 72. This is a bill that has three schedules. We've focused a lot on the buy-Ontario section. There's also a Highway Traffic Act section—and don't worry, I'm going to talk about that a bit.

But first of all, I want to say that this is an opportunity for us to talk about opportunities in this province. If we are buying-Ontario, we also need to be building Ontario—and as a girl from Oshawa, I know that we can build it well. People think of Oshawa and they think of automotive, but we also need to be looking at the future and not just holding on to the jobs we have. Yes, absolutely, we have to protect those jobs, but we also should be taking this opportunity to imagine a brighter future for those workers and for the province.

This is a government—a government that has fleet vehicles. How many of those could be made in Oshawa? We make fantastic trucks. Do any of the government ministry employees drive trucks? This is a chance to look at what we're doing well in the province and do it better.

In debate, we have been hearing about small and medium-sized businesses that aren't able to grow in the way that they would imagine or envision, that they might have to reach out to different provinces or other countries because there's some stupid barrier in the way that needs to be identified and moved. So this is the time to be getting creative and getting down to brass tacks and getting barriers out of the way for small and medium-sized businesses.

But when we look at large businesses, when we look at a company like General Motors Canada, when we look at Stellantis, who is wreaking havoc on real people, on real lives, this is a government that needs to make deals and make agreements with companies, be at the table, but attach strings. Because those strings attached means that jobs stay in communities.

And nobody wants to hear what this government is talking about with retraining. Okay, yes, we want retraining, if and when that is what is necessary, but we should be fighting like heck to save those jobs.

I remember when GM was going to pull the chute. We were in it to win it, we were fighting for those jobs, and this Premier said to me something along the lines of the fact that I was peddling false hope. But I will always have hope for the people in Oshawa. I will always believe in auto workers and people who get up and go to work and want to make their communities better, want to build a quality product for their communities and neighbours. Good jobs are worth fighting for.

But also, let's be smart and listen to small and medium-sized businesses who are saying, "If only this problem were out of my way, I could sell to the province, I could get in on that procurement, I could be successful and grow from small to medium or medium to large." That is what North America used to be about, that, we'll say, North American dream.

The government needs to see this bill, this moment as an opportunity and not miss out. When I have meetings

with companies—like, I met with a gentleman about flooring. His customers are not actually in the province of Ontario, but he makes a fantastic product that sells around the world. You may recall the story not too long ago, the hospital flooring that was such a mess. That was not his product, but he's not able to get in on that job because somebody knows buddy knows somebody who went to school with somebody. And all of that procurement chain, all of those subcontractors, all of those decisions are made behind the P3 curtain. We need to be smart about these big projects and making sure that procurement is fair, that there's some transparency and that this government doesn't just hand it over to the P3. "Just let them figure it out" means Ontario businesses don't have a fair kick at the can.

So, Speaker, we want made-in-Ontario. We want made-in-Oshawa. Friendly amendment: Let's call this the "made-in-Oshawa act"; maybe that can be after the recess. But let's look at manufacturers in the province, see what they're doing well and figure out how we can help them to do it better.

I met with a company when the Canadian manufacturers were here at Queen's Park having really heavy conversations with us about the realities faced by a lot of them in manufacturing. We don't make equipment like the big heavy machinery, like earth-moving equipment. They make it in the States. They make it elsewhere. We used to have John Deere here; they've moved to the States—big heavy machinery that we rely on for various construction projects, right? But we have the rest of that supply chain. So you picture that link in the chain of making the heavy equipment here; we don't, but we do all of the rest of that chain, the repair pieces, the parts—all of that. So that link is breaking, and the rest of the chain is going to be lost if we don't figure out how to get those large manufacturers here, to come to the province. I'm hoping this bill is that opportunity.

But, Speaker, I'm very frustrated by the fact that we don't get to have committee on this bill. This government has chosen to skip committee. Maybe they've been having really inspiring, great meetings with experts in manufacturing and folks in business. We don't get to know as opposition because they'll be happening behind closed doors.

1530

But here's the problem: I have been having those meetings; so have all of my colleagues, maybe even the third party—maybe. I'll tell you, you should be using us better, because the conversations we're having are a lot of people who come to us, and they're not whistle-blowers per se, although that happens too, but they will flag issues, and we want to be able to share that with the ministers. Some ministers—you guys are great. You've got great staff; we have good relationships. Others—partisan hacks who don't answer the phone. You can guess who is who. But we have great information to share that comes from industry and comes from business, and those folks want to be able to identify ways to do this better or tripwires that we need to avoid if we want to do this well.

So it is a huge mistake to not have committee. That in and of itself—I shouldn't vote for this bill, except that I support buying Ontario and making Ontario. But you're doing this poorly—no surprise, but still disappointing. When you have a chance to do things, you don't tend to do them well. I say that as the critic for infrastructure and transportation, and I could give a whole giant speech that is as long as the 95-year lease about the foreign-owned spa at Ontario Place, but anyway.

The Ontario NDP proposed a buy-Ontario, build-Ontario strategy that would have prioritized procurement, supported domestic supply chains and directed infrastructure spending to local industries. We also called for the Ontario-first procurement. This is a chance that the government has had with us, and they've voted against it, so I hope they actually mean it this time. Anyway, this is the time not only to buy Ontario but to believe in Ontario and to listen to Ontario and do it better.

Speaker, in this bill there is a second schedule, on the Highway Traffic Act, and it is about the supersized speed limit signs. It was a mistake for this government to outlaw automated safety cameras in school zones. Legislating giant speed limit signs to replace speed cameras will not keep kids safe. These mega signs are too big to be secured on existing poles. They don't come with the necessary posts to secure them. And these signs will block sightlines of drivers and pedestrians if installed at ground level. If posted, they'll be too high, like what we're seeing in Ottawa. You could fit, like, four kids behind those signs. This is not safe. Four kids in a trench coat, that's what I'm picturing, except that—

Interjection.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I don't mean to make light of it, because people will be hurt.

The gas pump stickers didn't stick. The licence plates couldn't be seen at night or in sunlight or in the rain. And now we have these giant signs. For a Premier that is normally so motivated by polls, it seems unbelievable that he didn't factor them in when choosing supersized traffic signs. Maybe Ontarians should see this as a sign that the Premier should stick to provincial matters.

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

Pursuant to the order of the House from earlier today, I am now required to put the question.

Mr. Crawford has moved third reading of 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. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I declare the motion carried.

Be it resolved that the bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

Third reading agreed to.

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

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

Mr. Flack moved third 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 Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): I recognize the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Hon. Rob Flack: It is an honour for me to rise today to speak once again to the Barrie — Oro-Medonte — Springwater Boundary Adjustment Act, 2025.

Speaker, this legislation is about one thing above all else: supporting the continued growth, stability and prosperity of Simcoe county. This bill does this by giving the city of Barrie the certainty and the room it needs to keep building homes and creating jobs.

Barrie is growing. This is undeniable and at the heart of why I am standing here today. It is growing faster than almost any other community in Ontario. In the last two years alone, its population has increased by nearly 13%, a pace few could have predicted, and one that reflects the extraordinary demand to live, work, study, play and build in this important region in Ontario.

Families continue to choose Barrie for opportunity. Employers choose it because of its access to transportation and talent. Students choose it for its post-secondary institutions. Entrepreneurs choose it because of its strategic location in the province's economic corridor, linking north to south.

You simply cannot talk about the future of Simcoe county without recognizing Barrie's central role. It is the regional hub for health care, post-secondary education, transportation, commerce and employment. Every surrounding municipality depends on Barrie's services.

That growth, however, brings pressure, as we have seen throughout Ontario—pressure that requires planning, clarity and decisive action. Barrie is on track to nearly doubling its size over the next 25 years, growing from 169,000 residents today to nearly 300,000 by 2051—almost doubling, Speaker. Employment growth is projected to reach 150,000 jobs by that very same year. This is not abstract forecasting. This is the lived reality on the ground: people arriving, businesses expanding and investment accelerating at an extraordinary pace.

But there is a problem, Speaker—a simple structural problem that cannot be wished away: Barrie has no remaining developable land inside its boundary that can be brought into the urban area to support future population and future job growth. Without expanding its boundaries,

Barrie will run out of residential land in the 2030s and run out of employment land in the 2040s.

We are preparing for the future. While that sounds far in terms of planning at this very instant in time, we need to take action today to address this challenge.

When a major urban centre hits a planning ceiling, the impact is not limited to its borders. Businesses stall, investments hesitate, servicing uncertainty grows, and the cost always falls onto the people of the region. We cannot allow that to happen—not for Barrie and not for Simcoe county as a whole.

That is why our government is taking action. We are supporting growth by introducing legislation that would transfer 1,673 hectares of land located in the townships of Oro-Medonte and Springwater to the city of Barrie. This boundary adjustment responds directly to the region's long-term needs and reflects what every local partner already acknowledges: Barrie needs additional land to grow, and the region needs Barrie to grow with it.

Speaker, these lands are not chosen at random. They are strategically located. They can be serviced quickly and cost-effectively, and they allow the city to deploy existing servicing capacity, including major water and waste water infrastructure that Barrie has already built and paid for, so that new homes, job sites, schools and community services can move forward without delay.

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This boundary adjustment will unlock up to 8,000 new homes, housing more than 23,000 people by 2051. It will ensure that major economic investments continue, and it will align growth with key transportation infrastructure projects, including the Barrie GO line expansion and the Bradford Bypass.

Speaker, Barrie is not just another city in the region. It is the largest urban centre in Simcoe county and serves as the regional hub, as I have said, for transportation, health care, education and employment. This legislation ensures that Barrie's existing infrastructure works for its transit networks and arterial roads, its GO rail connections and its large-scale water and waste water systems so they can be used to support housing and job creation in a way that benefits all of Simcoe county. That point is essential, Speaker. This is not legislation that benefits one municipality at the expense of another. It is legislation that strengthens the economic engine of the entire region by making sure growth happens where infrastructure already exists to support it.

I want to turn to the extensive work that brought us here today. For 18 months, the Office of the Provincial Land and Development Facilitator worked closely with the city of Barrie, the townships of Oro-Medonte and Springwater, and the county of Simcoe. The goal was simple, right from the very beginning: to identify a local solution that would allow Barrie to grow in a way that is aligned with servicing capacity and regional planning needs. The facilitator reviewed engineering reports, legal submissions, community feedback, servicing models and growth projections. Every option was explored. Every perspective was considered. Listening took place, Speaker.

But despite genuine effort and goodwill from every municipality—I want to emphasize that: goodwill from every municipality—consensus could not be reached at the end. Meanwhile, significant development projects, including more than 2,500 homes, a future high school, a long-term-care facility, a hospice and employment lands were left in limbo as planning uncertainty grew. Residents, business owners and community institutions were unable to move forward.

