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Mardi
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 21 October 2025

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 21 octobre 2025

The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

BUILDING A MORE COMPETITIVE ECONOMY ACT, 2025

LOI DE 2025 VISANT À BÂTIR UNE ÉCONOMIE PLUS CONCURRENTIELLE

Ms. Khanjin moved second reading of the following bill: Bill 56, An Act to amend various Acts / Projet de loi 56, Loi modifiant diverses lois.

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

Hon. Andrea Khanjin: It is a privilege to rise in the House to introduce the Building a More Competitive Economy Act. I will be sharing my time with the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks as well as the Deputy Premier and Minister of Health.

Before I begin, Speaker, I just wanted to take a quick moment to commemorate a great constituent of mine, because I wouldn't be here in this Legislature elected as the member for Barrie–Innisfil if it wasn't for the great constituents that I represent. But sadly, we lost Derek Francis on Sunday to a battle with cancer. He was a remarkable individual who contributed so much to our local Legion in Innisfil, in Belle Ewart, Legion 547.

Many of us would ask: If we won the lottery, if we had \$1 million, what would we do? Well, Derek Francis asked that very same question, and he said, "If I ever won \$1 million, I would be donating it to the Legion." Well, Speaker, in his lifetime, he actually won the Lotto 6/49, and he fulfilled that dream of his, which was to donate money to the Legion. In fact, he donated \$26,000 to the local Legion, and he will forever be remembered for his generosity.

Derek not only donated to the local Legion, but he also helped his children get through school and did so much for our community, whether it's the Barrie Food Bank, and certainly he will be missed. I will miss his annual tradition that he had with his wife, April, where they would stop by my house around the holidays and drop off a little ornament that April would work on and that she had beaded. So, to April and your family, my condolences. And Derek, may you rest in peace.

Speaker, as I continue on with the bill that is before us, this is an example of how we are moving forward. Our government is moving forward with our unwavering commitment to make Ontario the most competitive place in the G7 to live, work, invest and do business. This bill is not just about cutting red tape. It's about unlocking opportunity. It's about removing barriers that hold workers back and hold businesses and communities back. We are unleashing the full economic potential of this province and we're protecting Ontario's future by acting decisively in the face of global uncertainty.

I want to thank my deputy minister, Maud Murray, and the whole team at the Ministry of Red Tape Reduction for their work in putting this great piece of legislation together, as well as my colleagues across government for their collaboration and leadership. Speaker, red tape reduction bills are truly a team effort, and I am so blessed to be joined by such an incredible team in this Legislature who are always putting forward bright, bold ideas that keep our economy moving forward.

This bill is also a great example not only of how our government is working as a team, how we're working across ministries, but also the impactful contributions each of us make. This bill has contributions from nine different ministries that are playing a vital role. One of the ministers who could not be with us today who contributed to this role is our Minister of Infrastructure, Minister Kinga Surma, who delightfully had a little baby girl many weeks ago, little Georgia. If she's watching, I just want to congratulate her on the beautiful birth of her baby girl. We are excited to see her in the Legislature when you bring her to meet all of us.

Speaker, we live in a time of rapid change, and the global economic pressures—flation, supply chain disruptions, geopolitics and the headwinds of geopolitics—are shaping our landscape. The recent study as of Monday by the Bank of Canada survey of businesses shows confidence across the country is still weak, and a large part of this is because of the uncertainty from the United States.

The central bank's quarterly business outlook survey actually showed uncertainty still remains a top concern cited among Canadian businesses. The other concern they also showed in the exact same survey is that cost pressures, slowing demand, taxes and regulations still actually round out the top concerns amongst businesses in this third quarter. To complement that, our Canadian Federation of Independent Business, the CFIB, also indicated persistent uncertainty among small business owners.

This is an impetus—that it has never been more important to cut red tape, and our government is listening and

taking decisive action. That is what the Building a More Competitive Economy Act is about. It's about positioning Ontario to meet this new moment. In this environment, we must be nimble, we must be bold and we must act with purpose. Our government has a clear plan to protect Ontario's economy by cutting red tape, streamlining approvals, modernizing regulations and unleashing the full potential of our workforce and industries. This is a direct response to the challenges we face and the opportunities where we must seize to stay ahead. It builds on the commitments we've made on the progress already launched to reinforce our momentum.

Under the Liberals, Ontario was shackled in red tape. Our businesses were strangled by overregulation and they weren't able to do what they do best, which is help grow our local economies, hire people and give back to our communities. Under the Liberals' rule, the red tape compliance cost for small businesses hit \$33,000 per business per year, the highest of any province in Canada. The Liberals' failed policies forced Ontario businesses to pay a total of \$15 billion in annual regulatory costs, twice as high as any other province. How is anyone supposed to open a business in Ontario? The Liberal legacy of overregulation strangled Ontario's potential and held Ontario back. It is no wonder why the Canadian Federation of Independent Business gave the Liberals a C- on red tape reduction when they were in government.

But there is hope. Our government got elected, and now Ontario is actually the best place to do business with the lowest regulatory burden in all of the Confederation. All of this is without compromising our environment and safety, and that is something we can all be proud of.

The Building a More Competitive Economy Act is more about what we're doing to protect Ontario from the disruptions that we're seeing to make us more competitive in this economy. We are reinforcing the foundations of a resilient, self-sustaining economy that can weather uncertainty and thrive in a rapidly changing world. This act includes 11 items, from regulatory amendments to policy changes from nine ministries, and together, these measures will accelerate labour mobility across provinces and territories. It will cut red tape for permissions and approvals in key sectors like forestry, mining, energy and housing. It will strengthen our supply chains by developing a made-in-Ontario vehicle policy to support the auto industry through fleet purchases by provincial ministries and the broader public sector and municipalities. It will support Ontario producers, local economies and jobs by exploring ways to increase procurement of Ontario- and Canadian-made goods, and it will modernize outdated legislation to improve clarity and consistency. It will strengthen Ontario's position as a global leader in economic competitiveness.

Ontario is at a crossroads, and the status quo isn't enough. As the global landscape continues to shift dramatically, we need to do more, and this legislation positions Ontario to meet that new moment. A stronger, more competitive Ontario can position itself as a global leader in investment readiness and economic development. By re-

ducing barriers, improving regulatory efficiency and listening to the needs of the people—employer and employee alike—we are laying the foundation of long-term growth and prosperity.

0910

I would like to take a moment to explain how each of the pieces of this legislation help address this critical point. As my colleague the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks will be speaking to this bill, as well as my colleague from health will be speaking to this bill, I will allow them to address those particular sections. But first, I want to address the buy local and support for workers piece of this act, which tackles the growing challenges of labour shortages and protecting jobs. Across sectors, from health care to skilled trades, employers are struggling to find qualified workers, and so that is why we need to seize the moment here and be able to support made-in-Ontario. That is what we have in this bill, the ability to say that we should lead by example.

When it comes to our local automakers, I have many in Barrie and across the way in Alliston, which is Honda, and the ripple effects we see of those jobs are great. From all the precision components that are made for these vehicles to the greater supply chain through the press—which I know the Minister of Economic Development and Trade has actually come with me to Matsu automation in my riding of Barrie and seen first-hand the incredible press they have there. These are local employers. This is part of our greater automotive supply chain, and we need to be able to stand up for them every step of the way. This bill is a move in that direction—by supporting those workers, to tell them that there is certainty in this uncertain global world, under the Donald Trump tariffs.

There is a government that is listening to those workers to protect their jobs, but also to lead by example. When we say, "Buy an Ontario vehicle," not only are we saying that for the ministries of this government, the Ontario public service or municipalities, but we're leading by example, for all Ontarians, to say, "When you're going buy that next vehicle, maybe make a strong statement with your pocket-book." We saw this summer where a lot of people chose to keep their tourism dollars here in Ontario, here in Canada, and certainly we can do that for autoworkers as well. To them, I say that Premier Ford will always have your back, and certainly in Barrie–Innisfil, I will always continue to represent the great supply chain we have in the automotive sector.

