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Clerk: Trevor Day

Présidente : L'honorable Donna Skelly  
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# LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 10 December 2025

# ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 10 décembre 2025

*Report continued from volume A.*

1707

## PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

### COMMISSIONER FOR DEMOCRATIC RIGHTS ACT, 2025

### LOI DE 2025 SUR LE COMMISSAIRE AUX DROITS DÉMOCRATIQUES

Mr. Glover moved second reading of the following bill:  
Bill 78, An Act establishing a Commissioner for Democratic Rights / Projet de loi 78, Loi créant le poste de commissaire aux droits démocratiques.

**The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell):** Pursuant to standing order 100, the member has 12 minutes for their presentation.

**Mr. Chris Glover:** It's a real honour to rise in this House and to speak about Bill 78 to create the Commissioner for Democratic Rights Act, 2025.

I'm going to ask for a bit of participation here. Would any of my colleagues volunteer just one principle of a democracy? How do you know that you live in a democracy—one thing that you know that makes you know that you live in a democracy? Anybody?

**Ms. Peggy Sattler:** Elections.

**Mr. Chris Glover:** Elections, okay. Another? Something else? How do you know you live in a democracy besides elections?

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Free speech.

**Mr. Chris Glover:** Free speech, okay. Anything else?

**Ms. Lee Fairclough:** Participation.

**Mr. Chris Glover:** Participation, okay.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Choice.

**Mr. Chris Glover:** So elections, free speech and choice.

I can tell you that our right to elections has been interfered with by this government over the last eight years. Our right to a democratic election in 2025—our provincial election—was interfered with, and I'll explain how. Our right to free speech has been overridden by two pieces of legislation using the "notwithstanding" clause.

This is part of a pattern of global backsliding into authoritarianism, and we see it in countries around the world. Leaders get elected, and then they consolidate power. They remove the checks of the Legislature, the police and the courts on their power. They manage or manipulate the mainstream media. They build a loyal following through a rabbit hole of algorithms of social

media. All of this consolidation of power is tied to corruption. We see it in the backsliding of democracy in the United States and other nations, and we do see it right here in Ontario.

1710

In 2018, when this Conservative government was first elected, one of their very first actions was to cancel four regional chair elections and to change Toronto's election from 47 to 25 seats.

*Interjections.*

**The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell):** I know it has been a long day. It's close to Christmas. So I'm going to ask you again to just keep the voices down. I'm trying to concentrate and hear the member.

**Mr. Chris Glover:** Thank you, Speaker.

In 2018, they cancelled four regional chair elections and changed Toronto's election from 47 to 25 seats in the middle of a campaign period. This was fought all the way to the Supreme Court, and in 2021, the Supreme Court ruled that in Canada, we do not have the right to democratic municipal elections. We have the right to federal and provincial elections, but not to municipal elections.

With this power, with this decision, this government has run amok. One of the first things they did afterwards was to introduce strong-mayor powers. With strong-mayor powers, the mayor and a third of city councillors can overrule the votes of two thirds of elected councillors. So we have minority-vote rule in the majority of our municipalities in Ontario.

This Premier has also removed our elected school trustees. We've been electing school trustees since 1816 in Ontario, and previous to that in Upper Canada. He has attacked student unions with Bill 33. These school board trustees and the student unions have been fighting against this government's agenda to privatize our schools, our colleges and our universities. What they're doing is undermining the people that we elect to protect our education system in this province.

This Premier—he wants to be not just the Premier. He was elected to be the Premier of Ontario, and that's just fine; that's what he was elected to do. But he also wants to be the mayor of Ontario. He wants to be the chair of every school board in Ontario. He wants to control what every elected student union does in every college and every university in Ontario, and that's a dangerous consolidation of power. In a democracy, laws apply equally to everyone.

Bill 5, passed by this government in the spring of this year, gives the government the power to declare any part of the province a special economic zone, where they can break any provincial or municipal law. And they don't have to come back to the Legislature to do it; the cabinet

can do it by decree. So the cabinet ministers have the power to determine who the laws apply to and who is exempt. This is a violation of the rule of law, which is a fundamental principle of democracy.

In a democracy, the justice system is a check on elected governments. This Premier, when he was first elected, one of his first acts was to try to appoint his friend Ron Taverner to be the chief of police of the OPP. Since then—

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Can you imagine?

**Mr. Chris Glover:** Yes, he did do that.

Since then, he has boasted about appointing Conservative judges. He says, “I don’t want to appoint NDP or Liberal judges; I want to appoint Conservative judges.” Well, judges are not supposed to be NDP or Liberal or Conservative or Green. They’re supposed to be non-partisan and impartial. That’s a fundamental right that is enshrined in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms of this province, and this Premier is boasting about overriding that.

When you look at the control that they’re seizing over the justice system—this government is under RCMP investigation for the greenbelt scandal. One of the recipients of their Skills Development Fund is now under investigation by the OPP. So that’s why there needs to be a separation of power between the elected officials and the justice system. But this government has tried to cloud that separation.

One of the other principles of a democracy: In a democracy, freedom of speech is a fundamental democratic right. This government, as I mentioned before, passed two pieces of legislation—and actually introduced three pieces of legislation—that strip Ontarians of our right to freedom of speech and our other charter rights and freedoms using the “notwithstanding” clause.

In one example of this, in Bill 307, they used the “notwithstanding” clause to prohibit the third-party advertising that was critical of the government 12 months before the 2022 election. This went all the way to the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court ruled, in March of this year, that this Bill 307 violated not only our right to freedom of speech, it also violated our right to a free and fair provincial election.

This government passed legislation that they then used to prohibit advertising 12 months before the elections of 2022 and 2025, giving them an unfair advantage but also disenfranchising our right to a free and fair election in 2022 and 2025.

This consolidation of power is tied to corruption, and I mentioned this earlier. There is a circular economy of corruption. Donors give the governing party thousands of dollars in donations so that they can win elections, and, in exchange, what we’ve seen is this government gives millions of tax dollars to donors.

A good example of this is that the Premier’s dentist gave \$20,000 to the Conservative Party and received two million taxpayer dollars from the Skills Development Fund to train his staff. You invest \$20,000 and you get a \$2-million return—that’s a 9,900% return on investment. That is a really, really good return on investment. How-

ever, it means that there are \$2 million less to put into our schools, our colleges, our universities, our hospitals, to increase ODSP rates so that we don’t have people with disabilities living in destitution, to build affordable housing. That’s where that \$2 million should have gone to.

When I talk about this, one of the things with this circular economy of corruption that happens—where our tax dollars are used to fund, to give to donors instead of to our public services—is that people lose their faith in the democratic system. Some 57% of eligible voters did not vote in the last provincial election. Why? Particularly young people, newcomers, marginalized people are losing their faith in the system. They say it doesn’t make a difference.

This is because this government is not addressing their concerns. The cost of housing is unaffordable. The cost of food is unaffordable. People are saddled with student debts that take decades to pay back. The economic challenges that people face keep worsening as this government and other governments keep prioritizing giving our tax dollars to donors.

It’s not just the tax dollars; it’s also our public assets. It’s the greenbelt, Ontario Place, the science centre, and soon, with Bill 33—which gives the Minister of Education the power to sell off our schools—it’s going to be our schools; it’s going to be our colleges, our universities. They’re all going to be sold, and soon, I would bet, the hospitals. They’re going to be sold off to their friends and donors so that they can provide us services at a profit, just like the last Liberal government sold off Ontario Hydro, and now we buy back our hydro at an inflated cost so that they can generate a profit.

We need a commissioner whose job it is to protect the right of Ontarians to vote, to participate and to be represented fairly by their government. In Ontario, we say we don’t want to be the 51st state, and we need to act like it. Having a commissioner of democratic rights is a first step in defending the democracy that we must pass on to our children, our grandchildren and their children.

I am hoping that all of the members in this House, when you vote today, think this is not just a vote on a bill; this is a vote to restore our democratic rights in this province, to have a person who’s going to be a watchdog, not just over this government, but all future governments to make sure that future generations of Ontarians live in a healthy, robust democracy. I hope all members in the House will support this bill.

**The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell):** I recognize the member from Toronto—St. Paul’s.

**MPP Stephanie Smyth:** I am very happy to get up and speak today about Bill 78 because, honestly, this is one of those bills that just makes sense. It’s not flashy, it’s not partisan, because democracy never should be. It’s just about protecting something that we should all value, and that is our democracy, which can very quickly be eroded right before our eyes.