Speaker, uncertainty is the enemy of progress. We're seeing that in our economy today with the threats south of the border. Uncertainty is the enemy of progress. In a region growing as quickly as Simcoe county, delay is not a neutral act; it is a decision with real costs for families, for employers and for the municipalities themselves.

With a municipal election approaching and ward boundary decisions looming, waiting until 2027 was simply not an option, Speaker. After reviewing all evidence and submissions, the facilitator concluded that legislation was the only viable path forward to get us across the finish line and, Speaker, we agreed.

This bill transfers the necessary land—approximately, again, 1,673 hectares—to the city of Barrie. It ensures continuity of planning approvals. It authorizes the minister to make regulations for financial compensation—an important piece, Speaker—transitional ward boundary changes and the phasing in of property tax changes. It ensures an orderly, predictable transition for residents and businesses alike. This is responsible. This is modern boundary adjustment. It respects the role of every municipality while ensuring the region's long-term needs are met.

Speaker, I also want to be clear about the scope. This transfer represents only 2.3% of Springwater's land area and only 0.8% of Oro-Medonte's. These are small portions of land in percentage terms, but are strategically located lands that can unlock homes, job sites and economic opportunity for the entire Simcoe region.

The legislation also ensures that the Office of the Provincial Land and Development Facilitator will continue to work with all affected municipalities to guide implementation and shape next steps. The goal is not only clarity, Speaker, but co-operation and orderly transition that respects residents, businesses and local concerns. This is a long-term plan for a region experiencing long-term growth. Barrie's infrastructure is already aligned to support this development—again, already aligned, in place. The Barrie GO line carried 4.3 million riders in 2024. By 2041, that number is expected to reach between 10 million and 14 million, Speaker. We need to grow. We need to create the conditions to allow this to take place.

The Bradford Bypass will link Highways 400 and 404, strengthening the flow of goods and people right across the region.

These are not theoretical conveniences, Speaker. They are transformative projects shaping the region's growth pattern right now. Growth must follow infrastructure, and in Simcoe county the infrastructure clearly points to Barrie, Ontario.

The future of the Highway 400 economic corridor is also at stake. Local leaders have called the employment

potential of these lands a game-changer. They represent the next generation of job creation, jobs that keep people closer to home, reducing commuting times and strengthening communities.

Again, this legislation is not about where Barrie grows. It's about how Simcoe county grows and whether planning decisions today support or hinder the prosperity of the next generation.

People deserve clarity about who provides their services, who plans their neighbourhoods and how their communities will grow. This legislation provides the clarity. It replaces uncertainty with a coherent, regionally aligned approach grounded in evidence and driven by the needs of families and employers. It aligns growth with infrastructure. It supports new homes, and it supports jobs. It strengthens planning certainty across municipal boundaries, and it ensures that Barrie has the room it needs to serve their entire county.

Speaker, the Barrie — Oro-Medonte — Springwater Boundary Adjustment Act, 2025, is practical, fair and forward-looking. It's a solution to a challenge that has been decades in the making. It gives Barrie the land it needs. It supports Springwater and Oro-Medonte through a clear transition framework. It enables new housing, new employment areas and new investment aligned with existing infrastructure. And it ensures that Simcoe county continues to grow, continues to lead and continues to thrive.

For all these reasons, I urge all members of this House to support this legislation. It's common sense, Speaker. It's going to support growth. It's time to pass this legislation. Thank you for your time and attention.

The Chair (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): Further debate.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I'd like to thank the minister for his comments as I follow him. I think he's a great guy. We get along extremely well. But I think he also knows quite well from me that I do not trust his government. I would not trust his government to organize a bun fight in a bakery. He knows that I would not trust his government to pour water out of a boot if the instructions were on the heel.

As I rise today to talk about Bill 76, the Barrie annexation proposal, I want to be clear from the outset: I oppose this bill. I oppose it because it raises serious concerns about transparency, about fairness and the long-term impacts on communities, farm families and residents in the affected areas. This bill would annex roughly 4,100 acres of land from the townships of Oro-Medonte and Springwater into the city of Barrie, effective January 1, 2026.

These lands are listed in the bill schedule, but what is truly striking and what is truly troubling is that the government gives itself the power to completely change that list retroactively, through ministerial regulation. This means that the lands listed today may not be the lands annexed tomorrow. In effect, the government is handing itself sweeping authority over the fate of these communities without clear limits or accountability.

Speaker, this raises the question and it's asking the question, why would you need to create a list at all when you have possibly no intention of abiding by that list? The list is almost meaningless entirely.

All township property in the annexed areas—roads, sewers, easements and other infrastructure—would immediately vest in Barrie. Township reserve funds for maintaining this property would transfer to the city, while other assets and liabilities remain with the townships.

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Barrie's bylaws and resolutions would extend to the annexed areas, effectively replacing township governance, with only a few exceptions for zoning, traffic and other prescribed bylaws. Property taxes for annexed agricultural land would be phased in over 20 years, and five years for other properties, with immediate increases in cases of ownership change.

These details may seem administrative by nature, but they reflect profound changes to local autonomy. Municipalities have been placed in a position where they have limited say over what happens to their land, what happens to their infrastructure and what happens in their communities.

The process bypasses the existing Municipal Act annexation procedures, which are designed to ensure majority support, consultation and transparency. You remember that word, Speaker: this word that the government likes to use but doesn't actually like to show or to exemplify. This bill seems—instead of transparency—to shortcut democratic governance.

The background of this proposal is also similarly concerning. While discussions have been facilitated between Barrie, Oro-Medonte, Springwater and Simcoe county for months, the bill itself was introduced with very little notice. Residents, landowners and stakeholders learned of this legislation only after it was tabled. This approach limits the ability of effective communities to meaningfully provide input and raises questions about whether proper consultation has taken place. And here we are again, Speaker, with a time-allocated piece of legislation. I believe the number of pieces of legislation we have—I believe we've had 19 out of 23 pieces of legislation in this House that have been time-allocated.

The proposal is controversial among residents. Oro-Medonte, for example, is home to valuable farmland, wetlands and cherished homes. Many residents have expressed deep opposition to the annexation, concerned not only about the immediate changes, but also about the precedent it sets for future provincial interference and local planning decisions.

I mean, from the greenbelt, from the science centre, from Ontario Place, there are tremendous concerns about this government and what their motives are for all of their land-grab schemes, all of the gift and all of the handouts for connected Conservative insiders. And I'm sure, with that list, there are far more that we could add to them, such as Bill 33, trying to seize vacant schools that are owned by school boards. The list goes on and on.

Now, conditional approvals from Oro-Medonte and Simcoe county include requests around land use and

employment conversions, yet these conditions are not reflected in the bill, leaving the community in uncertainty about how these commitments will be enforced.

In Springwater, the situation has been even more complicated. The majority of council opposed the annexation, but their decision has been overridden, leaving questions about the lawfulness of the process.

Legal advisers have raised concerns that there are alternatives to the annexation that could meet regional growth needs without stripping land from these communities. At the same time, there are potential conflicts of interest tied to other land developments in the area, which further complicates trust in the process.

We must also consider the broader implications of this legislation. This annexation is being justified as a solution to accommodate growth to 2051 and even 2061. Yet, despite this long planning horizon, the government wants the annexation to occur on January 1, 2026. This really unmitigated rush leaves little time for careful consideration of the long-term impacts of farmland preservation, infrastructure, local governance and the people who live there. We're already losing prime farmland at an alarming rate in Ontario: roughly 320 acres per day. Directing thousands of acres of this farmland into sprawl-oriented development will have irreversible consequences for local food security and economic resilience.

We know from experience that in other municipalities, like Ottawa, the forced amalgamations and restructuring do not deliver the promised efficiencies. Instead, they often lead to higher bureaucracy, weakened local identity and infrastructure deficits that burden the taxpayers for decades.

Growth in Simcoe county is not just a local issue. Decisions made here will influence land availability, development patterns and economic opportunities all across the region. This annexation will create winners and losers, with decisions being made under sweeping ministerial discretion, so it is really, truly unclear who is representing the public interest.

The people of Oro-Medonte, Springwater and surrounding areas deserve clarity on tax impacts, service levels, infrastructure responsibilities and fair compensation, but this bill, as it stands, leaves those critical questions to regulation, rather than codifying them transparently.

At its core, this is about respecting local democracy, fair governance and long-term planning. Municipalities should be partners in growth planning, not hostages to a top-down provincial decision. Communities must have a meaningful say in how their land is used, how infrastructure is managed and how growth is directed. Rushing a bill through without proper consultation undermines the democratic process and threatens the stability of the affected communities.

This annexation itself is a troubling precedent. If it proceeds unchecked, it signals to communities across Ontario that local voices can be bypassed, that processes designed to ensure fairness and transparency can be overridden and that ministerial discretion can trump council

decisions. That is not how we build trust or sustainable growth.

As I conclude, I urge this Legislature to prioritize the voices of residents, the voices of councils and the voices of farmers who are directly affected. Bill 76 should not move forward until there has been thorough consultation, clear accountability and transparency about compensation, land use and long-term planning. The stakes are too high for communities, for farmland and for the integrity of our local governments. For these reasons, I stand firmly in opposition to Bill 76.

To this government: This is a concern. This is yet another situation where we have the seizure of land, we have the undermining of local voices, and we have the disrespecting of rural voices and the disrespecting of the farm community. I urge you to vote against this bill. This needs to go to committee. It needs to go around the province. It needs to be fixed.

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

Mr. Adil Shamji: Thank you, Madam Speaker, for allowing me to speak to Bill 76, the Barrie — Oro-Medonte — Springwater Boundary Adjustment Act.

Inefficient development initiatives continue to serve as this government's *modus operandi*. I use the words "*modus operandi*" quite explicitly, because the government's MO has been coming under increasing scrutiny over the last few months and, frankly, years. Their MO has come under scrutiny by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police in regard to their misconduct around the greenbelt. It has come under scrutiny in the current scandal surrounding the Skills Development Fund. We now understand that their MO is under scrutiny in relation to some of their associates related to the Skills Development Fund, as will be investigated by the Ontario Provincial Police, as they announced just a short while ago this afternoon.

The most recent occasion for questioning their MO revolves around Bill 76 and its efforts to implement a boundary adjustment, moving land from the townships of Springwater and Oro-Medonte to the city of Barrie. I want to invite all members of this House to think carefully about why this will inevitably be an ineffective plan.