Speaker, the Premier talks about this a lot, which is creating the right environment to create growth in the uncertain times that we're in. And so it's no wonder why this government has already seen great growth in red tape reduction. To date, we've been able to reduce \$1.2 billion in red tape reduction. We've been able to save individuals and people 1.8 million hours in red tape time. As we all know, time is money. And so we're building on these great successes that we've embarked on since the beginning of our government's mandate back in 2018.

But it's not just there that we are helping support our automotive workers, helping a lot of skilled labour be able

to practise across this great Confederation. But you see that the work that—and she'll be talking later today—the Minister of Health is doing with the as-of-right tool. It's frustrating to me and my community when you have individuals who are really excited that we have a primary health clinic, a nurse practitioner health clinic that is opening at the Rizzardo centre, which the Minister of Health came and helped us launch, but there's still so many other individuals who don't understand, "Well, why can't my daughter be practising here in Ontario?" Or: "My son or daughter went to school in Ireland and now they're stuck and they want to come back to Canada." These are all things our government is looking at, and so this as-of-right tool is going to help us propel that economy by saying that if you are a doctor or nurse in Saskatchewan and Alberta, it will take up to two business days to be able to be recognized here in Ontario. And, Speaker, that is a united front for Canada. If you want to be able to practise in Ontario, we should be able to say, "Yes, come practise here. Please take on patients, and please come back home and practise here."

I know she will elaborate on that particular section, but one other aspect of this bill that I did want to touch on—it's a sector that's being really hard hit by tariffs at the present moment. We talk a lot about steel, but it's also our forestry industry. As everyone knows, I love to frequent our provincial parks and sometimes with our Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks. But when you go out to Algonquin Provincial Park, you can't help but see those great trucks that are carrying all the lumber from the forestry sector. And you see the sustainable practices we have here in Ontario—bar next to none how great these workers are. I was able to actually visit a lot of these workers up north and in Resolute Bay, and the passion they have for the sector, but they're hurting right now, and they want a government that has their back. Premier Ford, with his leadership and in this bill—we're showing the natural resource sector, the forestry sector, that we have their back. We don't want them to be mired in bureaucracy and red tape. We want them to get on with what they're doing best, which is to employ workers and continue with the sustainable practices that they're very proud of.

The amendments that we're proposing in this particular bill are amendments to the Crown Forest Sustainability Act. What it does is that it would streamline annual approval requirements and remove unnecessary steps, helping reduce costs for forest management planning. Overall, this proposal delivers on Ontario's commitment to strengthen the forestry sector by reducing red tape and supporting economic growth.

These changes are enabled in nature—pun intended. They lay the groundwork for future regulatory improvements that will be developed in consultation with stakeholders. But let's be clear—and the direction is clear: We are building a more efficient, responsive forestry framework that supports growth while maintaining environmental standards.

The other part of this bill, in addition to supporting our automotive sector, our forestry sector, our great health

care workers across this province, is about road safety. This bill is building on our road safety and infrastructure so that we can continue to protect Ontario's people and communities while supporting a strong economy. Road safety is a shared responsibility, and our government is taking action to deliver safe benefits in a fair and transparent way across the province.

Safe roads keep communities connected, helping families thrive, workers succeed and businesses grow across Ontario. Protecting Ontario also means being responsible with taxpayer dollars and making sure every investment results in deliverables. We're taking action to deliver road safety measures that focus on prevention. This bill will work with municipalities to put smarter, community-focused solutions in place that keep our roads safe and our communities strong. By focusing on prevention, we're protecting Ontario's communities, supporting our economy and ensuring our province remains the safest jurisdiction in North America. These preventative steps will help slow down drivers and keep our streets safer.

But Speaker, this bill is more than just policy. It's about delivering real outcomes that protect Ontario's future and strengthen us as a global leader. If passed, the measures in this package will save businesses and individuals millions of dollars in compliance costs, reduce approval timelines by months, not weeks, improve access to skilled labour and send a strong signal to investors that Ontario is serious about competitiveness. These proposed changes reflect our commitment to protect Ontario's economic strength and ensure we're the most attractive place in the G7 to invest, innovate and build.

Another part of this bill that I'm quite proud of is the work that we're doing at the red tape reduction ministry, and that is compiling a list of the different economic permits that we have within this government. Before this exercise, we didn't know how many economic permits we had in this province. This is something Alberta had already done, to compile a list of economic permits that the government is responsible for. We found that in Ontario, we have 332 economic permits. This is anything from what you've seen in the past, which is parking minimums, which in previous red tape bills we got rid of. That not only helped with the cost of housing but also the red tape that was getting in the way. These 332 permits that we're looking to eliminate or transform are going to help us move our economy.

You've already seen the great successes this government has had with the "one project, one process" review, where we're cutting mining approval timelines in half, by 50%. The goal of reviewing these 332 permits is transforming about 35%; if not transforming, eliminating them all right. These are low-risk permits, everyday routines. We've already seen in practice how this government has transformed the regulatory framework without compromising our environment or worker safety. It's allowing workers to get on with the work that is at hand. Our economy cannot afford to stop. We need to be progressive. We need to move forward. There are systems in this government that were outdated. We had policies that were

developed before the iPhone. So this is about working smarter for business, smarter for government, delivering results and real-time impacts.

0920

When I started my speech, I talked about the uncertainty. Nothing gives our economy, the people, the employers and employees alike more certainty than being able to say that the government will deliver on this timeline. And many people have said, "I just want to know where my permit is. Is there a way that I could check it?" Well, this framework that we're introducing in this bill will allow us to work towards that measure, so that if you're a proponent who's applying for a permit, you're able to put in that permit number into a database. In this 21st century, believe it or not, we do not have this. We have it for other streams of business, thanks to this government—thanks to the work that the Minister of Public and Business Service Delivery and Procurement has delivered on, we have it in our day-to-day transactions we have as a government, but we're taking that template, we're taking that model and we're moving it further so that those individuals have that certainty. They can see where in the queue they are, where is that permit—providing that certainty for their project.

Frankly, Speaker, this will not only help industry thrive, it will help us build more homes. It will help us unlock that economy and we can keep those jobs and keep those industries here. Now more than ever, we need to seize that moment and be able to give that certainty to businesses.

Again, this isn't about compromising safety. These are low-risk, everyday routine things. To point to an example of the previous reviews this government has done is we had an environmental assessment process in this province where we let hydro poles collapse if we were replacing them. And thanks to the getting it done bill, now we are able to replace them in real time. But this was an antiquated system, Speaker. This is what we're talking about when we're reviewing our permits and permissions system—updating this antiquated system so we're in touch with the 21st century and we can move as fast as the opportunities for people to seize them.

Speaker, as I wrap up my comments and pass the baton to the next speaker, the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks, I want to ask all members to support this bill, support unleashing our full economic potential, support the workers, whether it's in forestry, whether it's in auto, whether it's the small business, whether it's the person working from home—every employer and employee benefits from red tape reduction. We've been here at this crossroads before. The status quo is not working. We need to do better. Workers are counting on it.

So let's keep building a province where opportunity moves as fast as the people ready to seize it. Let's fight to keep Ontario a place that remains resilient, responsive and ready to lead in a rapid global economy. Let's protect Ontario. I hope that everyone will support this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresce): I recognize the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks.

Hon. Todd J. McCarthy: It's an honour to rise today to follow the Minister of Red Tape Reduction and to speak

to Bill 56, the Building a More Competitive Economy Act, 2025. I am here to address those items of the bill, those aspects of the bill specifically related to the mandate of the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks.

The proposed amendments are ones that support this government's direction to protect Ontario's economy and to drive long-term growth, while at the same time, restoring and enhancing our environment, leading to healthier communities and building a more resilient future for all Ontarians. My colleague the Minister of Red Tape Reduction has already given this House some description of the sections of the bill related to the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks. But I would like now to take this opportunity to go a little more in-depth.

Mr. Speaker, first I would like to speak to our proposed amendments to the Ontario Clean Water Act that would, if passed, modernize the protection of Ontario's drinking water sources. But first, I believe it would be beneficial to quickly summarize how Ontario undertakes drinking water source protection.