**1720**

Bill 78 creates a commissioner for democratic rights—someone independent, someone chosen by all parties,

someone whose only job is to keep an eye on our democratic system: on voting barriers, on government overreach, on provincial interference in municipalities, on whether people still feel like their voice actually matters. Speaker, do you know what? We need that right now more than ever. We have seen an erosion of oversight even with our media, which used to be seen, that fifth estate, as the eyes keeping watch on everything. But the media companies are crumbling. They can't afford journalists anymore. The ones who work, work really, really hard, but there's fewer and fewer of them.

And you know what? If we have to be really honest, this past year in Ontario hasn't been democracy's finest hour. We've had a record number of time allocation motions, the government cutting off debate again and again, bills being pushed through at lightning speed, when people from across the province were literally begging for more time to be heard. The Queen's Park lawn—we saw it: They're packed with folks saying, "Please listen. Please slow down. This is going to hurt us," and the government just shrugging and moving on ahead. It's been a year of, "Thanks for your feedback. Thanks very much. We're just going to do it anyway."

Speaker, when laws get rushed like that and when public input becomes just a box to check instead of something really meaningful, people, as my colleagues said, lose their faith in it, they stop believing in the institution, and they stop believing that their voice matters. Once they stop believing, it's really hard to get that trust back.

That's why this bill really hits home for me. It creates an independent commissioner who actually says, "Hold on. Is this democratic? Are people's rights being protected? Are we shutting people out of decisions that affect their lives?" They can report right to the Legislature, not the Premier's office. What's wrong with that extra oversight, just that check and balance? Because this government is even taking on the courts. That was supposed to be the check and balance. Next thing we know? Not so much. We've seen it happen south of the border. All this matters so much.

Democracy should not depend on whether the government of the day finds it convenient. This government has made a habit of treating democracy like an inconvenience. And whether it was pushing controversial bills through in days, whether it's using time allocation like it's a default setting or ignoring massive public concern, people are tired, they are frustrated, and they feel like Queen's Park is talking at them and not with them.

When we say we need a commissioner for democratic rights, this isn't abstract. It's not academic. It is just a response, literally, to what we've all been watching happen in real time. I don't expect the government to vote for this for a hot second—sorry. I would love to be totally wrong.

**Mr. Chris Glover:** Maybe they'll surprise us.

**MPP Stephanie Smyth:** I don't know. But I don't think so, because this bill creates exactly the kind of oversight this government has been trying to avoid all year. Really? You know that.

Somebody who pays attention, somebody who can call things out, someone who can say, "This isn't right," is exactly what we need. It shouldn't be possible for any government—not this one, not a future one. It can happen with any government. We've seen it happen in all kinds of places around the planet, all party stripes. So that's why it's a good thing, acknowledging we can all be at fault.

Rewriting local councils overnight, rushing major legislation without real debate, or treating public consultation like an obstacle course—you know, maybe clear-cutting around Ontario Place. These are the kinds of things that could use some oversight. The commissioner would make sure that that can't happen quietly or quickly ever again.

So, yes, Ontario Liberals are proud to support this bill, but more importantly, Speaker, we support the people who have been sitting in committee rooms, the people who have been writing emails, organizing town halls, attending our town halls, saying, "Please listen to us." Because that is exactly what democracy is supposed to look like: everything having its day and its time.

Bill 78 is about making sure Ontario never loses sight of this again. And, Speaker, when the government votes this down, I genuinely hope that they can look at their constituents in the eye and explain why protecting democracy was something that they didn't think was worth supporting.

To my colleague: I wish you luck and thank you for this opportunity to even speak on this.

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

**MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam:** It's always an honour to rise and speak in this House on behalf of the good people of Toronto Centre. I want to begin my remarks by thanking my friend and colleague from Spadina-Fort York for putting forward this very important piece of legislation.

The fact that Ontario should have a commissioner of democratic rights should not even be up for debate and consideration. This is the House of democracy. Of course, we should be actually doing everything we can to strengthen it by making sure we invest in those institutions and the tools to do so.

But speaking about our democracy which is becoming increasingly fragile and weak under this government is not something that I take great pleasure in doing. We have actually seen many decisions by this government that have gone the way of eroding democracy.

In 2018, city council in Toronto was under active, open elections. I was registered as a candidate running for re-election, and in the middle of that election, the rules entirely changed. We had thousands of pieces of literature that were no longer usable because the ward boundaries changed. Neighbours and neighbourhoods were so confused about which ward they were going to be voting in, and all of this because the Premier decided that he wanted to cut city council in half. All of this leads to just the beginning of what we are now knowing as the norm in the thinking of the Premier: He can do whatever he wants, whenever he wants, and the rest of us be damned.

Following that, we saw the strong-mayor legislation coming forward, handing mayors powers to override council

decisions—something that we haven't seen before in Ontario—consolidating power in the hands of one or two individuals and then bypassing the bylaws that council would have passed. These powers are largely designed to centralize power every single time by actually disenfranchising the voters.

This is a very concerning pattern at the provincial level, at the municipal level, and it has rippling effects throughout.

This particular Conservative government also introduced election laws that restricted third-party advocacy, limiting the ability of unions, community groups, civil society organizations in speaking up—again, suppressing speech and suppressing their democratic rights.

The justice system has not been spared under this government. We've seen political meddling and interference with the appointments of adjudicators at the tribunal as well as justices. All of this is important because we know we need an impartial rule of law in order for us to have a healthy, strong democracy—something that each and every single one of us in this House should fight for.

And then, the government goes ahead and takes away the democratic, duly elected school board trustees, again, disenfranchising parents and students from having an elected voice in the House. All of this is leading to a disturbing pattern in the erosion of democracy that we should be very, very mindful of.

Let me bring you a story of why you should care. I was born in Hong Kong under a British colony. And in 1997, before the British released us back to Chinese rule, they gave free elections for the very first time. The Communist Party came along and started to erode and take away what freedoms we had for just a very short period of time.

Now, you cannot speak freely in Hong Kong. You cannot criticize the government. You cannot have free elections without political interference and meddling. And all of this is creating the suppression of speech and the erosion of democracy in a tiny, little city state that really could be prosperous and flourishing.

Why this matters is because Tai Po has experienced a disastrous fire. You've all read it; it's made international news. Seven towers caught fire, 160 people have died, and the people of Hong Kong cannot speak up. This is what can happen in Ontario if we don't protect our democratic rights.

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

1730

**Mr. Ted Hsu:** It is very true, what my colleagues have been saying tonight, that we can't take our democracy for granted. It's a precious thing. This bill reminds me that the municipal election season is starting. It always starts about a year before the municipal elections. I've been chatting with councillors in Kingston and they all seem to be like—the gears are turning in their brains and they're starting to plan for municipal elections next year.

I remember what this Premier did when Toronto held municipal elections in 2018. The Premier changed the ward boundaries in the middle of the election. He completely disrupted those elections. This Premier got rid of

the ranked-ballot voting. In the city of Kingston we had a referendum to have ranked-ballot voting in municipal elections. It passed by a 2-to-1 margin. Two thirds of the people voted for ranked-ballot voting, and this Premier got rid of that. The education minister is thinking seriously about getting rid of school trustees. Next year would normally be an election year for school trustees—those who are supposed to make our school boards locally accountable to local communities.

For all of these reasons, I am very concerned about the state of our democracy in Ontario. My colleague from Toronto—St. Paul's put it much better than I could ever say, talking about how democracy has been eroded in this very fall session of the Legislature that we are coming to the end of. It's actually a pretty timely thing for my colleague from Spadina—Fort York to put forward his bill for second reading debate. I will be very happy to support this bill.

I will, however, say—and I do hope that everybody votes for it and it goes to committee stage—that I want to suggest three things that could be added to the bill, three important things, three areas where our democracy is weak and that aren't explicitly covered by this bill—maybe implied but not explicitly covered. I hope my honourable colleague from Spadina—Fort York would consider allowing amendments to the bill.

Number one would be that free and fair elections may not actually be useful if the public is not informed—or if the public is misinformed. One of the things that's been eroding, especially in the last 10 years or so, is local journalism and investigative journalism. I hope that my colleague allows an amendment for this commissioner to include looking at local journalism and at how informed voters are.

Second thing: Elections are one thing, but accountability to elected representatives after the election is also very important. I hope that this commissioner would be allowed to look at the standing orders in this Legislature because the commissioner should be able to comment on how the standing orders allow or impede elected MPPs to fulfill their primary responsibility to hold the government of the day to account. These standing orders—I remember what they were like in the House of Commons—in this House allow the majority to run roughshod over the elected representatives of the people. I think it would be good to have some external comment about that.