Most notably, this bill deviates from five decades of historic patterns of municipal boundary changes in Barrie, patterns that have been established on the basis of servicing capacity and necessity. To deviate from them without a good reason or explanation is to present a concerning, inefficient strategy under the facade of housing solutions.

But I'm not convinced this is an arbitrary decision. This bill looks to transfer more than 1,600 hectares of land in the townships. The government purports to open the door to thousands of new homes, new jobs and new investments, all of which are intended to support Ontario's municipalities in the housing crisis. This sounds quite grand, but the reality is, these are always the justifications for everything that this government does and for everything that this government always fails to deliver.

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If these things were, in fact, the goal of this legislation—for example, aiming to accelerate economic growth in Simcoe county, to align growth with the Barrie GO line and Bradford Bypass and to connect resources—if these were indeed the goals, then this legislation is a poorly conceived plan of action.

Barrie's road network only has one arterial road heading north, while all other roads are single-lane. By comparison, supporting infrastructure already exists south of Barrie across southern Ontario. Locals have consistently expressed that the infrastructure does not have the capacity to expand to the north and that the groundwork is already present in the south, so the rationale for this decision stems from outside of practicality in housing solution proposals.

Bill 76's initiative is to annex portions of the township of Springwater and the township of Oro-Medonte to the city of Barrie. To break down this proposal further, Barrie offered \$39 million in compensation to the townships, with Springwater receiving \$22 million in installments, and Oro-Medonte receiving a lump sum payment of over \$10 million in 2026. An additional \$850,000 over five years would be granted to Springwater to fund economic development initiatives, while the county of Simcoe would receive \$5 million.

In exchange, it is proposed that the property of Oro-Medonte, Springwater and the county of Simcoe in the annexed areas would be granted to the city of Barrie. This transaction would encompass any highways, fixtures, water lines and sewer systems that fall within the jurisdiction. However, it is not only physical properties that would be integrated in this transfer; beyond the geographical, other factors include any of the township's assets, liabilities and funds related to the boundary-shifting areas.

Similarly, the bill legislates that Oro-Medonte, Springwater and Simcoe must transfer to Barrie all and any studies, plans, records, data and designs that it has prepared, regardless of whether they were prepared for public access, if they relate to the annexed areas in any degree. Altogether, this bill grants power to Barrie at the cost of ignoring the voices of dissent from Oro-Medonte, Springwater and Simcoe. Moving forward with this decision would not only have implications for the housing crisis by failing to prevent adequate solutions, but also set a dangerous precedent, one that enables the enforcement of future annexation bypasses.

The transactional amounts discussed are not where the funding ends, either. In an unprecedented case of municipal compensation, Barrie is placing the burden of costs on its existing tax base. Paired with the \$39-million sum mentioned earlier, this bill would ultimately leave Barrie taxpayers paying twice to fund development-enabling infrastructure in the north, rather than pre-existing infrastructure in the south.

The benefits of this project are not for taxpayers, not for the residents of Barrie and not for Ontarians. Instead, local developers who donated to this government, who have

been publicly quoted supporting this boundary adjustment, are the sole recipients of the benefits.

With these factors in mind, I must draw attention to important queries: By leaving compensation to Oro-Medonte, Springwater and Simcoe up to regulations, how can we verify that the ministry will honour the deal that the municipalities have agreed to? And what are the ramifications if they don't? While I can't answer these questions myself, I can put forward this perspective: Bill 76 promises to be an ineffective proposal, and one that all members in this House should be warned to vote against.

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

Mr. Brian Saunderson: It's my pleasure today to rise on the behalf of my residents in Simcoe-Grey, which is a critical part of Simcoe county. In my riding, I have six of the 16 municipalities that make up Simcoe county. Having served on municipal council for eight years and on county council for eight years, I have a very strong connection with Simcoe county and the importance that that region plays in the economic future.

And so, I stand today to offer my strong support for Bill 76, the proposed Barrie — Oro-Medonte — Springwater Boundary Adjustment Act, 2025. And might I just say, in response to the comments of the member opposite from Don Valley—West?

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: No.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: My apologies. East? East—is that this legislation is dramatically different than the Liberal government's Barrie-Innisfil Boundary Adjustment Act, 2009. In that instance, over 4,000 acres were transferred and there was no compensation paid to Innisfil at all. His comments, respectfully, Madam Speaker, about the amount—this being done with improper planning and without any consultation with the municipalities—is completely incorrect at its very base.

I want to thank the minister and members of this government that have all spoken and worked very closely with the member municipalities on this transition. They have all spoken to the urgent necessity of this legislation and the compelling need to address housing and secure viable employment lands in the rapidly expanding region of Simcoe county. When I speak of that region, I speak not only of Simcoe county but also the separated cities of Barrie and Orillia that both purchase critical social support services from Simcoe county. It is in fact a collective; they all operate together for the betterment of the region. Their motto at Simcoe county is "For the Greater Good." I believe that, in keeping with that model, this legislation is for the greater good of the area of Simcoe county, including the two separated cities.

I want to acknowledge the enormous effort that was put forth by all parties involved: the city of Barrie, the townships of Oro-Medonte and Springwater, the county of Simcoe and, most particularly, the Office of the Provincial Land and Development Facilitator. Their detailed analysis, collaboration and dedication to the mediation process over the last 18 months have provided the necessary foundation for the legislation that we're debating today.

Speaker, Simcoe county is, in fact, one of the most dynamic areas in the province, growing extremely quickly but also contributing in terms of jobs and technological development, and building strong ties with its educational partners like Georgian College and Lakehead University to ensure a robust supply of skilled workers.

We've heard some of the statistics about the growth of Barrie. The population has grown by nearly 13% and is projected to double to almost 300,000 people by 2051. Concurrently, the number of jobs is set to reach 150,000.

Critical planning metrics in Simcoe county: The population is over 350,000 and projected to grow by over 55%, or 194,000 people, by 2051, so Simcoe county will have a population over half a million people. Corresponding to that, there will be a rise in jobs of almost 200,000, indicating the very important critical engine that that area provides for Ontario. The Simcoe region population will grow to over 900,000 people by 2051, with jobs to exceed over 350,000. These are critical metrics when we start talking about the boundary expansion and why it is necessary.

This bill is fundamentally about expanding career opportunities right here in Simcoe county by ensuring that Barrie has the land capacity for its growth for the 150,000 new jobs. We're creating a clear pathway for residents to live, work and build high-paying careers close to home not only in Barrie or Orillia, but also in Simcoe county, because it is a self-feeding circle—an ecosystem, Madam Speaker.

The purpose of this bill is to execute a necessary municipal restructuring that is fair to all properties and transfers approximately 1,673 hectares of lands from Oro-Medonte and Springwater to Barrie. It unlocks the potential for up to 8,000 new residential units, which will provide homes for an estimated 23,000 people by 2051.

I want to draw attention to the land composition, as referred to by the minister in his comments. Of the 1,673 hectares, approximately 803 hectares, or nearly half of the designated lands, will be deemed undevelopable and designated as conservation lands. The reason for including this critical green space in the transfer lies in the principle of holistic planning: to ensure that the areas come under proper stewardship. Of the remaining 870 hectares of land, 500 will be allocated for housing and 300 hectares will be allocated for employment under the stewardship of the city of Barrie, to ensure a unified long-term strategy for managing the growth responsibly. As part of the 18-month negotiation process and the hard work of the provincial land development facilitator, Hemson was retained to do a study on the land needs. They came up, through the proper planning process, with a report that indicated there was a need for 800 hectares—500 for residential purposes and 300 for employment purposes. That is exactly the metric that came up with the 870 acres that will be used for residential and employment uses.

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When we look, comparatively, at the land mass in the transfer, when we look at the lands that are coming out of Oro-Medonte and Springwater, in the case of Oro-

Medonte, the land is less than 1% of Oro-Medonte's land mass and just over 2% of Springwater's. However, in the context of Barrie, which is gaining those lands, it will give an increase of over 16.7% to the land mass of the city of Barrie. This strategic transfer of land is key to securing the necessary balance of housing, employment and protected green space for the wider regional population and is critical to the long-term sustainability of Simcoe county as a region.

Speaker, I want to be very clear on the legislative route that was necessary as the final step for this process. The standard process required the municipalities to negotiate a comprehensive agreement, hold public consultations and, ultimately, secure the unanimous agreement of their councils. That was pursued. Over 18 months, they worked very diligently. It was a very public process, with public input. And the proposal was made by Barrie that went to the town councils of Oro-Medonte, Springwater and the county council, the county of Simcoe. And there, in those processes, there were four public meetings held: one for the city of Barrie, one for the township of Oro-Medonte, one for the township of Springwater, and one for the county of Simcoe. All of these meetings invited public input. They were public meetings.

As the restructuring proposal that was ultimately drafted and approved by the municipalities after public input was put to the provincial land facilitator, these approvals contained conditions that could not be made part of a structural change. So the conditions imposed by the councils meant that the process could not legally proceed to the final step of a ministerial order. The law requires unconditional agreement, and that agreement was not secured.

This is a critical distinction. We hear from across the floor the need for public consultation and travelling this around the province—it has already been done. For 18 months, it has been done. So we're now at a point where we need to get this across the line before the end of this year, for reasons that I'll explain. This is not a process where we have imposed or bulldozed an answer. This is a process where we've facilitated, worked with the communities, worked with the mayors, worked with the councils. When the process resulted in a legal deadlock due to conditional approvals, we have a duty to govern.

I'd like to refer to a letter that Minister Flack received from the mayor of Oro-Medonte, Randy Greenlaw. This is what he wrote:

"On behalf of the township of Oro-Medonte council and staff, please accept our sincere appreciation for your continued support and commitment to advancing a mutually beneficial solution that addresses the city of Barrie's future land needs and supports the broader Simcoe county region.

"We recognize the significant time and effort you and ministry staff have dedicated to this initiative, which is critical to the region's long-term success. The township remains fully committed to achieving an outcome that aligns with provincial priorities and supports regional prosperity.

"I have also valued the opportunity to work collaboratively with neighbouring municipalities and with the Office of the Provincial Land and Development Facilitator throughout this process. Your team's professional and constructive approach has been greatly appreciated.

"As always, I remain available at your convenience and can be reached at the following numbers and email. Thank you again for your leadership and the important role your ministry plays in supporting growth and success across Simcoe county."

Madam Speaker, that is from the mayor of Oro-Medonte, one of three municipalities and Simcoe county that were involved in negotiations—writing to us about the process, thanking the minister for the collaboration and the extensive process that was undertaken. It is not a complaint; it is, in fact, lauding this government.

The legislative adjustment that we are putting through must be fair. This bill does not simply redraw lines and walk away; it ensures an orderly and equitable transition through regulation.