Under the Ontario Clean Water Act, communities help protect their drinking water supply by focusing on prevention. They do this by developing science-based, locally driven source protection plans. This helps ensure municipal drinking water sources are protected from contamination or depletion. Local source protection authorities, working together with multiple stakeholder committees, have created plans that help protect municipal drinking water systems within 38 source protection areas across Ontario. Together, these plans support nearly 440 municipal drinking water systems over an area where over 95% of Ontario's population resides. Through these plans and the Clean Water Act, 2006, Ontario continues to take strong action to protect existing and future sources of drinking water from contamination and depletion.

I want to make this abundantly clear, Mr. Speaker: Ontario's drinking water is among the safest and the best protected in the world, and this is not changing. Our government continues to take strong action to protect existing and future sources of drinking water to protect existing and future water sources. At the same time, the simple reality is the system can be improved to work more efficiently and to deliver faster outcomes.

The current process for making routine amendments to source protection plans is overly complex and slow, with duplication in terms of approval and consultation requirements. This can delay the expansion of drinking water systems in situations where comprehensive protections are already in place, leading to unnecessary burden and unnecessary delay.

Source protection plans may require amendments for any number of reasons, the most common being to add a new well or intake to supply municipal drinking water to meet an increase in demand to support a new housing development or to address structural issues as well. Under the present system, if a municipal well has structural issues and a new well needs to be built next to the existing one, the current process requires updating the source protection plan. This includes completing two consultation periods

and obtaining minister approval before the new well can be used. This can take as much as 21 months, even when protections for the drinking water are already in place and are not even changing. These unnecessary delays can cause issues in advancing housing projects for growing communities or even in ensuring that local communities maintain access to safe, clean drinking water should the existing well face issues. These burdens are costing time and money—time and money that we cannot afford, certainly not when our province is facing external and internal pressures like never before. External pressures include our tariff and trade war and constantly shifting positions on trade, and internal pressures concern an unprecedented growth in our population here in Ontario.

So we must do better. We must be fast and flexible and nimble while continuing to restore, protect and enhance our shared environment. We must be able to get shovels in the ground faster to keep workers on the job to continue to fuel our economy and to create the infrastructure we need to build the Ontario of tomorrow while preserving the environment today and for future generations.

That's why we are proposing updates to the Clean Water Act and related regulations—changes that will enable local source protection authorities to approve routine plan amendments and to streamline the plan process so that drinking water sources are protected faster—changes that will simplify consultation, enhance transparency and accountability and remove redundancies that delay expansion of drinking water systems, all while maintaining strong science-based protections and oversight for our sources of drinking water.

These proposed changes are about accelerating and modernizing, not weakening protections for sources of drinking water. I will reiterate, Mr. Speaker: Strong and proactive protection of our sources of municipal drinking water will continue across Ontario.

Let's take a closer look now at how these proposed changes would work in practice and why they're so very necessary. Right now, when a community needs to make even a small change to its drinking water system, it kicks off a lengthy, complicated process. Even when all the protections are already in place and nothing is being weakened, we still require two full rounds of consultation followed by ministerial approval. Again, this can take up to almost two years. Think about that: If a growing town needs more water to support new homes or if an old well has a problem, the red tape we have today can hold things up for almost two years. That's two years of delay for new housing projects, two years of uncertainty for communities and families that just need reliable access to clean drinking water. So we can and we must do better, and that's why we're proposing changes to how our source protection plans are updated.

0930

One of the key improvements we're making is around who can approve what. Right now, every change—no matter how small—has to go all the way to the minister for approval. That includes changes that don't impact the safety or science of our drinking water protections. This

process is not only long and drawn out, but actually unnecessary. We have found that these small decisions are all inevitably approved in any event. That's why we're proposing changes that would empower local source protection authorities to outright approve these routine plan amendments—speeding things up while also ensuring that our resources are better focused on the larger, more significant decisions.

Under the new approach, the ministry would still be very much involved, but in a smarter way. The source protection authorities would work closely with us from the beginning of the process, ensuring the proposed changes meet all the high standards we've set for drinking water protection. Now, once the ministry confirms that all is in order, the 120-day clock begins. That's the maximum time it would take to make a decision. If more consultation is needed, the ministry can pause that clock—but, at least now, everyone involved has clarity, certainty and a clear timeline. And if a change is straightforward—like updating a map to show where a new well is located, or applying existing protections to a nearby area—the local authorities will be able to approve those changes themselves. These are routine, common-sense decisions, and they should not be held up by unnecessary layers of approval.

We're also simplifying the public consultation process. Right now, there are two rounds of consultation: one with the people who implement the plans—like municipalities and conservation authorities—and another with the general public. This can lead to repetition, confusion and fatigue. So we're proposing to bring these two phases together. One unified consultation period where everyone—the public, Indigenous communities, municipalities and other stakeholders—can have their say all at the same time. This is more efficient, more transparent and it ensures that everyone's voice is heard.

We've also begun outreach efforts into the modern age. That means moving away from outdated requirements like placing notices in local newspapers. We're moving away from local newspapers and instead focusing on methods that are more accessible, more visible and, quite frankly, more effective in today's world.

Speaker, I will reiterate: Not one of these changes—not one—will reduce protections for drinking water. What they do is reduce red tape, save time and resources and help communities get the clean, safe water they need faster.

Let me give you a few examples of what we mean by routine or minor changes. Imagine a new well is being drilled right next to an existing one that already has protection policies in place. The protections don't change—they just apply to a slightly larger area. That's the kind of thing that shouldn't take almost two years to approve. Or, for example, consider a prohibition in place on a certain activity, but now we have a better approach that protects the environment even more effectively. We should be able to make that change quickly and responsibly.

Of course, not everything will be considered routine. Any change that introduces new rules or prohibits certain activities will still need full ministerial review and approval. And, as always, Indigenous communities, the public

and all key stakeholders will have meaningful opportunities to provide input. In fact, we're asking for feedback on whether there are other types of plan changes that should continue to go to the minister. We want to get this right, and we're listening.

To sum up, the changes we are proposing to the Clean Water Act under Bill 56 would cut down on unnecessary delays by removing the need for ministerial approval of truly minor administrative amendments that would save, if passed, up to 12 months. Secondly, letting local source protection authorities approve routine changes with ministry oversight on the science, that would save, if passed, around six months. Thirdly, combining consultation periods into one, more effective phase, and that would save about two and a half months, if approved. And then, fourth, set a clear, 120-day timeline for ministerial approval so everyone knows what to expect and when to expect it. That improves transparency and certainty. And fifth, and finally, and most importantly: getting safe drinking water to growing communities faster, while keeping the protections strong and science-based. These are smart, balanced changes that will help us build homes and infrastructure faster, support economic growth and give communities faster access to clean, safe drinking water, all while continuing to protect our environment for all and for generations to come.

The next proposed amendments in Bill 56, the Building a More Competitive Economy Act, I would like to talk about are related to the Species Conservation Act, 2025; that was part of Bill 5, passed last spring. Under this act, our government is taking a new approach to environmental permitting and environmental approvals for activities that impact certain species. The previous approach to protecting and conserving species was simply not working. It was overly complicated, it took too long to complete and, ultimately, it did not deliver the outcomes that Ontarians need and expect.

That is why under the new Species Conservation Act, we are shifting species-related authorizations to a registration-first approach. It's also known as "permit by rule." It is a process already used successfully for many other environmental authorizations. This new approach sets clear expectations and clear rules for proponents to follow. These rules and expectations focus on those activities that are most likely to have a direct negative impact on species. Under our new system, proponents will no longer be required to wait for the ministry to approve permits for most activities. Instead, proponents will now be able to register, follow the requirements and then proceed with their activities right away.

Our ministry is now in the process of developing new requirements for registered activities in consultation with the public and with Indigenous communities. These new requirements will have to be followed by anyone undertaking an activity that impacts certain species, with no tolerance for bad actors. In fact, we've stepped up the investigative and enforcement powers under this new legislation to root out any bad actors who would harm species. Under the new Species Conservation Act, we will leverage this strong enforcement, including hefty fines,

potential jail time and new investigative and compliance tools for officers that I referenced. Repeat violators may be prosecuted and face fines of up to \$2 million for corporations or \$500,000 and imprisonment of up to one year for individuals.

To bolster our efforts to help conserve and recover species at risk in Ontario, our Species Conservation Program will invest \$20 million each and every year in conservation projects across Ontario. That is a four-fold increase in annual funding over the old program. This program will support the important work that experts and community organizations are doing to protect species across the province.