Thirdly—this is not exactly elections, but it is related to elections—I think the least democratic part of our system is party nominations and leadership races. Everybody knows that that's the weakest link in our democracy. There's very little enforcement of the rules, of how many you spend, and you're susceptible—because a small number of people participate in these nomination votes or leadership votes. It's very susceptible to influence by special interests; the worst would be influence by foreign interests. I hope my colleague from Spadina—Fort York would welcome amendments to allow the commissioner for democracy to look at this particular weak link in our democracy and, in fact, all of the three weak links which I just remembered. Those are some of the details.



I do hope that the government members, in listening to the things that I've said, will realize—and not just me, sorry; I should include the other comments from my honourable colleagues who have spoken here today. I hope that the government MPPs, in listening to our comments, will agree that our democracy should not be taken for granted, that it has weaknesses, and that we should have somebody separate from the partisan part of our democratic system and that person should be able to study, investigate and report back on what they see. Thank you.

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

**Mr. Matthew Rae:** I'm glad my friend from the Kingston and the Islands thinks I'm courageous, Speaker.

I rise in my place to speak to an important private member's bill brought forward by MPP Glover, An Act establishing a Commissioner for Democratic Rights, 2025.

Speaker, this evening I want to begin by reaffirming that the Legislative Assembly is the foundation of democracy here in Ontario. It's made up of members of provincial Parliament. Still, I don't think quite a thousand unique members have sat in this place in the history of our democracy in its current form since 1867. It speaks to the great role that we all have as members of provincial Parliament, who are elected by the people of Ontario to bring their voices, their priorities and their concerns to Queen's Park at the provincial Legislative Assembly. I know all members in this place do that every day.

I think of the former Speaker, Speaker Arnott, who said to me when I came to this place three and a half years ago that there is no bad seat in this chamber, because if you have a seat, you obviously have the parliamentary rights and privileges that come with that, to get up, speak and advocate on behalf of your constituents. At that time, I had the current member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke's seat, the last government seat in the chamber, but I know all seats are important in this place.

The assembly has three core responsibilities: to debate and pass legislation, to hold the government to account, and to review and approve—or not approve, depending on the makeup of the House—government spending.

Responsible government is a long tradition in our history. It emerged in 1839, well before our lovely Confederation came together through the Durham report. Lord Durham commissioned it. It was a simple idea, Speaker, where the executive, the cabinet, must maintain the confidence of the elected Legislative Assembly—not the King's representative or the Queen's representative, depending who's on the throne; not the governor of Canada, at that time Upper Canada. Lord Durham was one of those individuals at one point and commissioned this report.

Responsible government came about through that. Really, our provincial governments and federal governments came about in the tradition of that, where the executive answers to the Legislative Assembly and the members within it. This process has worked for generations. It continues to uphold the principles of democracy and is carefully designed to ensure fairness, transparency and public input at a variety of stages.

Speaker, in preparing for this evening's remarks, I found an interesting quote which I'd like to share with my colleagues here. It says, "Canadians do not want an expensive American-style election that drags on for months and months, and there is nothing more democratic than calling an election." What's more democratic than an election? The great, great Canadian defender of democracy Jean Chrétien said that in 2000—right before he called a snap federal election, in that case. He won, colleagues, as we all know. He won, actually, three elections—three majority governments, similar to Premier Ford. And I agree with Jean Chrétien. I know—a Conservative is agreeing with a federal Liberal politician. But elections are the greatest voice that people have to make their voices heard and ensuring that their voices are heard.

1740

The protection of democratic rights is not something, in my opinion—and I hope some of my other colleagues feel the same—that should be delegated away to a non-elected official. It's a fundamental, inherent responsibility of every elected member in this chamber to come to this place and advocate on behalf of their constituents, bring forward their concerns and priorities. Yet the member opposite wants to propose and delegate these responsibilities to be shifted to an unelected, appointed commissioner.

Speaker, this commissioner would not only be redundant and unnecessary; it undermines the duties of the very people Ontarians have sent here to this place to represent them. Bills introduced in the Legislature pass through several stages of scrutiny, multiple readings, committee hearings, clause-by-clause, public input. The proposal to create an appointed commissioner to review bills duplicates these processes, compromises the clarity of our system and introduces unnecessary layers of uncertainty and delay.

Madam Speaker, I want to emphasize that MPPs are directly accountable to the people that we have the pleasure and honour of serving in this place every single day. I know I take constituents' calls every day. I meet with many of them when I am able to in the riding. I meet with them at Canadian Tire on a Saturday morning as well—happens very often. But we are here to introduce legislation, propose amendments, participate in debate and ultimately vote on laws that shape our province and our province's future. That accountability is essential to democracy. By creating a new commissioner for democratic rights, the member opposite would duplicate these responsibilities, consume public resources and add the very red tape our government is working hard to eliminate.

The Legislative Assembly already benefits from a variety of non-partisan officers and leadership. The Speaker, as you all well know, presides over proceedings and is impartial. The Clerk, our chief permanent civil servant, oversees procedure and administration with professionalism and expertise. Ontario, as I mentioned, has a strong suite of independent officers to uphold trust and transparency: the Ontario Ombudsman, the Auditor General, the Integrity Commissioner, the Chief Electoral Officer. These officers oversee fairness, accountability,

elections and public administration, and they are well-established, respected and effective individuals. Creating a new commissioner would not strengthen democratic rights. It would only slow down the system, duplicating existing mechanisms and diverting resources away from where they are needed most.

Our government is committed to protecting democracy, strengthening participation through public hearings, committees, community outreach and education. This bill, I would argue, Speaker, moves in the opposite direction. This proposal does not enhance democracy, adds duplication, red tape and costs. Ontarians deserve better. We'll continue to listen to the people of Ontario and taking meaningful action to ensure democratic institutions remain strong for today and for generations to come.

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

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** I can see why the member from Spadina–Fort York has brought forward this piece of legislation.

I will say that, traditionally, opposition parties play a very important role in this House. But this government has changed the game. They've changed the order paper. They've changed the rules of engagement. And they've reduced public consultation. They have reduced our committee involvement to fix your flaccid and weak legislation. They have reduced our opportunity to debate through time allocation.

Reducing our voices as parliamentarians undermines the very democracy of this province, and you have done it with glee and reckless abandonment, because your disdain for democracy is so profound in the province of Ontario. We have never seen it this bad. We think that we're better than the United States. We think that it can never happen here, when it is happening actively, in real time, in this place.

As the critic and shadow minister for economic development, trade and tariff response, I just wanted to let you know that traditionally, historically, when governments like yours interfere in economic policy—as we've seen with the Skills Development Fund, where the minister is putting the bottom applications to the top, picking winners and losers over very strong economic applications—we have seen this undermine our economy, reduce the potential of our workers, steal their opportunities. When you do that, you also weaken the province of Ontario.

I also would like to just educate you on a few things. There is an owl on this side. The government is supposed to look at the owl and gain wisdom. I would recommend you look at that owl a lot more. I would recommend that you think about your oath that you take as a public servant in this place.

We have the hawk. Our job is to look at your legislation and scrutinize it and try to make it more fair. God knows, you give us a lot of material to work with. But I will say, there seems to be a complete imbalance of democratic power in this place, and you are actively undermining our roles as parliamentarians. There's a lot of data, actually, to

support that when a government—unlike the Ford government—values public consultation and voices that are democratically elected, democratization increases GDP growth per capita by 20% to 25%. As democracy declines, nearly all businesses will therefore face substantial costs. We've actually seen this in Ontario.

Businesses with high exposure to government decisions and contracts, which we've also seen—the politicization of contracts undermines confidence for people to look at the province of Ontario and say, “Hey, that's a good place to invest.” So, the connection and the relationship between a strong democracy and people reaching their potential and strong economic growth is evidence-based. It's there.

Of course, you're not interested in the facts or, I would argue, the truth, and you've already declared you're not going to support this motion, which is of no surprise to any of us, because your disdain for our democracy is insulting to the people of this province.

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

**MPP Lise Vaugeois:** I just want to note for the member from Perth–Wellington, who doesn't agree with appointees such as the Integrity Commissioner or the Auditor General or the Financial Accountability Officer—but when it comes to putting partisan supervisors into schools to replace duly elected trustees, that's okay.

**MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam:** At great expense.

**MPP Lise Vaugeois:** At great expense, yes.

I want to thank the member from Spadina–Fort York for bringing this bill forward. It creates a commissioner of democratic rights as an independent officer of the Legislative Assembly, as a non-partisan office that cannot be directed by the government of the day. That is so important, because we see so much happening to undermine our democracy. The creation of such a commissioner will enhance public trust in Ontario's democratic institutions by providing independent oversight. It will strengthen accountability by reviewing government actions that affect voting rights, civic participation and institutional integrity.

Under the Ford government, however, every principle of democratic government has been violated. Our right to free speech and other charter rights have been overridden with legislation using the “notwithstanding” clause. In 2022, the government passed Bill 3, Strong Mayors, Building Homes Act, and Bill 39 that stripped Ontarians of majority-vote decision-making. Under this legislation, a mayor and one third of councillors can overrule a vote by two thirds of councillors. I mean, they just completely undermine the whole purpose of municipal councils and the balance that is there, the people that are elected to be representatives.

The interference in municipal matters hasn't stopped here either. They love to tell municipalities what they can't do. At the same time, they will brag about not having any taxes, but they download all the responsibilities to the municipalities without the money, and then the municipalities have no choice but to raise taxes. So it is a game. It's

certainly a disingenuous process that takes place with this government.

1750

Our right to an impartial judiciary has also been violated, as the Premier, through the Attorney General, is openly and self-righteously appointing Conservative judges.

The recent takeover and dismissal of school board trustees, with Bill 33, violates our right to elect trustees to run our schools—and uses a back-door trick to eliminate the ability of university student councils to function.

The consistent use of time allocation removes the ability of the public to bring their concerns to committee, cutting their voices out altogether.

Most recently, the Conservatives have brought in a plan to merge 36 conservation authorities into seven, all but eliminating local knowledge and local voices.

These plans are not only anti-democratic; they are anti-science.

Perhaps worst of all is Bill 5, which concentrates power in the executive branch, bypasses standard legislative and public consultation processes, erodes local decision-making authority and undermines constitutionally protected Indigenous rights.

And I must say, the patronizing response of the Minister of Education this morning to the member from Kiiwetinoong, an Indigenous rights holder, shows how little respect the government has for process or Indigenous rights. His comments were a shameful display of colonial arrogance and entitlement.

I will end there.

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

**Mr. Dave Smith:** It has been interesting listening to this tonight.

We operate under a Westminster parliamentary system, and in my opinion, it truly is the best democratic system that's out there, because what it does is it creates that level of accountability across the government. We have elected members in this House, in the chamber, who are here to hold government responsible. We have ministers who are responsible and report back to the members on things—and our structure is set up for that. Think of things like public accounts. Think of things like estimates. Ministers have to come in and defend what they've done to the members.

One of the interesting things that they have talked about in this—that I really find very interesting is, they've made the assumption that the only consultation that happens is after a bill has been introduced. But what we see with the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs—right now, we're going through pre-budget consultations. We're going out to the people, right now, to get feedback from the people. In fact, we're going to 11 different communities with the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs—24 delegations from each of them.

On top of that, the ministry of—

*Interjections.*

**The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell):** Let's take it down a notch. Let's be respectful to each member when they're on the floor presenting.

**Mr. Dave Smith:** On top of that, the Ministry of Finance is also doing that pre-budget consultation, and I, myself, from the beginning of December till the end of January, will be in 26 different communities, and I will be hearing from upwards of a thousand different presenters. On top of that, my fellow parliamentary assistant, the member for Eglinton–Lawrence, is doing exactly the same thing, and so is the minister. And that is simply on the budget.

The amount of consultation—that we go out to the public, prior to introducing a bill, to find out what it is the people need. That is what democracy is about. We're going to the people.

It's interesting to listen to the opposition talk about this, because what they want to introduce is a commissioner, and I'm truly thankful that they didn't say we needed a chairman of democracy, similar to what Chairman Mao would perhaps be in China—that we're not going to have someone who—

*Interjections.*

**The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell):** Okay. I've got to quiet us down again. We need to take it down a notch. I can't hear the member. It's close to Christmas. Let's keep it down, please.

**Mr. Dave Smith:** We have this system of democracy in Ontario, in Canada, that is about people electing representatives to come here to create the laws to make Ontario a better place. What we do have is Elections Ontario, which oversees that. There are two pieces of legislation that Elections Ontario uses for that, and they ensure that our democratic process in elections is appropriate, that we are electing people to represent our communities. That is Elections Ontario's job. For more than 160 years that is what has happened, and it continues to happen that way.

As the member from Perth–Wellington mentioned, there are less than 2,000 individuals who have ever been elected to sit here and represent the people of Ontario. At each one of those provincial elections—there have been 44 of them—the people of Ontario have an opportunity to stand up and say, "This is who we want to represent us." In the last three elections, the people of Ontario have consistently stepped forward and said, "We would like to have the members of the Progressive Conservative Party leading the government."

That is what we have been doing. We've gone out to the people on multiple occasions. Before every bill, we go out to the people to find out what it is. For the last three elections, the people have stepped forward and said, "This is the process that we want, and these are the people we want representing us."

**The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell):** The member has two minutes to reply.

**Mr. Chris Glover:** I want to thank all of the MPPs who participated in the debate today, and I especially want to thank all of the people who came here to fight for our democracy in Ontario. Thank you for being here for the debate.

I don't know where to start. I mean, I heard this government say that democracy is red tape and that's one

of the things that they're in favour of cutting. And they do cut red tape; they do cut our democracy.

One of the things that has struck me most since I was elected seven and a half years ago is how weak the legal framework for our democratic rights is, and this government keeps finding more and more ways to exploit that to undermine our democratic rights. They've just recently replaced our elected school board trustees with appointed supervisors. They cancelled regional chair elections in 2018 and replaced them with appointed regional chairs who govern with one third of the votes of the actual elected members of the councils.

In the majority of our municipalities now, we no longer have majority-vote democracy; we have minority-vote: One third of city councillors and the mayor can overrule two thirds.

We no longer have the right to democratic municipal elections because of this government. The Supreme Court ruled—and this government was talking about elections—that our right to democratic provincial elections was violated in 2022 and 2025 by this government when they passed legislation that banned third-party advertising that would be critical of this government.

This government is appointing partisan judges. Our democratic rights in this province are under attack. In the Legislature, there are supposed to be checks and balances on the power of the elected officials. This government keeps eroding those checks and balances. They're taking over our school boards. They're appointing partisan judges. They're removing our right to—

**The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell):** The time provided for private members' public business has expired.

MPP Glover has moved second reading of Bill 78, an Act establishing a Commissioner for Democratic Rights.

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 nays have it.

A recorded vote being required, it will be deferred until the next instance of deferred votes.

*Second reading vote deferred.*

**The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell):** Pursuant to standing order 36, the question that this House do now adjourn is deemed to have been made.

## ADJOURNMENT DEBATE

### GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

**The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell):** The member for Don Valley East has given notice of dissatisfaction with the answer to a question given by the Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development. The member has up to five minutes to debate the matter, and the minister or parliamentary assistant may reply for up to five minutes.

1800

I recognize the member for Don Valley East.

**Mr. Adil Shamji:** I'm pleased to rise and elaborate on my question from Monday, December 8. Of course, this is an adjournment debate, a so-called late show, because I filed a notice of dissatisfaction. But, Madam Speaker, I must admit that dissatisfaction does not come close to adequately capturing the scale of my disappointment with the Minister of Labour's response to my question.

I will quote the document that I submitted to file this notice of dissatisfaction. I had to explain why I was filing it. I think a more appropriate way to describe the feelings I had when I listened to the Minister of Labour was that—and I literally quote—the "answer was terrible."

I asked him a question in regard to the Skills Development Fund, and specifically around the latest scandalous development in regard to Connex, and the Minister of Labour did not even have the courage to utter the word "Connex" once. His answer was completely and utterly unrelated to anything that I had asked him.

I will remind the members in this House that I started by saying that the Premier and this government made a series of promises about protecting jobs, which they didn't do; promising family doctors, which they didn't do; about making life affordable, which they've absolutely failed to do; and are now taking away people's rewards points.

I asked the Minister of Labour: On what planet did it make sense for him to prioritize a promise to a donor and deliver \$1 million to a CEO who had been discredited? I didn't get an answer. He didn't mention anything about a CEO, anything about \$1 million, anything about Connex.