There is hard work in this transition still ahead. The provincial land development facilitator will continue its facilitation role to resolve critical issues—including fair compensation to the townships of Oro-Medonte and Springwater, a priority which the mayor of Oro-Medonte has outlined and our minister has committed to pursuing; and property tax changes in annexed areas will be phased in gradually to prevent sudden financial implications. This is a far cry from the type of annexation legislation passed in 2009 by the Liberal government, when there was no compensation for Innisfil—where they took over twice the land mass that we're talking about today, and for which I'm sure the mayor of Innisfil wrote no complimentary letters to the government of the day.

My time is up, but I can say, as a long-standing resident of Simcoe-Grey and a member of Simcoe county council who has dealt with each of the mayors in issue, and the warden, this is a measure that is much necessary to promote the greater good of Simcoe county. That's exactly what this government will do. And I invite all members of this House to support this.

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

MPP Catherine McKenney: Once again, we see complicated municipal restructuring being rushed through with little notice and almost no opportunity, again, for meaningful review or public input. Municipal councils, residents and community stakeholders were not given a full chance to understand this bill before it was tabled. And now, we are rushing it through—as we see with this government on so many of the bills that they bring in front of this House. If they just considered going to committee, there are experts and people that could make their bills better.

We have to also ask why the legislation is necessary at all. We already have a defined annexation process through part V of the Municipal Act, and that process requires majority consent from affected councils. It requires some public consultation. Every tool that the government needs

already exists in law for this to happen. So we have to ask ourselves why this government wants to abandon this statutory framework and bypass a process that is designed to protect local democracy and accountability. The only conclusion, of course, is that they chose speed over transparency again and imposed their preferred result rather than allowing negotiations to conclude properly.

Speaker, the implications, also, in this bill for land use are concerning. The annexation relies on growth projections that are rooted in sprawl-focused development assumptions—low-density expansion across greenfield land—and that require or will require massive investments in things like roads, infrastructure, servicing. This is the least cost-effective way to grow cities. We know that today. It locks municipalities into decades of higher maintenance costs and expanding infrastructure liabilities, while doing little to improve affordability or livability.

I speak from direct experience on this issue. The city that I represent—Ottawa Centre in Ottawa—underwent a forced amalgamation in 2001 by a former PC government. It was justified by many of the same arguments that we hear here today: cost-efficiency, cost savings, streamlined governance. I served on Ottawa city council for eight long years, and before that, I worked for the city almost from the time it was amalgamated until I entered elected office. I saw first-hand how forced amalgamation reshaped municipal governance, and not always for the better. In the case of Ottawa, it did not bring any savings, and it did not lead to more efficient service delivery. Instead, it increased the bureaucracy while weakening community representation. Nobody is happy. Nobody in the rural areas is happy. Nobody in the suburban areas is happy. And nobody in the urban areas feels that their community and the character of their community and the things that they care about have been protected.

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We know that we have independent research by the Fraser Institute—which I don't always go to for research. But the Fraser Institute confirmed what many of us already knew: that our municipal consolidation did not deliver the efficiencies that were promised, didn't lower costs, and it undermined public engagement in the city. And instead of savings, we inherited sprawling infrastructure and long-term financial liabilities that our residents are still bearing.

Today, Ottawa faces a massive infrastructure deficit—\$50 billion. That has gone from \$20 billion to \$50 billion in just a few years—and these are dollars that we don't have to invest in new services and new infrastructure. That \$50 billion will go to just maintain the infrastructure: the underground pipes and the roads and the roadwork that have already been built. So it's just there to maintain and then to eventually replace. But we can't continue to build the same way and expect different results in a few years, or 10 or 15 years from now. That \$50 billion will balloon again and, at some point, we will not be able to maintain and replace our infrastructure. And that burden was directly tied to expansion-driven planning. It prioritized outward sprawl over smart intensification.

We know that when you develop already serviced lands, it pays for itself—and actually more than pays for

itself. When we look at what it costs to develop on low-density greenfield development, it has been shown that for every unit built out on greenfield, it costs \$465 per person per year to maintain that type of development. We just cannot continue to sprawl and to build on our greenfield and on our agricultural lands.

All of us here in the NDP support building homes and housing development, but we believe that housing has to be built through smart growth, not heavy-handed governance—and that's what this bill is bringing us. That means focusing on development within already-serviced areas, protecting farmland, respecting municipal autonomy, and ensuring genuine community participation in planning decisions.

Residents in all of our municipalities deserve full transparency. They deserve to understand how taxes will change, how services will be delivered, what farmland will be lost, and what compensation arrangements will apply. They deserve committee hearings. They deserve to be able to show up and to ask questions and to provide advice.

For these reasons, we oppose Bill 76.

We urge the House to learn from what communities like Ottawa have already lived through, where forced restructuring promised efficiency but delivered higher costs, weaker local voices, and long-term infrastructure burdens that we just cannot afford. We should not repeat these mistakes. I urge all members to stand up for municipal democracy, responsible land use planning and the long-term public interest.

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

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: It's always a pleasure to rise in this House—unfortunately, not over this bill. Bill 76 reeks. It simply reeks. It is greenbelt-lite, and I can't believe you guys are going down that path again.

The title of the bill should actually be changed to “an act disrespecting the boundaries between the city of Barrie, the township of Oro-Medonte and the township of Springwater,” because there is no respect for two of those municipalities, and that would be Springwater and Oro-Medonte, unlike what has been said today.

I know the area. I grew up in Collingwood, as you know. We shopped at Barrie Georgian Mall for our back-to-school clothing. We went to Barrie quite a bit. My grandparents lived, at one point, at Eight Mile Point in Orillia, and at another point they had the Northcourt Motel in Orillia. We went through Springwater and Oro-Medonte a lot. So I'm familiar with that.

How this first came to light for me was at the regional governance reviews, which in of themselves are questionable—why we were doing that exercise in futility. We were in Barrie, and the mayor of Barrie came to the meeting—the standing committee on heritage, infrastructure and culture—and he dropped a glossy presentation on our desk. It had maps in it—maps of land that he wished to have, which is interesting for a mayor to want that. So I'm curious, and I'm listening to the reasons why—employment lands was the main one, housing secondary. What happened afterwards was that the representatives

from Springwater and Oro-Medonte came to me and said, “Can we see that map? We think our lands are on that map, but we have not seen that map.” I thought, “Wow, that is quite peculiar, that one municipality would have a map just drawn up”—it's like a game of Risk, rolling the dice, and I'm taking over that land and I'm taking over that land, without consulting the neighbouring municipalities. That was my first clue. Where did this come from? Who did the maps? Staff at the city of Barrie—were they directed to do the maps? Were these maps created by developers? Is it developer-driven? Where did the maps come about? There's a question for you, reporters, if you're listening. I have a bunch of questions, actually.

Why the rush for this? Barrie did a comprehensive official plan review a few years ago, and guess what? No land needs were specified. Just a few years back—no land needs specified with a comprehensive official plan review. We do official plan reviews every 10 years. The next one for Barrie would be 2031, so why not wait until then, or why not take a pause? Simcoe is undergoing a review right now. So why not take a pause, do a yoga breath, you guys—it will be good for you—and deal with this comprehensively in the Simcoe review. Why the rush?

Also, why is the ERO on Bill 76 open until December 25, Christmas Day? Why is the ERO open until then, when you're trying to ram this through today? Can someone explain that to me? Why have the ERO? Are you duping the public? “Hey, we want to hear from you, but actually we voted it through weeks ago.” Do you think people are dumb? Do you think Ontarians aren't aware of this? Explain that to me. Why is the ERO open until Christmas Day?

Has the government considered the natural heritage features, the class 1 farmland, the wetlands, Indigenous consultation? No way have you considered any of those if you're ramming it through today.

1630

What is the rush? If you actually wanted to build housing, Springwater is ready. They're keen. They're mobilized. They are competent. They have a better balance sheet than Barrie. They're not some backwoods hick area. They are smart and capable, and they want to build in their own area. In fact, there's a plan for 10,000 homes already approved in Midhurst—10,000 homes in Midhurst—but all of a sudden, we need 8,000 over here. Hmm, that's very curious.

I like salmon, I like halibut, and I like tilapia, but I don't like the fishiness of this Bill 76. I'm telling you that right now.

There's the Midhurst land group, and they've had a fabulous relationship with Springwater for 20 years. They're good developers building the right thing the right way, not doing any of this speed-rolling development.

Springwater is no shrinking violet; they can do the servicing. They are ready and able to do the servicing.

Another thing that's curious—why is there the push for this cross-border servicing, when Springwater could build the homes and do it themselves in Springwater? “Nope, we're in a hurry. We got to do this cross-border servicing.”

When Barrie will have to rip up Bayfield Street—are you hearing that, businesses on Bayfield? If we can't even open the Eglinton Crosstown in 15 years, how long do you think you're going to be out of business on Bayfield Street when you rip it up to the tune of—what? A billion dollars? Half a billion dollars?

The pipes are too small in Barrie. There's an ailing sewage plant on Lakeshore. It will be a colossal nightmare. You'll have to microtunnel. Businesses will struggle, and it's completely unnecessary. It's a disaster. It makes no sense. Members across are talking about common sense. I don't see it. Springwater is ready and able. But, no, Barrie wants it. Barrie gets what Barrie wants.

Now we'll go on to the strong-mayor powers which the government put in. Within 48 hours of Springwater getting that strong mayoral ability, all of a sudden, the strong-mayor powers were used by the mayor of Springwater. So let's talk about the abuse and misuse of the strong mayoral powers. Within 48 hours, the strong-mayor powers were used for this boundary change—how chomping at the bit were they?—against most of the councillors' wishes, so I don't know about those letters of support. It's very curious, indeed. Then a councillor moved an injunction. They moved an injunction because it adversely affects the municipality of Springwater—smart councillor. Guess what? Strong mayoral powers were used to block that injunction. Wow—that's working collaboratively with your team.

Then a judicial review was proposed to look into the use and abuse of strong mayoral powers with the mayor of Springwater. Guess what? Strong mayoral powers were used to kill the judicial review idea. Are you kidding me? How ironic is that? I'm pretty sure that the government specified that, legally, these strong-mayor powers would be used surgically and precisely and not the like the Wild West for whatever you want.

It's not about building housing either. So, the strong-mayor powers were to be used to help propel housing forward. But these were used for annexation, boundary changes and control. And—get this—the town lawyer said this is a terrible plan for Springwater. Guess what? The mayor of Springwater fired that lawyer with the strong-mayor powers. Woah, what kind of Netflix show is this? You can't even make it up. You guys, this makes the greenbelt look tame, like a boring story. This doesn't even pass the sniff test.