As part of the Building a More Competitive Economy Act, we are proposing technical amendments to the Species Conservation Act before it comes into force. Because under Bill 5, the Endangered Species Act was amended and remains in force; the Species Conservation Act is still to be proclaimed in force and we're readying for that process. Consequential amendments to other statutes will be required to reflect the future repeal of the Endangered Species Act and the implementation of the new Species Conservation Act. These technical amendments to the Species Conservation Act are necessary to ensure the legislative language is clear and consistent. They include amendments to when the minister can issue a habitat protection order to align it with other order powers in the act and clarify that one of the purposes of the act is indeed to protect species at risk rather than all species.

These proposed amendments also clarify that the requirements in the act also apply to activities impacting parts of living or dead members of protected species. This is consistent with the existing approach under the Endangered Species Act.

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The proposed changes would also ensure the one-year exception for certain activities that impact species that are listed for the first time as "endangered" or "threatened," also applying to species that were previously listed as "special concern" on the species at risk in Ontario list under the act. This, of course, would provide clarity to stakeholders.

I would also like to point out, Mr. Speaker, that these proposed amendments are posted for public consultation on the Environmental Registry of Ontario and Ontario's regulatory registry. This occurs along with regulatory proposals that are also needed to implement the new Species Conservation Act.

The comment period began on September 26 and is set to close on November 10, 2025. Anyone who wishes to comment on these proposed amendments is strongly encouraged to do so.

And so, Mr. Speaker, these technical amendments to the Species Conservation Act, if passed, would ensure accuracy, clarity and consistency in both the act and other legislation that reference species at risk or the Endangered Species Act—and the Endangered Species Act will be repealed. That is the plan when the Species Conservation Act is proclaimed in force.

These proposed technical amendments to the act will support Ontario's efforts to enable faster development and support the long-term strength and security of our province and our economy, all while continuing to preserve and recover species in our province.

Mr. Speaker, I am grateful for having this opportunity this morning to clarify the proposed amendments put forward by the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks—amendments that support, I submit, our government's plan to protect Ontario by modernizing environmental protections while at the same time continuing to safeguard public health and our shared environment.

I ask that my colleagues in this House support Bill 56, the Building a More Competitive Economy Act. I thank you for your kind attention this morning to all members of the House, through you, Mr. Speaker.

Now, it is my pleasure to turn the debate over to our colleague the Deputy Premier and the Minister of Health.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresce): I recognize the minister.

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Good morning, Speaker. It is indeed a pleasure to be able to join the Minister of Red Tape Reduction and the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks on this important piece of proposed legislation, the Building a More Competitive Economy Act.

Under Premier Ford's leadership, our government has worked tirelessly to protect our health care system and to protect workers' jobs. This is a time of global uncertainty. As we face the impact of President Trump's tariffs and the resulting trade war, I want to acknowledge Premier Ford for his unwavering and passionate defence of our province and our country as he works relentlessly to protect Ontario. These unjust tariffs continue to threaten our economy, our businesses and the livelihoods of Ontarians.

In the face of these very real and present challenges, our government is united and steadfast in our resolve to protect Ontario and to protect Canada. Now more than ever, Ontario needs a world-class, highly skilled workforce to keep our province competitive. Now is the time to do everything we can to eliminate red tape and bureaucratic delays and remove the interprovincial barriers to trade and labour mobility. That is why our government has been taking bold and decisive action with the Building a More Competitive Economy Act to break down barriers, ensuring trained workers can get to work faster and keep Ontario strong, healthy and productive.

The proposed as-of-right legislative changes are an innovative step our government is taking to address these challenges and support our province's future. This is an important piece of legislation that, if passed, will remove barriers to internal free trade and labour mobility that impact our health care system.

Expanding as-of-right rules in our health care system would allow more regulated health professionals to work faster in Ontario and provide high-quality care to the people of Ontario. This bill builds on the work we have done to support the Your Health plan that our government launched in 2023. Your Health is focused on providing people and their families with a better health care experi-

ence by connecting Ontarians to more convenient health care options closer to home while shortening wait times for key services across the province and growing the health care workforce for years to come.

The Your Health plan has a number of initiatives working together, coordinated under three pillars: the right care in the right place, faster access to care and hiring more health care workers. These initiatives are delivering more connected and convenient care in hospitals, emergency departments, community settings like pharmacies, primary care, long-term-care homes and through care delivered in our homes and communities.

Our government has made tremendous progress in implementing Your Health and providing more connected and convenient care to Ontarians. As an example, when it comes to hiring more health care workers, we've moved forward with the largest expansion of medical school education in more than a decade. We've made significant investments to expand education and training opportunities to support individuals who want to work in health care and to support communities to grow their health care workforce. There are many health care workers from across the country, and indeed across the world, who are eager and wanting to work in Ontario.

In the face of the US administration, our government has also made some recent changes to make it easier for US-licensed nurses and board-certified physicians to begin practising immediately, which supports our government's plan to protect Ontario and strengthen our health care system. Earlier this year, our government made legislative changes to enable qualified US-licensed physicians, nurse practitioners, registered nurses and registered practical nurses to begin working in Ontario health settings for up to six months while seeking full registration in Ontario, removing a significant barrier to attracting American health care workers. By cutting the red tape that was delaying highly trained US-licensed board-certified physicians and nurses from being able to live and work in Ontario, we are making bold strides to ensure Ontario patients receive timely and accessible care.

These changes are another step in our government's historic action to reduce labour mobility barriers for health care professionals within Canada, and have made it faster and easier for American physicians and nurses to care for Ontario patients. This is a great example of how reducing red tape can strengthen our health care system, support front-line workers and ensure that patients get the timely and high quality care that they deserve.

Through Your Health, we have made a number of innovative changes to make it easier and faster for these individuals to begin working and providing care to people across Ontario. We have been reducing bureaucratic delays and reinforcing the front lines of our health care system. This includes establishing an as-of-right rule in 2023 that allows nurses, physicians, respiratory therapists and medical laboratory technologists who are registered with other Canadian provinces and territories to immediately begin working and caring for people without first having to register with one of Ontario's 26 regulated health

colleges. With these new as-of-right rules, Ontario became the first province in Canada to allow health care workers registered in other provinces and territories to immediately start providing care without having to first register with one of Ontario's health regulatory colleges. That is because our government prioritizes patients and health care workers over bureaucracy.

These changes are helping health care workers overcome the burdensome red tape that results in delays in becoming registered to practise in Ontario. Highly skilled health care professionals from British Columbia to Nova Scotia shouldn't have to pause their career or face barriers to starting their practice here in Ontario. We should make it as easy as possible for them to get work and start treating patients, and we are.

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I must say, having just returned from a health ministers' meeting in Calgary, where health ministers from across Canada came together to talk about best practices and how we can work together, these as-of-right initiatives that we began in Ontario in 2023 were of high interest to other health ministers because they wanted to have that same opportunity and figure out how they could have the ability to ensure people who want to work, regardless of where they're living, can have that opportunity.

I believe we can all agree that there is no better place than Ontario to live, work and raise a family. With our growing population, we must ensure that our health care workforce keeps pace. Since 2018, a record-breaking number of new health care professionals have joined the province's workforce, adding over 100,000 new nurses that are registered and nearly 20,000 more physicians, including a 14% increase in family doctors.

We are preparing for the future by undertaking the largest medical school expansion in more than a decade to further increase access to family and specialty physicians and other health care professionals across Ontario. This includes, of course, welcoming and opening two new medical schools, including the TMU School of Medicine that has welcomed its first 176 students this fall. I have to tell you, going and speaking to those medical students who are having an opportunity to train in Ontario—to train, often, in their communities—is a pretty good reason to be opening TMU and to be able to celebrate that success with those students. So to the students of TMU, congratulations. You're in the first cohort, and I know that you will do great things for the province of Ontario.

Of course, also online is York University's new medical school in Vaughan, which will be the first in Canada focused on training exclusively family physicians.