So then I followed up in my subsequent question. I asked: Why did Connex get a \$1-million payday when the CEO's last company already blew its shot and lost provincial funding after failing to deliver jobs or production? Because my understanding—and I invite anyone in this House to correct me if I'm wrong—is that the purpose of the Skills Development Fund is to create jobs and create opportunities. Instead, all it has been used to do is to divert \$2.5 billion into the hands of people like the owner of a strip club—divert funds towards bars and nightclubs, the Ford family dentist, a company that is literally called Get A-Head, which, under this government, absolutely did get ahead, to the tune of millions of dollars.

This \$2.5 billion went towards things like a private company, led by a CEO who was previously sanctioned for leading a public company by the Ontario Securities Commission for misrepresenting the work that his company did. To add insult to injury, this CEO of Connex, this sanctioned CEO by the Ontario Securities Commission, went so far as to take that \$1 million and use it to develop an AI chatbot that literally takes away jobs from everyday Ontarians.

My question to the Minister of Labour was how did he justify that? We're in adjournment proceedings, so I know that I will either get an answer from the Minister of Labour or his parliamentary assistant. I expect an answer to that question. I expect an answer that mentions the title "Connex," and I expect an explanation that acknowledges

the \$1 million given to a discredited CEO that could have gone towards actually creating jobs, that shouldn't have been diverted towards developing an AI chatbot that would take jobs away from everyday Ontarians.

Regrettably, this is just the latest in a series of scandalous examples in which the Skills Development Fund has been used to enrich friends and donors, to the exclusion of high-quality applicants that the minister personally intervened on. He personally overturned the decisions by his own bureaucrats so that those funds could be redirected towards his and his Premier's friends.

On Monday, I asked about that debacle. I asked the minister to justify how he could do that. I asked how something, a program that ostensibly could be a very good thing, was instead mismanaged and used to enrich friends and donors.

In my final 15 seconds, I want to challenge the Minister of Labour or his parliamentary assistant, in their response to my dissatisfaction, to mention the word "Connex," to acknowledge the million dollars that was diverted towards this inappropriate company and explain to Ontarians how they can justify this.

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

**Mr. Andrew Dowie:** I'm pleased to rise today to respond to the point of dissatisfaction raised earlier this week.

Let me begin with a simple truth: The Skills Development Fund is changing lives.

Since launching in 2021, SDF has supported over 1,000 projects and provided training in key industries to more than 700,000 Ontarians. And the results speak for themselves: Over 100,000 people attained employment within 60 days of completing SDF-funded training. We've trained 154,000 construction workers, 124,000 manufacturing workers, 52,000 health care workers, and 35,000 workers in mining, quarrying and energy—building the workforce Ontario needs for decades to come. This is progress that is real, measurable and felt in every corner of our province.

Speaker, it's important to emphasize that the SDF has continually strengthened its governance, transparency and oversight. Intake and assessment are led by ministry experts, using clear and consistent guidelines. Every proposal undergoes a rigorous scoring process that evaluates innovation, impact, employer partnerships, and training outcomes. Transfer payment agreements include strict reporting, monitoring, and compliance requirements that ensure projects deliver results. These improvements reflect our government's commitment to ensuring every dollar delivers real value, real training and real jobs. And these have not only improved, round after round; they're also driving innovation.

Speaker, the Skills Development Fund is not only building today's workforce; it's preparing Ontario for tomorrow's economy.

Under the leadership of Premier Ford, we've invested nearly \$28 million across 22 projects designed specifically to help 4,000 Ontarians upskill into high-demand careers in the digital and AI sectors. Ontario stays competitive not

by resisting innovation, but by equipping workers to embrace it. We have over 434,000 tech workers in Ontario; that's up 100,000 since we took office. Since 2018, we've landed nearly \$10 billion in AI investments. And to keep the AI sector growing forward, we need the skilled workforce to power it ahead.

Speaker, statistics truly matter, but the heart of SDF is the people whose lives have been changed.

Bernard, a veteran who served our country, joined the Coding for Veterans program through SDF. Through hands-on cyber security and IT training, he gained the skills he needed to become an analyst. Today, Bernard is thriving in a field that values his discipline, leadership and technical expertise.

These are not abstract numbers—these are real Ontarians whose futures have been reshaped because this government believes in them.

Speaker, Coding for Veterans was founded by my constituent Jeff Musson. It has been a tremendous success story.

The Skills Development Fund has been a tremendous asset for workforce development in my community of Windsor–Tecumseh.

The Ironworkers Local 700 training expansion project is a standout example. It expanded training capacity within 12 months, on schedule and on budget, exceeding key performance indicators; invested in industry-standard tools that accelerated certification for apprentices and journeypersons; expanded opportunities for women and marginalized workers to enter the trade; and enabled more workers to complete all three levels of training using upgraded facilities and technology. As we see major investments in construction, infrastructure, and manufacturing—from battery plants to automotive innovation—this is exactly the kind of training that Windsor–Tecumseh needs to remain competitive.

I'm proud to see so many others in my community supported by the Skills Development Fund: Build a Dream; In Honour of the Ones We Love; IBEW Local 773; Carpenters Local 494; the Windsor Centre for Film, Digital Media and the Creative Arts.

And it's working. Over the last month, in my community, we've seen a significant decrease in unemployment—down from 9.6% in October to 8.1% in November. That also includes the highest employment numbers ever—with over 246,000 people being employed in November and the lowest youth unemployment levels in the last two years.

So this project shows SDF at its best, supporting local training, strengthening local industry and preparing local workers with the jobs of tomorrow.

**1810**

The SDF has also played a critical role in rebuilding Ontario's apprenticeship system. Under the previous government, Ontario lost more than 15,000 apprentices in just three years. Since 2018, apprenticeship registrations have increased 61% and Ontario has over 100,000 active apprentices, including 16,400 youth registered last year alone, the highest levels we've seen in a decade.

Speaker, this is a story that matters—

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

#### PUBLIC TRANSIT

**The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell):** Next, the member for Scarborough Southwest has given notice of dissatisfaction with the answer to a question given by the Minister of Transportation. The member has up to five minutes to debate the matter, and the minister or parliamentary assistant may reply for up to five minutes.

I recognize the member for Scarborough Southwest.

**Ms. Doly Begum:** Speaker, I'm calling on the government, the Premier of Ontario and the Minister of Transportation to listen to the people and launch a public inquiry into Metrolinx. I hope to use the next few minutes to just be rational, to just tell you exactly what I'm feeling and what people across this province are feeling.

For the last three years, we've been calling on this government to launch a public inquiry into Metrolinx, and I hope that I can use the next few minutes to persuade you. Hopefully you'll see the light and you'll understand that this is not just for me, it's not just for one particular reason, but for a grander purpose: to actually have this public inquiry launched, so that you'll actually be able to have something much more tangible that will be beneficial for the entire province.

Speaker, when I asked the minister and the Premier earlier this week whether he would launch this inquiry, there was a very disappointing response. It could have been just a simple yes or no; instead, the minister went into self-praise about the Finch line—which, by the way, is going through a lot of struggles right now, and the minister has a lot to answer to for that, but that's a different conversation—and then he also went on to give factually incorrect information.

But putting all of that aside, I'm in the holiday spirit, so I just want to give you what is going on with Metrolinx and why it is so important to launch a public inquiry. The goal here is to make sure that we are accountable to the public. The goal should be to strip away Metrolinx's belief that it can continue to deny you—you as the government—the right to have answers, the right to have accountability over something that you have jurisdiction over. The need for transparency and accountability is a must, and we need to have that as people who are elected to the public.

Right now, the public are completely left in the dark when it comes to Metrolinx. Metrolinx has built and over the years polished this sense of arrogance and impunity, and, Speaker, you know this very well. There is complete disdain, complete disregard, complete mockery of this government, of all of the people, of this government's jurisdictional authority to hold Metrolinx accountable. There are times I honestly feel like you actually don't know what Metrolinx is doing.

Metrolinx continues to arbitrarily exercise power and entitlement using public dollars, and this government has given impunity or just put its head under the sand—

complete impunity for Metrolinx, whatever it does, without any accountability. We should never again have Metrolinx come out after seven months of not meeting—and they have 118 board members, vice-presidents, who are on the public dime, and not once has the government had the guts to get up and ask why. You don't even know what they're there for. You can't even answer those questions.

Not only that, but sometimes they don't meet for months. We've seen that with the Ontario Line and the Scarborough subway extension. They come out with a vague memo, which doesn't give much of a response. We saw that with the Eglinton Crosstown, and that's what I've been asking this government now. After over 15 years, billions of tax dollars, we still do not have an answer.