Was there ever a motion on the Barrie council's agenda to enter into an agreement with Oro-Medonte and Springwater? Was there? Was there? Was there? No, no, no. So, you would think three municipalities are working so cohesively together if you listen to the government, but it's actually led by two mayors, the mayor of Barrie and the mayor of Springwater, meeting and working in the shadows: no minutes, no agendas—very, very interesting.

And then the facilitation: Well, that was just a sham. It allowed the municipalities the illusion of involvement and that they actually had a say. But it never was amongst the municipalities. It was always the mayors: the mayor of Springwater and the mayor of Barrie. And who directed

them? Was it just their ideas that popped up, or was it some landowners in the area?

By the way, there's lots of land changing hands right now and being bought up recently, because we're in a hurry. Forget about the ERO. Attention Ontarians: Don't answer. Don't submit anything for the Bill 76 ERO because they're going to pass this sham—this farce—today at the speed of light.

And then there was the Hemson report. The Hemson report was commissioned: "This joint lands needs analysis and study evaluates land requirements for the city of Barrie and the townships of Oro-Medonte and Springwater to accommodate growth to 2051"—oh yeah, because it was changed from 2031 because the goal posts kept moving, moving, moving up. It doesn't say what we want it to say so let's just move it, rejig it, manipulate it, figure it out. We'll see.

So, here's the executive summary in case you don't want to read the whole report: "Barrie likely has sufficient employment area land to meet long-term demand through 2051." Barrie has the land, right here on the report that was commissioned—there you go. So, what are we doing, moving around and encroaching on other areas? Why was there a map years ago at the regional governance review? Come on.

"Annexation of additional lands would not solve the immediate shortfall due to multi-year timelines for land use and infrastructure planning and development." Interesting.

1640

"South Barrie lands hold a competitive advantage"—south Barrie lands, not north where there aren't arterial roads; not north where the servicing will be a nightmare to put in and a whack of money—south Barrie. Do you need a compass?

"South Barrie lands hold a competitive advantage over proposed boundary adjustment lands in Oro-Medonte and Springwater due to superior infrastructure, proximity to hubs, and fewer constraints"—Hemson report. I'm so shocked that the member across cited the Hemson report. Are you kidding? Are you reading the same thing I'm reading?

"South Barrie lands hold a competitive advantage over proposed boundary adjustment lands in Oro-Medonte and Springwater due to superior infrastructure, proximity to hubs, and fewer constraints." So what are you doing? What is this government doing?

Interjection: Building homes.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: But you're not—you're not. You have 10,000 homes approved for Midhurst.

"Both Oro-Medonte and Springwater have sufficient long-term employment area land to 2051." They can do it themselves. They can do the servicing. They have a better balance sheet than Barrie. They have the land. They have the approvals. And they've worked so well with the Midhurst land group.

So what is going on? Why is this government meddling? Why are they going against reports? Why are they going against elected officials who were duly elected, as we all were? Why the massive, massive abuse and misuse

of strong-mayor powers? Wow, can you just use them for anything now? Like, I don't think that was the intention. Personally, I don't think they were ever needed but they're here; they exist. But it sure as heck wasn't to be firing your township lawyer who tells you this is a terrible deal. You don't like it? Okay, what is that? To be going against your council who tells you, "Hey, we're just curious, what's going on? We want a judicial review. That's our right as elected officials"—and then you kibosh that? Unbelievable.

So at one point it was employment lands: "Oh, Barrie needs employment lands so badly, so badly; we need them right away." And then, when it was found out that, "Actually no, Barrie, you don't need them," then it was switched. "Oh, okay. Now we need housing." But Barrie has 20,000 homes approved on paper. So what are we doing jumping into Oro-Medonte and Springwater? What are we doing there? Why? Stay in your lane. Stay in Barrie. You can build in Barrie. You have 20,000 homes approved. You have enough employment land. Why now, guys? Why now?

Orillia went through the proper process with their official plan—great for Orillia. Why doesn't Barrie wait till the next official plan review in 2030 and see where they're at then? We have these comprehensive plans—we have them for a reason.

The mayor of Barrie has never identified what the lands will actually be used for. It keeps changing—moving goalposts. Why? Are we doing some land banking here? What are we doing? Why now? Why here? Why the rush? Who's behind it? Do I have to bring Nancy Drew and Harriet the Spy into this? Because I will. The Hardy Boys? Sherlock Holmes? Honestly, I was going to do other things at Christmas, like spend the time with my family, but I guess I've got to get a magnifying glass.

Interjection: Call Murdoch.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: I've got to call Murdoch Mysteries.

It's really interesting, these meetings with no agendas, no minutes, working in the shadows, a cloak-and-dagger approach, two mayors—Springwater, Barrie.

Also, Springwater council asked for more time. Can we just have more time? It's a fair request, I would think. No, no—we've got our foot on the gas. We've got to get 'er done—get 'er done—before the end of the year. Come on. Why the hurry? Why the rush?

You have the Hemson report, which obviously you didn't read or listen to, because the member over there quoted it, but it goes against your theory. And then you have the Dillon report. Wow. So "Dillon Consulting Ltd. has been retained by the county of Simcoe ... to undertake a review of the proposed"—proposed—"municipal boundary expansion in the city of Barrie ... to include lands from the neighbouring townships of Springwater and Oro-Medonte...."

When they had a target deadline of November 7, "this deadline was met, though it would be fair to say with a certain amount of reluctance." I wonder why. I wonder why, when people asked to slow it down. I'm always

telling you, do it right the first time. Build in Barrie, in Barrie proper.

I need to do my own yoga breath with you guys, honestly.

So the "focus remains on county-wide economic development and fiscal impacts ... regional growth management issues, the role of the city of Barrie within Simcoe and planning for a major new employment area." In the view of Dillon Consulting Ltd., "these issues should be given further consideration prior to making such a significant change." Hm.

"The timing and speed at which the boundary expansion has been moved through the decision-making process is unusual"—unusual—"particularly where there is no identified transformational catalyst from an economic perspective such as a new automotive plant."

So there was no reason to do it that Dillon Consulting Ltd. and the rest of Ontario could see—unless it was developer-driven, right? We've solved the Caramilk secret. Developer-driven—there we go. You need a new series of Nancy Drew.

"A major boundary expansion initiated so soon after the approval of the new official plan is unusual." It's not unusual to believe with this government.

"One of Barrie's key advantages is its well-established, 'central city' functions that make it uniquely well suited to accommodate demand for all types of housing, but especially higher density forms such as rowhouses and apartments"—aka, build in Barrie proper.

1650

"The shift to higher density forms may well continue as Barrie's central city function expands and is supported by investments in GO Transit"—finally—"and planned growth around its major transit station areas.... There is no constraint to intensification" in Barrie. I didn't write it, but I certainly believe it.

"The stage 1 work indicates there is no need for employment area land based on the forecast demand (job growth) over the period to 2051. It is noted that Barrie could monitor the take-up of employment land and address any potential shortfall issues that may arise at the time of the next MCR (OP review) but the merits of this approach are not explored."

"On a more practical note, Barrie is a leader in getting things built; fast approval times, 'best in class' application tracking and among the lowest fees and charges. For these reasons, and given the current economic slowdown, we struggle to see the reason why best efforts are not being made to explore the potential of these advantages and monitor progress over time, at least until the next plan review cycle around 2031, rather than making a significant change to the city and regional urban structure now: only a few years after the" official plan "came into force."

Why have the official plan review? Why have the ERO? Why do that when you're not respecting them? You are being told over and over again.

"It is correct that nowhere in the Hemson work is it explicitly stated expansion is required." Nowhere in Hemson, so there goes Hemson out the window. There

goes your common sense, your support for Springwater and Oro-Medonte.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Ignoring the experts.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Ignoring the experts all the time.

Someone from across the way complimented the municipalities on their enormous efforts from all the parties. It wasn't. It was the enormous efforts from the mayor of Springwater and the mayor of Barrie and the developers and landowners up there. That's what it was, and it's going to come out. It's a good thing you're breaking for a long time, and now maybe until March.

I'm telling you right now, there is no need to rush this. This Bill 76 stinks worse than the Dresden landfill you're trying to ram in.

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

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I rise today to speak to Bill 76, the government's bill to expand the boundaries of Barrie into Springwater and Oro-Medonte.

This bill raises serious questions about whether this government actually respects democracy and local decision-making. I mean, they clearly don't respect the democratic practices of this House because this bill, like many other bills over the last few weeks, is time-allocated, skips committee, doesn't give the public an opportunity to have any input whatsoever, to have their voices heard. I think that's a critical part of the democratic process that this government has just gotten rid of.

Now we're looking at them interfering with local democracy. It is clear that Springwater council is opposed to Barrie's annexation of their lands. I mean, it's very clear. Council said they were opposed to it. The mayor used strong-mayor powers to say, "We don't care about the democratic will of the democratically elected majority of our council. We're going to push this forward."

Members of the council were so appalled, and their residents—they're like, "We should have a judicial review of whether this is an appropriate use of strong-mayor powers." Many people would argue strong mayor-powers was an abuse of democracy in and of itself in the first place—but whether this application of it would be. And then, the mayor used strong-mayor powers to say, "No, we're not going to do that either. And we're actually going to just ram this thing through, even though our solicitor said, 'This is a bad plan.'"

Clearly, folks in Springwater—as a matter of fact, I was reading an article and a resident in Springwater declared what was happening as a painful, painful moment for their municipality. And I agree. I agree, Speaker.

Now let's go over to Oro-Medonte. So, Oro-Medonte, after about a year and a half of relentless pressure from Barrie and the province, finally just decided, "You know what? We're opposed to this, but we're going to capitulate. We're just going to capitulate because if we don't, are we going to have a target on our back? If we don't, are we going to be punished? If we don't, is the province just going to do it anyway?" Well, guess what? They were pretty smart about that, because with Bill 76, the province

said, "Yes, we're going to do it anyway." Even though you don't like it, they're like, "Yes, we're going to do it anyway."

I think we should put on the record that in Oro-Medonte, council did say to the government, "If we're going to capitulate, at the very least, will you take a few things under consideration? Because we know you're going to do it anyway." So I want to put on the record what they asked the minister to consider: (1) that they defer any decision on employment lands subject to further study on regional servicing considerations; (2) that they consider provisions to ensure that Oro-Medonte land to be annexed is used solely for community purposes; (3) that any wetlands included in the area remain under Oro-Medonte's control.

Now, I understand why they're asking for this, because there are concerns about available employment land for Oro-Medonte, but it's also a big concern—especially given the fact that this government has just eliminated pretty much all environmental protections, including for conservation authorities and other things. Maintaining wetlands are going to be pretty important here, because as you pave over them, you increase the risk of flooding. So I understand why they would be concerned.