We are creating more opportunities for students to study and practise in their home province, such as by expanding the Ontario Learn and Stay Grant, which is already supporting students in eligible nursing, paramedic and medical lab tech programs to learn, and ultimately stay, in underserved and growing communities. Over the next five years, about 2,000 eligible students that commit to practising family medicine in Ontario with a full roster of patients once they graduate will receive free tuition, encouraging more students to pursue family medicine.

Addressing the geographic distribution of our physician services in the province is another important priority. We must take action to help improve access in rural and remote or northern communities. We are revising the distribution and mix of postgraduate positions within medical schools and continuing to invest in the Northern Ontario School of Medicine. I have to remind people that the Northern Ontario School of Medicine was started by—that's right—a Progressive Conservative government. We know how to plan.

We are providing targeted financial incentives, such as the Northern and Rural Recruitment and Retention Initiative, to attract physicians to establish a full-time practice in communities with the greatest need, as well as investing in the Practice Ready Ontario Program, which enables internationally trained physicians to begin working more quickly in communities, again, where they are needed most, while also building on the progress we've made to break down interprovincial barriers, increase labour mobility for Canadian physicians and nurses and ensure they can get to work the day they arrive in Canada. It is part of our government's work to reduce barriers, create new opportunities for job creation and protect and grow our economy.

Now is the time to build on our successes increasing Ontario's health care workforce and enhancing labour mobility. Now we must take the next steps in breaking down barriers and removing red tape.

This proposed legislation will support greater worker mobility across Canada, building, again, a stronger and more resilient economy and health care system by expanding as-of-right provisions for Canadian workers licensed and credentialed in other provinces and territories—particularly health care workers—and move forward with automatic recognition of credentials for doctors and nurses from the rest of Canada.

Our current as-of-right rules allow nurses, physicians, respiratory therapists and medical laboratory technologists from other provinces and territories to work in Ontario for up to six months while they seek and complete their registration with their professions' Ontario regulatory body. This proposed legislation would lay the groundwork to expand these rules to an additional 16 health care professions, improving access to care for more Ontario patients and meeting urgent labour demands across Ontario. These professions would include audiologists, speech-language pathologists, podiatrists, dental hygienists, dental technologists, dentists, denturists, dietitians, medical radiation and imaging technologists, midwives, occupational therapists, opticians, optometrists, pharmacy and pharmacy technicians, physician assistants, physiotherapists and psychologists. With these legislative changes, patients in need of a wide variety of health care services will have more timely access to care from licensed professionals.

Secondly, we are introducing automatic registration for physicians and nurses. This again is a first-in-Canada approach that shifts from a "verify then trust" to a "trust then verify" model. The automatic recognition of physicians and nurses who are registered in good standing in other provinces and territories will make it faster and

easier for them to continue their practice here in Ontario. The province will do so by working with the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario and the College of Nurses of Ontario to reduce application fees and documentation requirements. Ontario continues to work with these regulators to cut unnecessary red tape and fees for professionals already licensed elsewhere in Canada.

Here's how it will work: Professionals notify the college of their eligibility. They receive a certificate of registration within two business days. Post-registration checks, such as police record and disciplinary history, are completed afterwards. Colleges retain full authority to impose conditions or suspend registration if concerns arise.

This model respects the integrity of our regulatory system while removing unnecessary delays. These changes will make the process more convenient for health care workers and their patients without compromising safety. This approach is consistent with Ontario's first principle on internal trade: that an individual registered or licensed to practise in one Canadian jurisdiction is also safe to practise in Ontario.

We are working closely with Ontario's health regulatory colleges to ensure readiness. Colleges are updating their systems, public guidance and internal processes to support these changes. Importantly, the legislation also includes ministerial regulation-making authority to add more colleges over time, exempt or reduce fees and to remove duplicative requirements such as continuing professional development already completed elsewhere.

This flexibility ensures the framework can evolve as needed and safeguards are in place. Professionals must attest to their eligibility, including being in good character and good standing with their original regulator, having no recent disciplinary actions and holding liability insurance. Colleges retain oversight and can act swiftly if concerns arise. We have engaged extensively with stakeholders, including regulatory colleges, health associations and interprovincial partners, and I thank them for their input. The response has been overwhelmingly positive.

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The stakeholders we have consulted recognize the urgency of addressing current and future workforce needs and support the principle of mobility and trust. Some have raised important questions about information sharing and differences in training across jurisdictions. We are already addressing these collaboratively, ensuring transparency and accountability remain critical.

Through these changes, Ontario is leading the way in modernizing labour mobility. This bill will help fill critical gaps in our health system, reduce delays for patients and support professionals who want to bring their skills to Ontario. We're proud to be taking this step, not just for today's challenges, but for a stronger, more resilient health workforce in the future.

By taking this first-in-Canada approach to streamline the labour mobility process, we are making it faster and easier for both our health care system partners and clinicians to provide the world-class care Ontarians need, when and where they need it. We are breaking down

barriers to build a more unified Canada that is resilient in a time of global uncertainty.

Our plan to expand as-of-right rules in health care and implement other labour mobility initiatives, like mutual recognition, supports these important goals. It supports our health care workforce by making it easier for more health care professionals to start working in Ontario more quickly. It assists our vital efforts to support the health care needs of Ontarians, Ontario's growing communities, and building a stronger, patient-focused health care system. It's another way our government is taking action and making innovative changes.

We are building on our progress, bolstering our nation-leading health care workforce and helping to ensure people and their families across Ontario can access world-class health care now and for years to come. Ontario is indeed setting a new standard for labour mobility across Canada. Our approach is bold, forward-thinking and rooted in trust. We're proud to lead the way, and we invite other provinces to join us in building a more connected and responsive health care.

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

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I would like to thank the ministers and the Deputy Premier for their presentation. My question is to the Minister of Red Tape Reduction.

The minister claimed that this government is achieving their goals without compromising the environment. Yet with Bill 5, they compromised species at risk and undermined habitat protection and, through Bill 56, claim to be undoing the damages they caused, but are they? Are they really?

I, for one, am deeply thankful that the RCMP is closing in on the Conservatives for their greenbelt debacle.

I have heard loud and clear from London North Centre constituents who are concerned about the removal of speed cameras, especially for school zones. Many ask why. Is it because this Premier wants to protect his 12-time-offending ministry stunt driver?

Now, if this government is ideologically married to undermining community safety by removing speed cameras, why are they handing the bill to cash-strapped municipalities?

Hon. Andrea Khanjin: There are many questions in his question, but let me bring it back home to my riding of Barrie–Innisfil, where the local mayor there, Mayor Nuttall, has said the following about focusing on prevention when it comes to speeding: "The city of Barrie supports the province of Ontario, and we are excited to see the new funding opportunities for municipalities. Thank you, Premier Ford, for your leadership and commitment to enhanced traffic-calming measures across our cities. We look forward to continuing to work with the province to create community safety measures that reduce speeding, improve safety and respect taxpayers." That's Alex Nuttall, mayor of Barrie, who also happens to be on Big City Mayors.

Also, Mark Baxter, the president of the Police Association of Ontario, says, "The Police Association of Ontario has consistently called for a comprehensive reassessment

of automated speed enforcement cameras”—and he goes on.

But, Speaker, this bill is about more than just road safety. I know the member opposite would rather go back to Liberal days of high red tape, where they were putting \$33,000 per year in cost compliance measures on our businesses, but we're moving forward. I hope the member opposite can move forward with us.

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

Mr. Lorne Coe: My question is to the great Minister of Red Tape Reduction. I'll take you back to 2018, Ontario was known as Canada's red tape capital. Thanks to the previous Liberal government, we had over 386,000 requirements on Ontario's businesses and individuals—the highest in Canada. Their failed policies drove investments and jobs right out of the province.

What I would like the minister to do is please share some of our results from the efforts of reduced red tape. They're considerable, in the case of people and businesses here in the province of Ontario.

Hon. Andrea Khanjin: The member has a great question. He's an excellent representative for his community. He's always bringing red tape reduction ideas to this government while speaking to his local residents and his community. This bill wouldn't be possible without a team effort. I also wanted to acknowledge my parliamentary assistants, the member for Wellington–Halton Hills and the member for Markham–Thornhill, who also contributed to building this bill.