Just this week, Metrolinx, the TTC, this government and the Premier had a meeting where Metrolinx did not give clear answers, and there was actually disagreement on when the opening date would be. Because there are significant issues with the Eglinton LRT, and right now, we do not know what these issues are. You're putting the people of this province on the hook for that, just like with the Scarborough extension right now. The tunnel is having problems. Metrolinx has given a vague memo of exactly what the issues are, and you still haven't figured out what it is.

So I am telling you, this will actually benefit you, because I understand you inherited this mess called Metrolinx from the Liberals. So why are you taking the blame? You've had now your third term, going into your eighth year. You have the ability to actually find out exactly what kind of skeletons are hidden, what kind of skeletons are buried, what exactly took place and why we are where we are with Metrolinx, why this complete disregard, disrespect for you that Metrolinx has. And it is the people's tax dollars that are on the hook, so I hope you have that answer for the people. I hope you'll call a—

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

**Mr. Hardeep Singh Grewal:** I'm actually honoured to talk about all the transit investments and infrastructure investments our government has made: \$70 billion is being invested into Ontario's transit and infrastructure when it comes to transportation. That's a record-breaking number because, under the previous Liberal government supported by the NDP, what did the people of this province get? Absolutely nothing.

Things were not being built. Things were not moving forward. The reason we're in an infrastructure shortage today is because they did not build it when we actually needed it, and now this is the government, under Premier Ford's leadership, that's actually getting things done, that's moving things forward. If she is concerned about her residents in Scarborough and other areas, with her caucus colleagues: Vote in favour of these projects. The subway that's going to help Scarborough residents is being undertaken by this government, by these caucus members, led by Premier Ford. She should stand up and champion that for her residents and vote for those amazing projects.

Speaker, no government has done more for public transit than under the leadership of this Premier—again,

\$70 billion to build the largest transit expansion in North America. These are historic projects that are going to shape our province for decades to come.

And this year, we've made incredible progress on our plan. We've increased GO rail service from Union Station in Toronto to Niagara Falls, with service now operating seven days a week. We've completed the Confederation GO station that provides more opportunities for commuters in Hamilton. We've launched the weekend GO train service in Kitchener for the first time ever. And we just opened the Finch LRT, just this past week.

I understand that there are things that are happening between the TTC and the city of Toronto, but you know what's happening? Infrastructure across this province is being built. We're moving forward. What you see here is a production of investments that we're putting into this government—

*Interjection.*

**Mr. Hardeep Singh Grewal:** The member over there is laughing, but instead of laughing, she should vote in support of these projects.

*Interjection.*

**Mr. Hardeep Singh Grewal:** There's still three minutes on the clock. You asked your question at the end; I'm going to come to your answer. Don't worry about it. There's still time here, Speaker.

Unlike the Liberals, who left projects like the Eglinton Crosstown LRT with years of construction delays, we got it done. We've completed the revenue service demonstration, which was the final stage of testing before opening, and Metrolinx has handed over control and operations to the TTC. The city of Toronto and the TTC operate the Crosstown, and just like Finch, the opening date will be announced—

**Ms. Doly Begum:** They have not handed it over.

**The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell):** I'm going to ask the member for Scarborough Southwest to take a moment and calm down and let the member present.

**Mr. Hardeep Singh Grewal:** The opening date will be announced by city and the TTC. But I understand how frustrated people are with this project. It's a bad contract that was signed over by the Liberals. We have been working on this since 2012 as a province, so we understand the frustration that everybody has in this room and in this province. That's why we're working so hard to make sure that we open safely and responsibly and have a successful opening. We want to make sure that everything is done right.

Unfortunately, the Liberals signed a bad construction contract. We inherited this project from the previous Liberal government that was supported for years by the NDP. That's why, on projects like the Ontario Line and the Scarborough subway extension, we're taking a different approach. Our projects are well under way. For example, we have shovels in the ground on all sections of the Ontario Line, tunnelling is complete on the Eglinton West extension and we have started construction on future stations for the Scarborough subway.

Speaker, if the NDP were serious about building faster, they wouldn't have voted against the Building Transit Faster Act. And if the NDP were serious about improving

transit services for Ontarians, they wouldn't have voted against the largest transit expansion in Canadian history. The reality is this is just a political distraction from the NDP. We're the party that's opening new transit lines, we're the party that's delivering better service for riders and we're the party that's building for the future.

The amount of investments that this government has made, \$70 billion, is a massive number, a record-breaking number. The NDP need to stand up and support that, because I'm sure once that subway opens up in Scarborough, the member is going to be riding it. The member's constituents are going to be riding it. Everybody is going to be celebrating it. It's with visionary leaders like Premier Ford that we're able to break ground on these projects.

**1820**

Speaker, the member talks about Metrolinx. Metrolinx has been tasked to build this largest transit expansion in the history of this province.

If you want to build absolutely nothing, you can listen to the NDP and just shut the entire thing down because that's what they're all about. They want nothing to happen. We can go ahead and reduce that number to zero and have nobody working there if that's what the NDP wants.

But under the leadership of this Premier, this Minister of Transportation, we're going to get it done for the people of Ontario. We're going to build transit infrastructure. We're going to build highways, we're going to build roads, we're going to build hospitals and we're going to make sure Ontario doesn't get left behind, unlike what happened with the Liberals, supported by the NDP.

## FORESTRY INDUSTRY

**The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell):** Finally, the member for Thunder Bay–Superior North has given notice of dissatisfaction with the answer to a question given by the Minister of Natural Resources. The member has up to five minutes to debate the matter, and a minister or parliamentary assistant may reply for up to five minutes.

I recognize the member for Thunder Bay–Superior North.

**MPP Lise Vaugeois:** Thank you very much, Speaker. The pulp mill in Terrace Bay has now been idled for almost two years, and despite numerous suggestions from industry experts to revitalize the mill or convert it to other forestry-related purposes, nothing has happened.

The Conservative government gave \$128 million to the mill with no strings attached. That's a problem. When the mill was first idled, early estimates to bring it back were about \$200 million.

That sounds like a lot of money until you remember that the Conservative government spent \$225 million to get liquor into corner stores six months early—by the way, having completely forgotten about what would happen to all the empties. But worse, according to the Financial Accountability Office, the whole liquor transition has cost the taxpayers of Ontario \$1.4 billion.

Can anyone tell me why killing off the LCBO, Beer Stores and their recycling program, rushing to get booze into corner stores, is worth \$1.4 billion, yet there are no dollars to support a major industry in northwestern On-

tario? Where has the Ford government been throughout this long and difficult period for the people of Terrace Bay? Forestry is a critical part of Ontario's economy, and the closure of the mill in Terrace Bay has had negative effects on the entire region: 1,800 workers, roughly, affected across the northwest, a number that doesn't include the family members affected.

Then there's the cost to all the other businesses that were forced to lay off workers and are extremely worried still about losing all of their investments, the cost to social services and police as crime and domestic violence increase, and the \$500 million in environmental costs if the mill shuts down permanently. The wreckage will be left behind for the community to deal with.

Speaker, pulp is now selling at USD\$1,800 per ton, with the mill in Terrace Bay having produced some of the best pulp in the world. Senior mill workers believe it would take about six months to get the mill up and running again, with the company able to make \$18 million a month, or about \$100 million a year. Those are good profits.

The government has made all kinds of direct investments into industries in southern Ontario, investments in industries that are actually shedding thousands of jobs in spite of receiving major grants. I'm thinking here of Algoma Steel that received \$500 million—interesting.

It appears that a decision has been made to blow off the mill in Terrace Bay and leave it as contaminated scrap. Who pays for the cleanup? Or does it remain as a derelict building in perpetuity?

I want to acknowledge that the government has made some investments into the forestry industry, but not in Terrace Bay. Now they are prepared to let the mill freeze and become an environmental disaster.

Frankly, I'd like to know about all the proponents that came forward and what it would have taken to complete deals with these proponents. No one in Terrace Bay knows. They've heard lots of rumours—they've heard bits about this company, that company—but there has been no real communication. There has been some investment into biomass, and the sawmill chip support program has bought some time for northern Ontario sawmills. But again, without a long-term strategy, this is actually going to collapse.

We know that unharvested wood is at risk of forest fires. Old wood becomes more susceptible to forest fires. Frankly, the wood is not being harvested to the amount that it would be if that mill was open. All of this was happening before the tariffs. You can't blame this on the tariffs, but certainly the tariffs have added to distress within the forestry sector.