I do appreciate the notes being sent over here.

So we clearly have two councils that are opposed to this decision, but the government is going to ram this through anyway—and that is a disturbing history that you've seen with this government. They're doing it anyway, even though the Hemson Consulting report clearly, clearly identifies the fact that the city of Barrie has long-term employment land that is available through 2051. The last time I checked, it's, what, 2025, I think, today. So I'm curious about what the rush is if they have enough employment land until 2051. The report also concluded that they have enough land available to meet their housing targets through 2031. So clearly, clearly there is another story here that we don't know. Who is benefiting? Which insider got to who? Who got the special deal? That is to be determined.

1700

That is a pattern we see with this government. When it comes to housing policy—and that's the primary argument they're making here, that this needs to be done for housing—this government has spent most of its 7.5 years trying to impose boundary expansions on municipalities, trying to open the greenbelt for development, trying to essentially put the financial profits of land speculators ahead of everyday people and actually building homes that people can afford in the communities they know and love. That's the pattern we've seen. That's the pattern we're seeing with this again.

The problem with this approach is that it has led to the worst housing crisis in Ontario history. Speaker, 7.5 years of this low-density-sprawl approach to benefit land speculators at the expense of everyday people has led to the worst housing crisis in Ontario history—the highest home prices we've had historically; the lowest housing starts; a whole generation of young people wondering if

they'll ever be able to own a home; no city in Ontario where a full-time minimum wage worker can afford average monthly rent; food bank use at historic all-time highs, primarily driven by the fact that people can't afford their housing. That's what 7.5 years of imposed low-density sprawl on communities to benefit land speculators over everyday people has led to in Ontario.

Why does this happen? It's because low-density sprawl is so expensive. It takes 2.5 times more money to service low-density sprawl, like what they're talking about here, than it does to actually build gentle-density missing-middle housing.

There was a study in Ottawa that showed that for every low-density-sprawl house built—my friend from Ottawa probably knows this study—it costs the city \$465 per person. For every infill built within the existing urban boundary, the city actually has a net return of \$606, because it's so less expensive to service homes that are built where you already have servicing, instead of building new servicing—like the roads, the waterlines, the sewer lines, the fire stations, the police stations that have to be built. All that costs lots of money. The net gain of infill development in Ottawa versus low-density sprawl is over \$1,000 per resident.

That's what fiscal responsibility looks like. That's what actually building communities that people can afford to live in looks like. But that's not what's happening here—not at all. That's not what has been happening with this government's agenda over the last 7.5 years.

If this government actually wants to address the housing crisis, it would stop imposing boundary expansions. It would stop putting land speculators first. It would actually legalize multiplexes and mid-rises so we can quickly build housing supply of homes that people can afford; where they don't have long, expensive commutes; where they actually can live close to work and family and the places they shop. But this government continues to say "No, no, no" because that would put hard-working, everyday people ahead of the land speculators. This government doesn't take that approach. They don't do it with this bill. They haven't done it with any of their bills, quite frankly.

Speaker, we have solutions to the housing crisis that don't require us to pave over farmland. Now what's going to happen to the farmland in this region?

We're losing 319 acres of farmland each and every day in Ontario. I've had members opposite ask me, "Why are you so obsessed with this number? Where is this land going?" Well, look at things like Bill 76; it will tell you where this land is going. That directly threatens our \$52-billion food and farming economy and the 875,000 people—one in nine jobs in Ontario are threatened by this government's sprawl agenda to pave over farmland. What else happens? It paves over wetlands. The increasing severity and frequency of climate-fuelled unsafe weather is going to make those wetlands even more important. The floods that hit Toronto just a couple of summers ago, the GTA, cost \$1.3 billion an hour—\$4 billion in three hours. If we would protect the nature that protects us, we could reduce those costs; we could reduce those risks.

I'll tell you a horrifying story, just in Guelph: About a month and a half ago, we had one of these freak rainstorms, and the flood waters rushed down, hit my neighbour's house, and trapped a single mom and her four-year-old in the basement of their house. They had to be bailed out by the fire department. As the flood waters were rising, they couldn't open the door. That's why it's important to protect the nature that protects us.

So I will not support this bill. I cannot support this bill.

I would ask the members opposite to actually respect local democracy, respect democracy in this place. When we take the time to make the right decision, it's more fiscally responsible, it builds better, stronger, safer communities, and it ensures our children have a livable future.

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

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: I am delighted to stand here and to support Bill 76 and to represent my community of York Centre. I've had the privilege of returning not once, but twice to the Ontario Legislature and to proudly be the 1,947th person ever elected to serve in this chamber. This is a House of democracy.

We are living in a time that nobody foresaw. The economic threats coming our way to Ontario—never before imagined. It seems that all we wanted to do as Ontarians is go about our lives and build a province that we all belong to, where we all have a right to succeed and where we all have a right to contribute.

Interjections.

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Thank you.

When the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing came forward with this bill—it was to realize that when we make decisions, they're not always easy; in fact, I would add, very few of them actually are. We have to weigh the consequences of the actions that we make, but we have to understand that the decisions that we make actually have enormous impact on the growth and the development and the prosperity of Ontario.

Never before have I seen a government—because before I was a member of the Legislature, I was an entrepreneur. I was a business person, like many of us across the aisle are. The member from Timiskaming-Cochrane is somebody who tells his story regularly—and there are people opposite as well who tell their story, who sit on boards of corporate companies, who lend their expertise to them. But the times find us, and this is exactly where we are.

I want to begin my short remarks by sincerely thanking the police service in Barrie. I want to shout out our chief there, Chief Rich Johnston, together with his 250 sworn officers and 130 incredible civilian support staff.

When you drive up, geographically, to Barrie, you realize that it is almost at the gateway of going to northern Ontario. When we foresee the development of the Ring of Fire—and by the way, I think the debates that we have had, especially with the policies led by our government, envision one day unlocking the resources in the Ring of

Fire. They will have incredible benefit across the province, and Barrie is so strategic in its location.

I've attended, together with the Attorney General and the Minister of Red Tape Reduction, many badging ceremonies of the Barrie Police Service. Why is this important, and why is this relevant to Bill 76? I'll tell you why: because Barrie is growing. It's literally bursting at the seams in prosperity.

I remember 25 years ago, when I was managing a property in Barrie. Barrie is unrecognizable today, as is Simcoe county, to what it was 25 years ago. I remember Barrie as more of a weekend retreat, where people would have cottages—and they still do. But Barrie has masterfully accelerated its development, with a tremendous mayor and a tremendous council, supported, I might add, by two great members. I think that says a lot.

1710

The 1,673 hectares that we're talking about is something that, as the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing said, was under discussion for quite a long time.

This bill establishes a framework for the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing to make regulations on transitional matters. This is important. We've tried; we have listened to the stakeholders, especially in Barrie, that have shown us they can build homes; they can have businesses that want to establish there; they can use the recreational geography of attracting people, both full-time and seasonal residents, and they can do so with an environment where everybody is welcome to belong and to succeed.

In the throne speech of this term of Parliament, which some of us might have forgotten with the passage of time, some of the words stand out more than others. I reminded Her Honour, when I recently attended a function with her to present bravery medals that she pinned on some worthy police officers and firefighters, that she said in the speech, "This is our land: the true north, strong and free." Et en français : « C'est notre terre : le vrai Nord, fort et libre. »

We have to be bold. We can't just assume that a thing will take care of itself. The Liberals believed—the NDP more so believed—that deficit takes care of itself. Remember that line? I remember it. How does it take care of itself? It doesn't. You need visionaries. You need people who are not afraid to come forward.

When the Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade—boy, it's a big title. The man travels around the world—and today he even said that, last week, over \$1 billion of new investment was committed to Ontario, because we are a province that's unstoppable, and people know it.

In order to move forward, we have to look at how our provincial government can take seriously our responsibility, a responsibility that the people entrusted in us not once, not twice, but three times—three times, a majority government, a government led by Premier Ford, who gives out his phone number. He gets thousands of calls a day from an average person who just wants help navigating in the world of bureaucracy. That's why we came forward. He came forward by making sure we had a Minister of Red Tape Reduction.

Today, it's about protecting our communities. Today, it's about making sure that people will want to come and locate in communities, cities and municipalities, because there are people there on the other side who will take that baton—just like we think of an Olympic race, and people are passing a baton to the next person.

Thank goodness we have a mayor in Barrie—a council and a great police service.

I want to also shout out the fire services that keep Barrie safe and thank the firefighters, because that is enormously important.

We can't ever forget about public safety.

Madame la Présidente, je voudrais remercier chaque personne qui travaille fort pour assurer la sécurité de notre province : les policiers, les pompiers et tous les premiers intervenants.

We always have to appreciate our first responders. Why am I giving such a shout-out to the firefighters in Barrie and the police officers? Because it ties back into this bill that we're debating today in the third reading. It's because when a town grows, you have to have the infrastructure that allows it to grow successfully. Barrie has accomplished that, in no small effort because of the two members in this chamber who help represent the interests of the government and their constituents here every day: the Attorney General and the Minister of Red Tape Reduction.

I also want to acknowledge the member who is just slightly south, who goes as far as Bradford, and that's our incredible President of the Treasury Board.

We need land to build homes. The opposition says that we need to build homes that are affordable. Everybody agrees with that. Everybody agrees that affordability is so important. That's why the government has called repeatedly on the municipalities to be mindful of their development charges, because it impacts everything.

I'm happy that, when I looked at the statistics today, the price of an average rental is dropping. The Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing said that very recently. They're dropping.

We have to do more. This bill allows, perhaps, a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to seize a moment that needs to be seized, to have a future that we all have a right to, to envision our prosperity, because we believe in our province, and we believe in our future.

Nous croyons en notre province et en notre avenir, et ensemble, nous bâtissons l'Ontario.

I've said that so many times here. We have to be bold to believe in our province and believe in our future. Together, we will build a great province, but we have to have a leader who's prepared to do this. Our leader is Premier Ford, who has been elected with the people's vote three times.

I'm proud, as I am every day, to stand here in the Ontario Legislature and thank Premier Ford and my colleagues, who work hard every day selflessly, with one goal in mind, and that is—our Ontario belongs to us. We have to be bold, we have to be ambitious, we have to be courageous, and we have to believe in ourselves.

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

Further debate?

Interjections.

MPP Wayne Gates: Speaker, I'd like to thank the Conservative Party for giving me a standing ovation. I really appreciate that. Thank you very much.