It's thanks to the work of this whole-team approach in this government that we've been able to save businesses and people \$1.2 billion in regulatory red tape reduction. That's also 1.8 million hours that we've been able to save people. We know that if we save people time, they can spend it more with the things that they value the most—with their families, with running their business. If we save them money, it's money they're putting back in the community. It's something we've heard clearly from chambers of commerce across this province and from the Canadian Federation of Independent Business.

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

MPP Robin Lennox: My question is for the Minister of Health: You spoke about the need for reducing red tape and barriers for growing our health care workforce, but just last week you announced that internationally trained doctors are only able to participate in the first round of the residency match if they spend two years of high school in Ontario. I've been practising as a physician in Ontario for 10 years and I can tell you that not a single patient has ever asked where I went to high school. They just don't care. They want a skilled, compassionate physician.

We know the international medical graduates already entered into the process. They paid money, they invested time and now they're being left stranded. How do you respond to the Ontario Medical Association and residency program directors across Ontario who have said that this will destabilize family medicine programs and reduce our ability to actually grow our health care workforce?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: What I can tell you is that I hear from far too many medical students who are training in other countries and want to have that opportunity to come back and complete their residency here in Ontario. What we are doing with only the first round of the CaRMS matching is ensuring that students who have a connection to Ontario have the opportunity for the first round of their CaRMS matching system to make sure that comes to fruition.

I think of the students who are training elsewhere because they wanted to get started in their medical career sooner and now we are giving them an opportunity for the first round of CaRMS matching to make sure that they have that pathway back to Ontario, back to their communities, so that we can welcome them home and ensure they train here.

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

Mr. Adil Shamji: I'm going to follow up on my colleague's question. As the Minister of Health will know, last year in the CaRMS match, the only reason that the family physician positions in Ontario were filled was because of international medical graduates. She knows that, the OMA knows that, the Canadian Medical Association knows that, and that is why the OMA and the CMA, along with residency program directors across the province, are all saying that this policy will only cause more red tape, more barriers and more difficulty in getting Ontarians the family doctors that they deserve.

My question for the Minister of Health is: Why is she so hell-bent on increasing barriers in access to primary care in this province, and why is she implementing a policy that is widely acknowledged as being discriminatory and, according to the Toronto Star, devastating?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Well, again, I will say, I am hearing directly from students who are training in other international medical schools who are welcoming this opportunity to have the opportunity in the residency phase to move back to Ontario and complete their medical training. I do not want to have a single Ontario medical student who cannot have the opportunity to train and complete their residency role in Ontario. We're doing that with the first round and I'm proud of the fact that we've done this.

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

Mr. Lorne Coe: Speaker, you'll know from your time as a representative in your municipality on council that one of the major challenges that we always faced was delays and unnecessary red tape when trying to expand drinking water systems, even in cases where protections are already in place—always a challenge, always a challenge. The opposition would rather keep communities waiting, stuck in outdated process. They always do. They always do.

My question is to the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks. How does our government's modernization of the Clean Water Act empower local authorities to act faster, support growth and ensure that strong environmental and public health protections remain firmly in place that we support?

Hon. Todd J. McCarthy: I thank the excellent member for Whitby for that thoughtful question. And he has it right, as implied in the question. It's certainly about balance, always. We also can learn from almost 20 years of history with the Clean Water Act, 2006, which we are proposing to modernize.

As the preamble to Bill 56 indicates, among other matters, building a more competitive Ontario economy by streamlining government processes for permits and approvals and lowering costs for taxpayers and businesses—that is part of the preamble of this bill. But embedded in the very first schedule of the bill—schedule 1, the proposed amendments to the Clean Water Act—are those provisions that while streamlining, while avoiding duplication, make sure that the strong protections and the strong oversight are there. We can build faster but we can build safely as well and that is what we intend to do.

The Clean Water Act and the Ontario Clean Water Agency are the result of the Walkerton Inquiry chaired by then Associate Chief Justice Dennis O'Connor. We learned from history, and we can modernize based on history. We will get it right with this balance to ensure clean water for all and at the same time building faster, building smarter and avoiding unnecessary duplication.

This is the balance we need, especially at this time of challenge with lower housing starts. We're going to build the Ontario of tomorrow. We're going to build those attainable homes and we're going to make sure there is clean drinking water for all.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): It is now time for members' statements.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

WOMEN'S ACHIEVEMENTS

Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos: I rise to recognize Persons Day, which is held each year on October 18 and celebrates the day when Canada officially recognized that women are persons under the law, enabling them to sit in the Senate of Canada. This was a landmark moment in our nation's journey towards equality, and it reminds us that rights once denied can, through collective effort, become rights upheld.

In my own community of Oakville North-Burlington we have many women whose lives reflect this spirit of change. I think of Florence Meares, who began her career teaching in a one-room school, then became one of the first female vice-principals and ultimately a principal, showing that educating the next generation knows no gender boundary.

I also honour Veronica Tyrrell, a dedicated community leader whose work with the Canadian Caribbean community in Halton helped newcomers settle and brought to life the stories of inclusion and belonging.

These pioneers remind us that trail-blazing is not only about formal office, it's about building community and giving voice where none was heard.

To commemorate Persons Day, the Speaker is hosting a Pink Tea for female MPPs. Pink Tea parties were held by early 20th-century suffragettes as a discreet way to organize and advocate for women's rights. So today, let's honour the past, celebrate the present and continue to build an inclusive future.

SMALL BUSINESS

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Small businesses are the backbone of our economy, comprising approximately 98% of all businesses in Ontario and employing about 2.3 million Ontarians. In London North Centre, they're the heart of our communities, creating jobs, supporting families and contributing to the unique quality and character of our city.

This Small Business Week, I want to recognize the outstanding work of the London Chamber of Commerce, the small business enterprise centre and our local business improvement areas. Their continued advocacy, leadership and support of small businesses across our city are invaluable.

Ontario has a responsibility to support our small business community beyond just words. It's time to listen, and it's time to act. Commercial rents have escalated past reasonable limits and utility costs are astronomical. Small businesses are not just economic engines, they are vital to the vibrancy and identity of our neighbourhoods. It's essential that we do whatever it takes to revitalize our downtowns, ensuring that they remain thriving hubs of commerce and culture. If this government truly wants to take on Trump, then the answer is to protect our economic backbone—80% of our economy is small business.

As the Ontario shadow minister for small business, I'm dedicated to advocating for the resources, supports and policies necessary to empower our small businesses to grow, succeed and continue enriching our communities.

To this government, it's time to move past words and into solid action because when small businesses succeed, we all succeed.

PERSONS DAY

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Good morning, Madam Speaker, colleagues next to me, across the aisle and every guest in our House today. You will know how proud I am to be a woman when you hear me say repeatedly, "My name is McMahon, but it should be McWoman."

My Persons Day private member's bill was co-signed and passed last December because I worked across party lines to recognize a group of five courageous and tenacious women. Canada's first female judge, Emily Murphy, wanted to be the nation's first female senator, so she invited four suffragettes to come for tea to her home in Edmonton in 1927. Her guests included Henrietta Muir

Edwards, who had established the Victorian Order of Nurses and YWCA; Louise McKinney, an advocate for women's and disability rights who refused to let partisanship hinder progress; Irene Parlby, the "minister of co-operation," who fought tirelessly for rural and farmers' rights; and Nellie McClung, an orator, author and Liberal MLA. Against all odds, the Famous Five secured women's recognition as persons October 18, 1929.

Belonging and awareness looks like working together, and I have high expectations for all of us in this session.

WILDFIRES IN HALIBURTON–KAWARTHA LAKES–BROCK

Hon. Laurie Scott: This past summer, during the first week of August, my riding of Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock experienced two significant wildland fires, one in the Burnt River area and another near Kirkfield that burned for 10 days. Seven fire crews monitored and worked for weeks to make sure both wildfires were successfully contained and fully extinguished.

I want to highlight that all those local responders were the very same people who protected and cared for us during the ice storm at the end of March. These efforts remind us of the courage and dedication of those who protect our communities.

I am so proud of the Kawartha Lakes Fire Rescue Service, the Kawartha Lakes Volunteer Firefighters Association, the Trent Lakes fire service, the Ministry of Natural Resources Haliburton detachment crews, the North Bay fire crews, the fire ranger teams, the water bomber pilots, the city of Kawartha Lakes and all the first responders and volunteers who assisted on the ground.