Now, in 2024, we all received—I know that this was sent to everybody—a request from forestry experts to actually create a panel of experts to really look at what's going on in forestry. I know that there have been round tables, but we haven't seen—again, companies in other jurisdictions are reconfiguring their pulp mills to produce a range of products: chemicals, energy, mass timber, laminated veneer lumber, wood fibre insulation and wood pellets. Some of that is happening in Ontario, but not in Terrace Bay.

The bottom line is that if the mill is not heated this winter, it's game over. The mill becomes a ruined asset: scrap metal in a sludge of contamination. I know the government will respond with whatever they've been doing to support the industry—that's fine. But the bottom line is that Terrace Bay has been abandoned with no plan. Communication with workers in Terrace Bay has been minimal. And, frankly, the people in Terrace Bay deserve a straight answer.

As I asked yesterday, if the intention is to let the mill freeze over in the winter, who will be paying for the cleanup of the environmental disaster left behind?

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

**M<sup>me</sup> Dawn Gallagher Murphy:** I appreciate the opportunity to expand on the minister's response to the member's question.

As the member opposite is aware, what happens at the AV Terrace Bay site this winter is far more complex than a simple yes or no. It is tied to ongoing discussions with the company, the municipality, labour and other ministries.

Speaker, I want to be clear that Ontario expects AVTB and its parent company, Birla, to fulfill their obligations as it relates to site maintenance and environmental remediation, just as the government did when the idling of the mill was announced in January of 2024. And we expect AVTB and Birla to present a plan for long-term sustainability for the future of the mill. That's Ontario's position, and we stand by with the people of Terrace Bay to await the company's decision for what they intend to do with this site, how it will meet its regulatory and environmental responsibilities, as well as the long-term plan it is prepared to stand behind.

Now, without that clarity, it would be irresponsible for the province to make any operational decisions on the company's behalf. Ontario must act responsibly, protect taxpayer interests, while continuing to build a sustainable forest sector that benefits northern communities. The onus is on the company to set out that path.

Madam Speaker, I will make mention that our government, the minister, has been working with AVTB and Terrace Bay for the past couple of years. And I understand it is only in the past two weeks that the member opposite reached out to the minister to ask about what was going on. Our government has been working with them for the past couple of years. And what I'd like to speak to is all of the work. I'm glad that the member opposite recognized the work that we are doing, because there are so many things we are doing in this sector to support the forest sector.

We are making historic investments in forestry and forestry workers. We've invested an additional \$20 million in the forest access roads program. This is critical infrastructure that keeps mills supplied, supports harvesting operations and enables workers to access job sites safely.

Now, through the over \$50 million invested in the forest biomass program—thank you to the member opposite who mentioned this program—we are helping mills find new



markets for low-value fibre and supporting innovative projects that strengthen their business models.

Now, further to that is an additional \$10 million we've added to the sawmill chip program, which is ensuring that sawmills can move their by-products to pulp and paper operations efficiently and cost-effectively. We are also seeing new growth in advanced wood construction and modern engineered wood products, with major investments from companies like Daiken in Huntsville and Element5 in St. Thomas. Their work is positioning Ontario as a leader in next-generation wood manufacturing and helping diversify the sector at a time when global markets are shifting.

Just yesterday, Associate Minister Holland was in Thorold announcing \$2.2 million in funding for Char

Tech. These projects show that Ontario's forest sector is adapting, innovating and building for the future.

During this time of uncertainty arising from south of the border as President Trump continues to wage economic hardship on both Canadians and Americans, our government has demonstrated that we will do what it takes to support workers and their families here at home.

Madam Speaker, I'd like to close by reaffirming that we are taking this matter seriously, and we will continue working with all partners—

**The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell):** There being no further matters to debate, pursuant to standing order 36(c), I deem the motion to adjourn to be carried.

This House stands adjourned until 9 a.m. tomorrow.

*The House adjourned at 1831.*







**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO**  
**ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO**

Lieutenant Governor / Lieutenante-gouverneure: Hon. / L'hon. Edith Dumont, OOnt

Speaker / Présidente de l'Assemblée législative: Hon. / L'hon. Donna Skelly

Clerk / Greffier: Trevor Day

Deputy Clerk / Sous-Greffière: Valerie Quioc Lim

Clerks-at-the-Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Julia Douglas, Meghan Stenson,