I want to talk to the House leader right off the bat, rather than just to the bill. I'll get to the bill. He's going to run away and watch me on TV outside. But I'm going to tell you: It was him that I became really good friends with, when he was on this side of the House.

I know some of you guys haven't been here that long—but the Conservative Party actually were on this side of the House for 15 years. You could probably say what your accomplishments were on the back of a postage stamp, but that's a whole other story. But you were over there for 15 years, and so was he.

He stood up time and time and time again—I could almost say word for word what he said: that he did not believe in time allocation. He said that shouldn't be done, and the Liberals shouldn't be doing it. Somehow, my good friend, when he walked from his seat, which was just over here—he walked across that aisle, became the House leader. Now he likes time allocation to a point that that's all we're doing now. We've been back now four or five weeks—time allocation, bill after bill after bill.

Do you know what they're saying to me? And I'm willing to listen. I listen to you guys even though you guys don't always listen to me. But at the end of the day, I listen to what you guys said. Do you know what happened here? Time allocation—here we go again; time allocation—here we go again. It makes absolutely no sense to me. They said the reason why we got a time allocation is because we're running out of time.

Well, here's the deal—and I know people are listening to me at home. Here's why you're running out of time: because we had an unnecessary election. It cost \$200 million in the middle of winter, and then we didn't come back for two months. But we needed to have that election because you guys wanted a super supermajority, even though you already had a majority, and then you ended up losing a couple of seats.

1720

What happened is, we come back and we sit until June 6, I believe it was, and then the government says, "Oh, well, we'll take the summer break now." Then we're off June, July, August, September, and what happened in September—anybody remember? All the kids went back to school. All the teachers went back to school. All the EAs went back to school. Everybody pretty well had used up all their vacation. Not the Conservatives. We're not coming back in September. Never came back—you guys remember that. I'm not saying you didn't do work in your constituency office. We all do that. What I'm saying is to get work done here so we can—what? Debate the bills, have the debates, then go to committee, and then travel around the province with the bill to make sure—maybe there are ways we can make it better.

1720

Did we come back in September? Jamie, did we come back in September?

MPP Jamie West: No.

MPP Wayne Gates: No. We came back at the end of October. And now, we're being told by the Conservatives we've got to rush all these bills through. We've got to time-allocate them because we've got no time.

Well, my suggestion to you is maybe it would have been better if we came and sat in September and sat in October so that we could have debates on these bills—whether we agree or disagree with the bills, at least have the debate.

Time allocation is against democracy, without a doubt. You're rushing this through, and rushing it through, by the way, when your own councillors—two out of the three councils—have said, no, they don't want this to happen. Barrie, which is a hardcore Conservative mayor, that enjoys his mayor powers, by the way, that you guys gave—which was wrong. You should never have done it. That's why you have a duly elected council.

Then I'm listening to my good friend over in the corner there, who did a nice little speech. He talked about democracy and how important it is for us to make decisions. But it's being taken away not only from us; it's being taken away from the councils—the duly elected councils.

Some of you will say, "Well, how do you know it's not going to work?" Talk to Ottawa and how bad it is; they still owe billions of dollars—the city of Toronto, Hamilton. It doesn't work. Bigger doesn't make it better. Bigger doesn't make it mean you're going to pay less taxes.

You talked about the firefighters, which, by the way, I think everybody in the House, not just you—we all love our firefighters. I'm not going to say anything too loud because my daughter would get mad at me; she's dating a firefighter. So I know a lot about firefighters. But at the end of the day, it's not going to be cheaper. If you look at Niagara—because Niagara may be next. Let's think of what we've done this week. We did Peel, which is going to come up tomorrow—time-allocated. We're doing this bill today, and then Niagara may be next. We may be in the same situation here, standing up doing this.

I'll get on the bill so you don't stand up and say, "He's not talking to the bill."

But the one that I want to talk about quickly, because I don't know how much time I get to talk—how much time's left?

Interjection: As long as you want.

MPP Wayne Gates: As long as I want? Don't say that to me. I could be here for days.

But let's talk about something that's really important in my area, and in Barrie's area, quite frankly: farmland, agriculture.

Do you know today—I want the Conservatives to listen to this; I know some are having caucus meetings in the corner and the middle here. But, Speaker—look at me and I'll tell you: Today, 320 acres of prime farmland is being paved over, every single day in the province of Ontario.

The Liberal member who spoke about this—what’s this really about? Why does Barrie want to be bigger? It’s about paving over our prime farmland which, I believe, is approximately—4,000 acres will be paved over to make room for housing. That’s what it’s really about. That’s what Barrie wants; that’s what the Barrie mayor wants; that’s what the Premier wants. It makes no sense what you guys are doing here. It’s not going to be cheaper, and then, once the farmland’s gone, it’s gone forever. And what are we suffering today? Help me out over there—one of you guys, stand up and tell me if I’m wrong. What are we suffering today? Food insecurity. Food banks are at record levels, my friends. We had a food bank in Windsor just close down. What are we doing getting rid of prime farmland? You can’t get it back. Once it’s gone, it’s gone. There’s no going back when it comes to our farmland.

And what did you do? You tried to do it with the greenbelt. How many remember the greenbelt? Remember the greenbelt, when they tried to push the greenbelt, saying, “Oh, we need housing, we need housing,” then they backed down when they found out it was all about—

MPP Lisa Gretzky: There’s still an RCMP investigation.

MPP Wayne Gates: It is still with the RCMP investigation.

I’m glad the agriculture minister is here, who I know real well. I’m telling her, she’s got to stand up and fight for our farmers and make sure that we’re not paving over agricultural land.

Go to the grocery store today. I had a conversation with my son-in-law yesterday. He said he went to the grocery store, and he used to get six bags of groceries for about \$300 to take care of his family. He’s got his wife and his two kids. Today, it’s \$100 a bag, so you’re going home with three bags, not six. That’s what’s going on with the price of food.

As our food security gets worse, as you continue to get rid of prime farmland, whether that’s in Niagara, whether that’s outside of Barrie, whether that’s up in the Toronto area, the cost of food is going to go up. We already can’t afford our groceries, although we know the Weston family is making record profits. They continue to do that.

We’ve got a problem here, and you guys aren’t addressing it. I’m telling you, forced amalgamation doesn’t work. The minister was here, and I talked to him about this. You guys are coming to Niagara. I know you are. I’m going to talk about it under another bill, I think on Wednesday afternoon—Bill 45, about Niagara. I’m really concerned because we have some of the best farmland in the entire world right in Niagara. And one thing—

Interjection.

MPP Wayne Gates: Thirty seconds? Are you okay? Sorry.

MPP Jamie West: Yes.

MPP Wayne Gates: I thought he wanted me to sit down.

But I want to tell you: The greenbelt was one part, but now what you’ve done is you’ve done this up in Barrie, but there’s a part and parcel of land that runs just below

the greenbelt. It’s called the whitebelt. The same developers that tried to buy the greenbelt are now going after the whitebelt in the NPCA.

That’s what they’re trying to do: They’re trying to destroy our wetlands, our farmland, our environment. And who’s that going to affect? Some of you guys are young enough; you’ve got a couple of really young MPPs on that side of the House. But it’s about our kids and our grandkids. What are you guys going to leave them? Our environment is going to be in terrible shape. Food security is going to be in terrible shape. That’s awful.

I would like to talk about the bill. I’ve got to say something positive about Barrie for sure. I’m a big Junior A fan. I go and watch the IceDogs play. Barrie has got a really good coach. He coached the IceDogs for a number of years. He’s been in Barrie a while. The Barrie Colts has got a nice hockey team. The IceDogs have suffered since he left as a coach. Unfortunately, I don’t think he wants to come back to Niagara, but Barrie does have a good hockey team.

I’ll let somebody else speak. Thanks for listening to me. I appreciate it.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): Further debate? Further debate? I recognize the member from Sudbury.

MPP Jamie West: Thank you very much, Speaker. I wasn’t sure if other members wanted to speak.

This is an interesting bill, and we’ve talked all afternoon, more or less, about this. This is Bill 76, for those keeping track at home.

The essence of this, Speaker, is it’s a housing bill. But I’ve been here for nearly eight years, like probably the majority of us have been. There was a big change in 2018; a lot of us were elected at that time. There has been bill after bill and initiative after initiative about making housing more affordable, building more housing, and I’ve got to tell you, I can’t think of a single one that has worked effectively.

Anybody who is looking at their rent—especially those of us in Ontario who are looking at the price of rent and are spending more and more on rent and less and less on food: the number of seniors I’ve talked to who tell me that they go to food banks on a regular basis because they have a fixed income, and rent continues to skyrocket; the number of people who are on the verge of being homeless because there isn’t affordable rent anywhere.

I was talking to people in Sudbury—and I had to google it to confirm it—and rent in Sudbury is comparable to rent in Brampton. So it might be 100 bucks off, something like that. But it is incredible that rent all across the province has gone through the roof, while bill after bill and motion after motion from this government—who brags every single day about how great they’re doing and how rent prices are coming down, but I don’t know what fantasy world they’re living in, Speaker, because it’s not the same one I’m living in. It’s not the same one, I’m sure, that the people who are phoning them, worried about the rent evictions that are happening—where unscrupulous, faceless corporate landlords are buying up buildings and

evicting people because they have to do “renovations.” And I put that in quotes because renovations for some of these means that they painted. But they have the bank account to leave the place empty for two or three months and pretend they’re doing renovations, and then they double, sometimes triple, the rent. Everyone is feeling that squeeze.

1730

I was telling my son—my oldest son, who’s going to be 30 soon—that in my 20s, I had my own apartment while I was going to school. It wasn’t the fanciest apartment in the world, but it was the sort of place you weren’t embarrassed to bring your parents to. And to cover my rent and my food meant that I had to work on the weekend. And I had an okay job; it was slightly more than minimum wage, but it wasn’t—you know, if it was that great, I wouldn’t be going to school.

But I’ve got to tell you, the idea that somebody could go to school and cover their rent with a part-time job that they worked on the weekends is gone now. That opportunity is gone. The opportunity that I had with my wife, or that my parents had, that generation, where you could save towards buying a house while renting a place—let alone the fact that you could save while having kids—it’s gone now, under this Conservative government. So when Bill 76 comes along and they’re like, “This is going to build housing,” don’t be surprised when we’re a little doubtful, because fool me once, shame on you, but fool me for seven and a half years, shame on me. I’ve got to take it with a grain of salt.