To put it in perspective, Madam Speaker, the ice storm had shredded our trees and our forests; we were in the worst drought that anyone can remember; everything was tinderbox dry; and the Burnt River fire was inaccessible by road. It was a perfect storm, but our first responders' commitment and their professionalism prevented what could have been a devastating disaster.

On behalf of the people of Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock, thank you for your service and dedication to keeping our communities safe.

COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTARY ASSOCIATION

Ms. Catherine Fife: Earlier this month I had the honour of attending the Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference, representing more than 180 Parliaments in 56 Commonwealth countries.

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The CPA's goal is clear: strengthen Legislatures to better serve citizens and uphold democracy. At this event, I was elected Chair of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians—a role Canada has never held. This success was only possible through multi-partisan Team Canada support, and I am deeply grateful to colleagues and coun-

tries that placed their confidence in Canada during a volatile global moment.

Chairing this committee is a profound responsibility, but I am inspired to work with women across the Commonwealth to advance gender balance in Parliaments and promote equality. Our work will span justice, education, health, women's empowerment, climate change, peace and the economy.

In a world that feasts on division, the Commonwealth's role has never been more vital. We must remind the world that connection, not division, defines and strengthens our world. Women parliamentarians are essential to this mission. When women reach their potential, nations succeed. Together as Commonwealth countries, we can lead towards peace, economic equality and global democracy. May God bless the Commonwealth, a family of the world.

FLOODING IN PUNJAB

Mr. Amarjeet Sandhu: I rise today with a heavy heart to extend my deepest sympathies to the people of Punjab, India, who are facing devastating floods that have displaced countless families, destroyed homes and taken innocent lives.

The images and stories emerging from Punjab are heart-breaking: communities submerged, livelihoods lost and families struggling to rebuild amid unimaginable hardship. My thoughts and prayers are with all those affected as well as with the brave first responders and volunteers, working tirelessly to provide aid and relief.

This tragedy hits close to home for many in Ontario, including myself, as we have deep family ties to Punjab. Our hearts are with our loved ones and all of those enduring this difficult time.

The people of Punjab are known for their resilience, compassion and strength in the face of adversity. I have no doubt they will overcome this tragedy with the same courage and unity that define their spirit.

ROAD SAFETY

Ms. Jennifer K. French: As the official opposition shadow minister for infrastructure and transportation, I support the use of speed cameras to keep roads and communities safe. The Ontario NDP has consistently been on the side of community members, road safety experts and municipal leaders demanding that Premier Ford back off from his absurd vendetta against speed cameras.

Ontarians will recall that it was this Premier and his government that rightly gave decision-making powers to local municipalities about whether or not they would use automated speed enforcement as a tool—or not—and where within their own municipalities. Now, years later, Premier Ford has done an about-face for no discernible or evidence-based reason.

Micromanaging local municipal decision-making is not appropriate. Removing tools from local leaders who are trying to keep their roads and communities safe is not appropriate or the right thing to do. Forcing municipalities

to bear significant costs for the removal of speed camera infrastructure is not fair.

It is clear that this Premier doesn't like speed cameras, and since at least 20 of his cabinet ministers have been caught speeding in safety zones, I imagine they don't like them either.

This ploy by the Premier is a very engaging distraction from what issues are actually provincial responsibilities, such as housing, health care, education and protecting jobs and the economy. I will oppose the Premier's ban on speed cameras and will fight for safer roads as well as for the many provincial priorities that this government is neglecting to address.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Members, if I could have your attention, please. The side bar conversations—especially on the government side—please keep your voices down a little bit, please. Thank you.

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: I rise today to speak about a recent community safety meeting that I hosted in my riding of Markham—Thornhill.

I want to thank the many residents and community leaders who joined us, shared their ideas and spoke up.

I would also like to thank: the Associate Solicitor General for Auto Theft and Bail Reform, Zee Hamid; Deputy Chief Da Silva; Superintendent Chirag Bhatt; and all of the brave members of York Regional Police for their presentation and their commitment to keeping our community safe.

Madam Speaker, we know that crime is on the rise, and these crimes are frightening our communities. Safety is our top priority. That's why our government is taking strong action by investing in new technology, aerial surveillance and expanded resources to better support law enforcement.

Because of these measures, auto theft in Markham has dropped 47% in 2025—and across York region, down by 37%—proving our investments are making communities safer.

We need the federal government to do its part. The new bail reform must ensure that violent repeat offenders are never released without consequences.

Community safety is a shared responsibility. I urge all levels of government to work together to protect Ontario families and keep our neighbourhoods safe.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Mr. Mike Schreiner: The housing affordability crisis is getting worse, not better: sky-high rent; young people unable to afford a home; an unprecedented number of people experiencing homelessness. That is why passing the bill to establish a homelessness elimination strategy, sponsored by the MPPs for Kitchener Centre and Etobicoke—Lakeshore, is so important.

We have affordable, financially responsible solutions, like the supportive housing project at 10 Shelldale in Guelph: 32 people have moved from tents to homes, with Kindle Communities, Stonehenge and the Guelph CHC working together to stabilize and support people with complex challenges.

In the first year of operations, there were no evictions, no residents died from an overdose and no residents left the facility. There has been a drastic reduction in police and hospital contact for residents, reducing cost and stress on the health care system and first responders when housing is combined with health supports that are available for residents.

I want to thank the government for helping to fund this project. I call on them to pass Bill 28 and to increase funding for permanent supportive housing so we can save lives and money by supporting our neighbours with dignity.

I want to close by saying: Go, Jays, go!

OKTOBERFEST

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize the member for Kitchener South—Hespeler.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Folks, if we could please bring the conversations down. Thank you.

Ms. Jess Dixon: Danke, Speaker, and good morgen. This month marks the annual return of Kitchener-Waterloo Oktoberfest. For more than 50 years, K-W Oktoberfest has brought our community together in the spirit of Gemütlichkeit, a wonderful German word meaning warmth, friendship and good cheer.

I want to extend my sincere thank you to this year's organizers, volunteers and the entire K-W Oktoberfest team, including our beloved Chef D, known formally as Darryl Fletcher; executive director Tracy Van Kalsbeek; our 2024-25 Oktoberfest ambassador, Katie Kneisel; as well as the presidents and misses of our wonderful festhallen: Alpine, Bingemans, Concordia, Hubertushaus, Shwaben and Transylvania.

As a reminder, myself and my other Waterloo region colleagues will be joining Madam Speaker as she hosts K-W Oktoberfest right at Queen's Park this evening. I will be in a dirndl—I have to mention—custom-made by my mother. She'll be upset if I don't mention that. I expect everyone else to show up in their trachtenhut hats, graciously provided to us by Madam Speaker.

Again, to everyone that makes this tradition possible year after year: Ein Prosit to friendship, good cheer and another unforgettable K-W Oktoberfest.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): This is the third time I've asked: Would the government side please lower your voices in these conversations? Thank you.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Now that I have your attention: We have with us in the Speaker's gallery today the member for Don Valley West during the 38th through 42nd Parliaments and the Premier of Ontario during the 40th and 41st Parliaments. Please welcome back Ms. Kathleen Wynne.

We also have with us in the Speaker's gallery my blind date, Ms. Kathryn McGarry, who was the member for Cambridge in the 41st Parliament.

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Also with us in the Speaker's gallery today are Anne Wagner-Mitchell, the consul general of the Federal Republic of Germany in Toronto, and she is accompanied by Laura Kunkel, the consular attaché for cultural, press and economic affairs. Please join me in warmly welcoming our guests.

REMARKABLE WOMEN
AT QUEEN'S PARK

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): As many of you know, we have long honoured the remarkable women who have served in the Legislature. Their portraits hang proudly on the wall just outside the Speaker's office, a tribute to their leadership and their legacy.

I am proud to announce a new initiative that broadens that recognition. Today, we are beginning to honour the remarkable women who keep this beautiful building functioning, those who make our daily lives at Queen's Park not only possible but enjoyable.

It takes a team to keep this place running. Every day that I come into this incredible building, I continue to be awed by its beauty. But behind that beauty is hard work, dedication and care, much of it carried out by women who often do so quietly and without fanfare.