Christopher Tyrell, Wai Lam (William) Wong

Sergeant-at-Arms / Sergent d'armes: Tim McGough

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Allsopp, Tyler (PC)	Bay of Quinte / Baie de Quinte	
Anand, Deepak (PC)	Mississauga—Malton	
Armstrong, Teresa J. (NDP)	London—Fanshawe	
Babikian, Aris (PC)	Scarborough—Agincourt	
Bailey, Robert (PC)	Sarnia—Lambton	
Begum, Doly (NDP)	Scarborough Southwest / Scarborough-Sud-Ouest	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjointe de l'opposition officielle
Bell, Jessica (NDP)	University—Rosedale	
<b>Bethlenfalvy, Hon. / L'hon. Peter (PC)</b>	Pickering—Uxbridge	Minister of Finance / Ministre des Finances
Blais, Stephen (LIB)	Orléans	
Bouma, Will (PC)	Brantford—Brant	
Bourgouin, Guy (NDP)	Mushkegowuk—James Bay / Mushkegowuk—Baie James	
Bowman, Stephanie (LIB)	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	Deputy Third Party House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjointe de parti reconnu
Brady, Bobbi Ann (IND)	Haldimand—Norfolk	
<b>Bresee, Ric (PC)</b>	Hastings—Lennox and Addington	Second Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Deuxième Vice-Président du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Burch, Jeff (NDP)	Niagara Centre / Niagara-Centre	
<b>Calandra, Hon. / L'hon. Paul (PC)</b>	Markham—Stouffville	Minister of Education / Ministre de l'Éducation
Cerjanec, Rob (LIB)	Ajax	
<b>Cho, Hon. / L'hon. Raymond Sung Joon (PC)</b>	Scarborough North / Scarborough-Nord	Minister for Seniors and Accessibility / Ministre des Services aux aînés et de l'Accessibilité
<b>Cho, Hon. / L'hon. Stan (PC)</b>	Willowdale	Minister of Tourism, Culture and Gaming / Ministre du Tourisme, de la Culture et des Jeux
Ciriello, Monica (PC)	Hamilton Mountain / Hamilton-Mountain	
Clancy, Aislinn (GRN)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	
Clark, Hon. / L'hon. Steve (PC)	Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes / Leeds— Grenville—Thousand Islands et Rideau Lakes	Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire du gouvernement
Coe, Lorne (PC)	Whitby	
Collard, Lucille (LIB)	Ottawa—Vanier	Third Party House Leader / Leader parlementaire de parti reconnu
Cooper, Michelle (PC)	Eglinton—Lawrence	
<b>Crawford, Hon. / L'hon. Stephen (PC)</b>	Oakville	Minister of Public and Business Service Delivery and Procurement / Ministre des Services au public et aux entreprises et de l'Approvisionnement
Cuzzetto, Rudy (PC)	Mississauga—Lakeshore	
Darouze, George (PC)	Carleton	
Denault, Billy (PC)	Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke	
Dixon, Jess (PC)	Kitchener South—Hespeler / Kitchener-Sud—Hespeler	
Dowie, Andrew (PC)	Windsor—Tecumseh	
<b>Downey, Hon. / L'hon. Doug (PC)</b>	Barrie—Springwater—Oro-Medonte	Attorney General / Procureur général
<b>Dunlop, Hon. / L'hon. Jill (PC)</b>	Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord	Minister of Emergency Preparedness and Response / Ministre de la Protection civile et de l'Intervention en cas d'urgence
Fairclough, Lee (LIB)	Etobicoke—Lakeshore	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
<b>Fedeli, Hon. / L'hon. Victor (PC)</b>	Nipissing	Chair of Cabinet / Président du Conseil des ministres Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade / Ministre du Développement économique, de la Création d'emplois et du Commerce
Fife, Catherine (NDP)	Waterloo	
Firin, Mohamed (PC)	York South—Weston / York-Sud— Weston	
<b>Flack, Hon. / L'hon. Rob (PC)</b>	Elgin—Middlesex—London	Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / Ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement
<b>Ford, Hon. / L'hon. Doug (PC)</b>	Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord	Premier / Premier ministre Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / Ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales Leader, Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti progressiste-conservateur de l'Ontario
Fraser, John (LIB)	Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	Leader, Third Party / Chef du troisième parti
<b>French, Jennifer K. (NDP)</b>	Oshawa	First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Première Vice-Présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Gallagher Murphy, Dawn (PC)	Newmarket—Aurora	
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	
<b>Hamid, Hon. / L'hon. Zee (PC)</b>	Milton	Associate Solicitor General for Auto Theft and Bail Reform / Solliciteur général associé responsable de la Lutte contre le vol d'automobiles et de la Réforme relative aux mises en liberté sous caution
Hardeman, Hon. / L'hon. Ernie (PC)	Oxford	
<b>Harris, Hon. / L'hon. Mike (PC)</b>	Kitchener—Conestoga	Minister of Natural Resources / Ministre des Richesses naturelles
<b>Hazell, Andrea (LIB)</b>	Scarborough—Guildwood	Third Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Troisième Vice-Présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
<b>Holland, Hon. / L'hon. Kevin (PC)</b>	Thunder Bay—Atikokan	Associate Minister of Forestry and Forest Products / Ministre associé des Forêts et des Produits forestiers
Hsu, Ted (LIB)	Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les Îles	
<b>Jones, Hon. / L'hon. Sylvia (PC)</b>	Dufferin—Caledon	Deputy Premier / Vice-première ministre Minister of Health / Ministre de la Santé
<b>Jones, Hon. / L'hon. Trevor (PC)</b>	Chatham-Kent—Leamington	Minister of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness / Ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et de l'Agroentreprise
Jordan, John (PC)	Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston	
Kanapathi, Logan (PC)	Markham—Thornhill	
Kernaghan, Terence (NDP)	London North Centre / London- Centre-Nord	
<b>Kerzner, Hon. / L'hon. Michael S. (PC)</b>	York Centre / York-Centre	Solicitor General / Solliciteur général
<b>Khanjin, Hon. / L'hon. Andrea (PC)</b>	Barrie—Innisfil	Minister of Red Tape Reduction / Ministre de la Réduction des formalités administratives
<b>Kusendova-Bashta, Hon. / L'hon. Natalia (PC)</b>	Mississauga Centre / Mississauga- Centre	Minister of Long-Term Care / Ministre des Soins de longue durée
Leardi, Anthony (PC)	Essex	Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint du gouvernement
<b>Lecce, Hon. / L'hon. Stephen (PC)</b>	King—Vaughan	Minister of Energy and Mines / Ministre de l'Énergie et des Mines
Lennox, Robin (NDP)	Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	
<b>Lumsden, Hon. / L'hon. Neil (PC)</b>	Hamilton East—Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est—Stoney Creek	Minister of Sport / Ministre du Sport
Mamakwa, Sol (NDP)	Kiiwetinoong	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjoint de l'opposition officielle
<b>McCarthy, Hon. / L'hon. Todd J. (PC)</b>	Durham	Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks / Ministre de l'Environnement, de la Protection de la nature et des Parcs
McCrimmon, Karen (LIB)	Kanata—Carleton	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
<b>McGregor, Hon. / L'hon. Graham (PC)</b>	Brampton North / Brampton-Nord	Minister of Citizenship and Multiculturalism / Ministre des Affaires civiques et du Multiculturalisme
McKenney, Catherine (NDP)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	
McMahon, Mary-Margaret (LIB)	Beaches—East York	
<b>Mulroney, Hon. / L'hon. Caroline (PC)</b>	York—Simcoe	President of the Treasury Board / Présidente du Conseil du Trésor
<b>Oosterhoff, Hon. / L'hon. Sam (PC)</b>	Niagara West / Niagara-Ouest	Minister of Francophone Affairs / Ministre des Affaires francophones Associate Minister of Energy-Intensive Industries / Ministre associé des Industries à forte consommation d'énergie
Pang, Billy (PC)	Markham—Unionville	
<b>Parsa, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (PC)</b>	Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill	Minister of Children, Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et des Services sociaux et communautaires
Pasma, Chandra (NDP)	Ottawa West—Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest—Nepean	Deputy House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjointe de l'opposition officielle
<b>Piccini, Hon. / L'hon. David (PC)</b>	Northumberland—Peterborough South / Northumberland—Peterborough-Sud	Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development / Ministre du Travail, de l'Immigration, de la Formation et du Développement des compétences
Pierre, Natalie (PC)	Burlington	
Pinsonneault, Steve (PC)	Lambton—Kent—Middlesex	
<b>Pirie, Hon. / L'hon. George (PC)</b>	Timmins	Minister of Northern Economic Development and Growth / Ministre du Développement et de la croissance économique du Nord
<b>Quinn, Hon. / L'hon. Nolan (PC)</b>	Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry	Minister of Colleges, Universities, Research Excellence and Security / Ministre des Collèges et Universités, de l'Excellence en recherche et de la Sécurité
Racinsky, Joseph (PC)	Wellington—Halton Hills	
Rae, Matthew (PC)	Perth—Wellington	
Rakocevic, Tom (NDP)	Humber River—Black Creek	
<b>Rickford, Hon. / L'hon. Greg (PC)</b>	Kenora—Rainy River	Minister of Indigenous Affairs and First Nations Economic Reconciliation / Ministre des Affaires autochtones et de la Réconciliation économique avec les Premières Nations Minister Responsible for Ring of Fire Economic and Community Partnerships / Ministre responsable des Partenariats économiques et communautaires pour le développement du Cercle de feu
Riddell, Brian (PC)	Cambridge	
Rosenberg, Bill (PC)	Algoma—Manitoulin	
Sabawy, Sheref (PC)	Mississauga—Erin Mills	
Sandhu, Amarjot (PC)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
<b>Sarkaria, Hon. / L'hon. Prabmeet Singh (PC)</b>	Brampton South / Brampton-Sud	Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports
Sarrazin, Stéphane (PC)	Glengarry—Prescott—Russell	
Sattler, Peggy (NDP)	London West / London-Ouest	
Saunderson, Brian (PC)	Simcoe—Grey	
Schreiner, Mike (GRN)	Guelph	
Scott, Chris (IND)	Sault Ste. Marie	
Scott, Hon. / L'hon. Laurie (PC)	Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock	
Shamji, Adil (LIB)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	
Shaw, Sandy (NDP)	Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas / Hamilton-Ouest—Ancaster—Dundas	
<b>Skelly, Hon. / L'hon. Donna (PC)</b>	Flamborough—Glanbrook	Speaker / Présidente de l'Assemblée législative
Smith, Dave (PC)	Peterborough—Kawartha	
Smith, David (PC)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	
<b>Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Graydon (PC)</b>	Parry Sound—Muskoka	Associate Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / Ministre associé des Affaires municipales et du Logement
Smith, Laura (PC)	Thornhill	
Smyth, Stephanie (LIB)	Toronto—St. Paul's	
Stevens, Jennifer (Jennie) (NDP)	St. Catharines	
Stiles, Marit (NDP)	Davenport	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau Parti démocratique de l'Ontario
<b>Surma, Hon. / L'hon. Kinga (PC)</b>	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	Minister of Infrastructure / Ministre de l'Infrastructure
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto—Danforth	
<b>Tangri, Hon. / L'hon. Nina (PC)</b>	Mississauga—Streetsville	Associate Minister of Small Business / Ministre associée des Petites Entreprises

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
<b>Thanigasalam, Hon. / L'hon. Vijay (PC)</b>	Scarborough—Rouge Park	Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions / Ministre associé délégué à la Santé mentale et à la Lutte contre les dépendances
<b>Thompson, Hon. / L'hon. Lisa M. (PC)</b>	Huron—Bruce	Minister of Rural Affairs / Ministre des Affaires rurales
<b>Tibollo, Hon. / L'hon. Michael A. (PC)</b>	Vaughan—Woodbridge	Associate Attorney General / Procureur général associé
<b>Triantafilopoulos, Effie J. (PC)</b>	Oakville North—Burlington / Oakville-Nord—Burlington	Deputy Speaker / Vice-Présidente Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Tsao, Jonathan (LIB)	Don Valley North / Don Valley-Nord	
Vanthof, John (NDP)	Timiskaming—Cochrane	Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle
Vaugeois, Lise (NDP)	Thunder Bay—Superior North / Thunder Bay—Supérieur-Nord	
Vickers, Paul (PC)	Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound	
Wai, Daisy (PC)	Richmond Hill	
Watt, Tyler (LIB)	Nepean	
West, Jamie (NDP)	Sudbury	
<b>Williams, Hon. / L'hon. Charmaine A. (PC)</b>	Brampton Centre / Brampton-Centre	Associate Minister of Women's Social and Economic Opportunity / Ministre associée des Perspectives sociales et économiques pour les femmes
Wong-Tam, Kristyn (NDP)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	