So what’s going on with Bill 76? I had a great conversation, actually, with the minister about this. The first time he debated it—and believe it or not, it wasn’t that long ago because this was time-allocated, so there’s minimal debate on this. But I went over and I talked to him and I said, “What’s going on with this bill?” And the way he explained it to me was that you have Barrie, which needs to build more housing, and you have Oro-Medonte and Springwater, which have land. And Barrie wants to expand the land, and my understanding from the housing minister is that Barrie would be providing the infrastructure—the sewage, the power lines, all of that stuff.

So the idea of this bill, basically, is they have been working, I believe, for about 18 months to try to resolve this; to find a way that Barrie could buy the land, and they get a fair price, and Springwater and Oro-Medonte would feel like it’s a fair price. They been negotiating for 18 months with the help of—I forget the official title, but someone from the government to help them negotiate, and it has not worked out very effectively, so it’s come here as a bill.

I appreciate that conversation. I appreciate being able to sit down with the minister and have a straightforward conversation. However, very often, we only get half of the conversation, so I was looking forward to, after second reading, that this bill would go to committee and members of our assembly from different parties would be able to talk to the people from that region to hear first-hand from them how they’d be affected—positively, negatively, if it

made sense or not. Because there’s only one, maybe two, members who represent that area and have regular contact with the citizens of those areas. So it would have been great if we were able to go to committee and hear from them. That’s really how legislation should be put together in the House.

Unfortunately, we just voted on second reading about three hours ago, and now we’re debating third reading until the clock runs out so they can vote on it and jam it through. I understand the government is in a rush, and I understand the government has a majority and, basically, they can ram through whatever they want. But also, at the same time, let’s be respectful of the people who live in these townships and the city. They have a voice; they’re valuable.

I know how it feels in Sudbury—probably all of Ontario, it’s become a bit of a cliché to be frustrated with Toronto. But the reality is that people in Toronto, including the Premier, when he ran in 2018—he looked at health care in northern Ontario and he talked about the importance of people going to Toronto to get that health care, missing the point that people in northern Ontario want health care where they live. And I don’t fault him for that: He’s from Toronto and that’s how he’d see the world. But you feel like sometimes you’re being overridden by people. So I would imagine that if you live in Springwater-Oro-Medonte, you’re kind of like the kid brother to Barrie. Barrie gets all the attention, and then maybe you feel forgotten. The least we can do in those small communities is go out there and let them know that they’re important to us and we want them to be heard.

I have less than a minute. I want to talk about the greater city of Sudbury. All I’ll be able to say, basically, is that this annexation, this government-knows-best policy, happened to Sudbury. We used to be the city of Sudbury. Now we’re the city of Greater Sudbury. What that means is that we have a population of less than 200,000 people, but we have a footprint that’s the size of the GTA plus Hamilton plus Peel region.

The great thing about that for the provincial government is they’ve downloaded all the provincial costs to the municipality, so now the provincial budget looks good. But the infrastructure costs, like snowplowing and road repair, have now become a higher cost for the municipality. What happens is that city councillors and the mayors now take the brunt of having to increase taxes to compensate for what the province had—thank you, Speaker.

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

Pursuant to the order of the House from earlier today, I am now required to put the question.

Mr. Flack has moved third reading of 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. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

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

All those opposed to the motion will please say “nay.”

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

A recorded vote being required, it will be deferred until the next instance of deferred votes.

Third reading vote deferred.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos):
Orders of the day?

Hon. Steve Clark: No further business, Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos):
Seeing the time on the clock, this House stands adjourned until 9 a.m. tomorrow.

The House adjourned at 1737.

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Collard, Lucille (LIB)	Ottawa—Vanier	Third Party House Leader / Leader parlementaire de parti reconnu
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Dixon, Jess (PC)	Kitchener South—Hespeler / Kitchener-Sud—Hespeler	
Dowie, Andrew (PC)	Windsor—Tecumseh	
Downey, Hon. / L'hon. Doug (PC)	Barrie—Springwater—Oro-Medonte	Attorney General / Procureur général
Dunlop, Hon. / L'hon. Jill (PC)	Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord	Minister of Emergency Preparedness and Response / Ministre de la Protection civile et de l'Intervention en cas d'urgence
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Firin, Mohamed (PC)	York South—Weston / York-Sud— Weston	
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Fraser, John (LIB)	Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	Leader, Third Party / Chef du troisième parti
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Gates, Wayne (NDP)	Niagara Falls	
Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	
Gilmour, Alexa (NDP)	Parkdale—High Park	
Glover, Chris (NDP)	Spadina—Fort York	
Gretzky, Lisa (NDP)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	
Grewal, Hardeep Singh (PC)	Brampton East / Brampton-Est	
Gualtieri, Silvia (PC)	Mississauga East—Cooksville / Mississauga-Est—Cooksville	
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Harris, Hon. / L'hon. Mike (PC)	Kitchener—Conestoga	Minister of Natural Resources / Ministre des Richesses naturelles
Hazell, Andrea (LIB)	Scarborough—Guildwood	Third Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Troisième Vice-Présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
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Jones, Hon. / L'hon. Sylvia (PC)	Dufferin—Caledon	Deputy Premier / Vice-première ministre Minister of Health / Ministre de la Santé
Jones, Hon. / L'hon. Trevor (PC)	Chatham-Kent—Leamington	Minister of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness / Ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et de l'Agroentreprise
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Kerzner, Hon. / L'hon. Michael S. (PC)	York Centre / York-Centre	Solicitor General / Solliciteur général
Khanjin, Hon. / L'hon. Andrea (PC)	Barrie—Innisfil	Minister of Red Tape Reduction / Ministre de la Réduction des formalités administratives
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Lennox, Robin (NDP)	Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	
Lumsden, Hon. / L'hon. Neil (PC)	Hamilton East—Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est—Stoney Creek	Minister of Sport / Ministre du Sport
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McCrimmon, Karen (LIB)	Kanata—Carleton	

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McMahon, Mary-Margaret (LIB)	Beaches—East York	
Mulroney, Hon. / L'hon. Caroline (PC)	York—Simcoe	President of the Treasury Board / Présidente du Conseil du Trésor
Oosterhoff, Hon. / L'hon. Sam (PC)	Niagara West / Niagara-Ouest	Minister of Francophone Affairs / Ministre des Affaires francophones Associate Minister of Energy-Intensive Industries / Ministre associé des Industries à forte consommation d'énergie
Pang, Billy (PC)	Markham—Unionville	
Parsa, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (PC)	Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill	Minister of Children, Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et des Services sociaux et communautaires
Pasma, Chandra (NDP)	Ottawa West—Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest—Nepean	Deputy House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjointe de l'opposition officielle
Piccini, Hon. / L'hon. David (PC)	Northumberland—Peterborough South / Northumberland—Peterborough-Sud	Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development / Ministre du Travail, de l'Immigration, de la Formation et du Développement des compétences
Pierre, Natalie (PC)	Burlington	
Pinsonneault, Steve (PC)	Lambton—Kent—Middlesex	
Pirie, Hon. / L'hon. George (PC)	Timmins	Minister of Northern Economic Development and Growth / Ministre du Développement et de la croissance économique du Nord
Quinn, Hon. / L'hon. Nolan (PC)	Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry	Minister of Colleges, Universities, Research Excellence and Security / Ministre des Collèges et Universités, de l'Excellence en recherche et de la Sécurité
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Rae, Matthew (PC)	Perth—Wellington	
Rakocevic, Tom (NDP)	Humber River—Black Creek	
Rickford, Hon. / L'hon. Greg (PC)	Kenora—Rainy River	Minister of Indigenous Affairs and First Nations Economic Reconciliation / Ministre des Affaires autochtones et de la Réconciliation économique avec les Premières Nations Minister Responsible for Ring of Fire Economic and Community Partnerships / Ministre responsable des Partenariats économiques et communautaires pour le développement du Cercle de feu
Riddell, Brian (PC)	Cambridge	
Rosenberg, Bill (PC)	Algoma—Manitoulin	
Sabawy, Sheref (PC)	Mississauga—Erin Mills	
Sandhu, Amarjot (PC)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Sarkaria, Hon. / L'hon. Prabmeet Singh (PC)	Brampton South / Brampton-Sud	Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports
Sarrazin, Stéphane (PC)	Glengarry—Prescott—Russell	
Sattler, Peggy (NDP)	London West / London-Ouest	
Saunderson, Brian (PC)	Simcoe—Grey	
Schreiner, Mike (GRN)	Guelph	
Scott, Chris (IND)	Sault Ste. Marie	
Scott, Hon. / L'hon. Laurie (PC)	Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock	
Shamji, Adil (LIB)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	
Shaw, Sandy (NDP)	Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas / Hamilton-Ouest—Ancaster—Dundas	
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Smith, Dave (PC)	Peterborough—Kawartha	
Smith, David (PC)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	
Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Graydon (PC)	Parry Sound—Muskoka	Associate Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / Ministre associé des Affaires municipales et du Logement
Smith, Laura (PC)	Thornhill	
Smyth, Stephanie (LIB)	Toronto—St. Paul's	
Stevens, Jennifer (Jennie) (NDP)	St. Catharines	
Stiles, Marit (NDP)	Davenport	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau Parti démocratique de l'Ontario
Surma, Hon. / L'hon. Kinga (PC)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	Minister of Infrastructure / Ministre de l'Infrastructure
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto—Danforth	
Tangri, Hon. / L'hon. Nina (PC)	Mississauga—Streetsville	Associate Minister of Small Business / Ministre associée des Petites Entreprises

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Thanigasalam, Hon. / L'hon. Vijay (PC)	Scarborough—Rouge Park	Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions / Ministre associé délégué à la Santé mentale et à la Lutte contre les dépendances
Thompson, Hon. / L'hon. Lisa M. (PC)	Huron—Bruce	Minister of Rural Affairs / Ministre des Affaires rurales
Tibollo, Hon. / L'hon. Michael A. (PC)	Vaughan—Woodbridge	Associate Attorney General / Procureur général associé
Triantafilopoulos, Effie J. (PC)	Oakville North—Burlington / Oakville-Nord—Burlington	Deputy Speaker / Vice-Présidente Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Tsao, Jonathan (LIB)	Don Valley North / Don Valley-Nord	
Vanthof, John (NDP)	Timiskaming—Cochrane	Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle
Vaugeois, Lise (NDP)	Thunder Bay—Superior North / Thunder Bay—Supérieur-Nord	
Vickers, Paul (PC)	Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound	
Wai, Daisy (PC)	Richmond Hill	
Watt, Tyler (LIB)	Nepean	
West, Jamie (NDP)	Sudbury	
Williams, Hon. / L'hon. Charmaine A. (PC)	Brampton Centre / Brampton-Centre	Associate Minister of Women's Social and Economic Opportunity / Ministre associée des Perspectives sociales et économiques pour les femmes
Wong-Tam, Kristyn (NDP)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	