That is why I am pleased to inform the House of a new monthly recognition program that I have launched to celebrate the remarkable women who work at the Office of the Assembly. Each month, one honouree will be featured in the A Remarkable Assembly exhibit located in the east wing of the Legislative Building, just outside my office. It's a small but meaningful way to show our appreciation and gratitude for the essential contribution that these women make every day.

Joining us in the Speaker's gallery today are the first two recipients of this distinction, Lauren Warner and Monica Weber.

In September, Lauren Warner, a research officer with the legislative research branch, was recognized for her leadership, analytical skill and commitment to service. She supports members with professionalism and clarity, mentors her colleagues and contributes widely to the workplace, setting a remarkable example for all of us.

This month, Monica Weber, the apartment services coordinator in the Office of the Deputy Clerk, is being recognized for her dedication, professionalism and collaborative spirit. In her role supporting the Speaker's office, she

approaches every task with grace, diplomacy and a deep commitment to the assembly's values.

On behalf of all members and staff of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, I extend my heartfelt thanks to Lauren and Monica for their outstanding dedication to Ontario's Parliament. Thank you, ladies.

Applause.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I am pleased to welcome to the House today representatives from AtkinsRéalis and Candu Energy: Joe St. Julian, Sandy Taylor, Carl Marcotte and Sam Boutziouvis. I want to welcome them and welcome all members of the Legislature to join us this evening at the reception. Thank you so much.

Mme France Gélinas: I'd like to welcome Gina McAfee. She's a constituent from Lively in my riding. Gina is a registered early childhood educator at the Rainbow District School Board.

I would like to wish a happy 25th annual Child Care Worker and Early Childhood Educator Appreciation Day to all of the workers, including Gina. Thank you for coming.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Good morning, everyone. I'd like to welcome to Queen's Park today members of the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario, joined by their executive: president, David Mastin; first vice-president, Shirley Bell; vice-president, Gundi Barbour; vice-president, Mary Fowler and many of the local presidents and executives of ETFO. We are very happy to have you join us today. Welcome to your House.

Ms. Lee Fairclough: Good morning. I'd like to welcome members of the Kidney Foundation of Canada who are here today discussing the impact of chronic kidney disease on people. I also really appreciated the opportunity to meet with them this morning.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I'd like to welcome all members of the Ontario Association of Architects, especially those from my riding of Guelph; Rev. Ian Duffy of the Basilica of Our Lady; Bill Birdsell, who sits on the OAA's council; and Michael Trussell, who is on the OAA's Grand Valley Society of Architects. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Deepak Anand: I'd like to take an opportunity to welcome page Aayush Rao from Mississauga–Malton and his proud parents, Sridhar Rao and Tina Walia, in the members' gallery.

Hon. Andrea Khanjin: It gives me great pleasure to introduce two hard-working interns from our summer months: David Litvak and Emily Dahlgren. Welcome to the Legislature today. It's their first time here.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: I'd like to join in welcoming members of the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario, including, from Ottawa, Jamieson Dyer, president of the Ottawa-Carleton occasional teachers, and Stephen Skoutajan, the Ottawa-Carleton teachers' president. Welcome.

MPP George Darouze: I'm pleased to welcome Carleton resident Brian Burnett alongside his colleagues from the Dairy Farmers of Ontario to the House today. Carleton is a strong agricultural riding with many dairy farms, and I'm very glad to have him join us here today with his colleagues, as farmers feed Ontario and feed the rest of Canada and we are thankful for them.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Today is a very special day. It's the 25th annual early childhood educator and child care worker appreciation day.

I'd like to welcome the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care ED, Carolyn Ferns; the Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario ED, Amber Straker; and parent Janet Amito. They are all here today with child care workers, parents and babies.

Happy appreciation day, and thank you for what you do for the child care sector.

Mr. Matthew Rae: On behalf of the Minister of Education, I want to recognize Diabetes Canada—Glen, Vik, Laura, Alanna, Jenna, Susan, Amy, Andrea, Tara and Catherine. Welcome to Queen's Park.

MPP Robin Lennox: I'd also like to welcome the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario, including Shideh Houshmandi, Cindy Gangaram and Tamara DuFour from Hamilton.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: I'd like to welcome Marjorie Hiley from Don Valley Community Legal Services; Janny Vincent, a small business owner from my riding, Fundata Canada; Sharon Castelino from Women Get On Board; Karma Lhamo from TNO; our city councillor, Rachel Chernos Lin, as well as her mom, Bev Chernos; and the Dewji ladies, Annie and Rozina, who are small business owners as well. And can I just throw in my constituency office manager, Kamrana Qureshi, and the Dairy Farmers of Ontario?

Hon. David Piccini: It's a pleasure to welcome Finn and Kevin from the Carpenters' Regional Council to question period today.

It's also a great pleasure to welcome Eldon, Baseet, Jovens, Junior and Shayok from Aspire For Higher. Eldon is doing a fantastic job. Keep it up.

Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. John Vanthof: On behalf of everyone in the Legislature, I'd like to welcome the members and staff of Dairy Farmers of Ontario, who produce the fantastic milk we rely on and invite you to taste it in room 228 at 12 o'clock.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I'd like to welcome Nathan Core, Jeff Pelich, Jenn Wallage and Niki Kazemzadeh from Waterloo region teachers, ETFO. Welcome to your House.

LEGISLATIVE PAGES

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I would now like to invite the pages to assemble for their introduction.

Joining us today, we have Finley Booker from Thunder Bay-Superior North; Elizabeth Demczur from Dufferin-Caledon; Ava Di Donato from King-Vaughan; Theodore Diplas from Markham-Stouffville; from Kitchener

Centre, James Fobel; Ziming Guo from Don Valley West; from Leeds-Grenville-Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, Lorraine Holmstrom; Ziyue Huang from Nepean; Oluwatishe Iwajomo from Oakville; Taylor James from Scarborough Southwest; Avery Lockwood from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound; Orion Musta from Etobicoke Centre; Rafi Naqvi from Ottawa Centre; Naomi Noack-Simone from Ottawa West-Nepean; Ishaan Patil from Markham-Thornhill; Oliver Prang from Brantford-Brant; Aayush Rao from Mississauga-Malton; Simone Reaume from Essex; Alyssa Saidova from Richmond Hill; Bani Kaur Sandhu from Kanata-Carleton; Mansahaj Sandhu from Brampton West; Lyla Snell from Barrie-Innisfil; Aditya Tandur from London West; and Alice Wu from Scarborough Centre.

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Welcome to our pages.

Applause.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize the member from Kingston and the Islands on a point of order.

Mr. Ted Hsu: I seek the unanimous consent of the House for leave to move a motion without notice that the 2025-26 estimates for the Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development be referred to the Committee of the Whole House.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The member from Kingston and the Islands is seeking the unanimous consent of the House for leave to move a motion without notice that the 2025-26 estimates for the Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development be referred to the Committee of the Whole House. Agreed? I heard a no.

I recognize the Minister of Education on a point of order.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I seek unanimous consent that, notwithstanding any standing order or special order of the House, the order for second reading of Bill 57, An Act to vacate the office of the member of the Brant Haldimand Norfolk Catholic District School Board who represented Haldimand county between July 8, 2024 and July 15, 2024 be immediately called; and

That the Speaker shall immediately put the question on the motion for second reading of Bill 57 without debate or amendment; and

That upon receiving second reading the bill shall be ordered for third reading, which order shall immediately be called; and

That the Speaker shall immediately put the question on the motion for third reading without debate or amendment; and

That the votes on second and third reading of the bill shall not be deferred; and

That if a recorded division is requested on the second or third reading votes on the bill, the division bells shall be limited to five minutes.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The Minister of Education is seeking unanimous consent that, notwithstanding any standing order or special order of the House, the order for second reading of Bill 57, An Act to vacate

the office of the member of the Brant Haldimand Norfolk Catholic District School Board who represented Haldimand county between July 8, 2024 and July 15, 2024 be immediately called; and

That the Speaker shall immediately put the question on the motion for second reading of Bill 57 without debate or amendment; and

That upon receiving second reading the bill shall be ordered for third reading, which order shall immediately be called; and

That the Speaker shall immediately put the question on the motion for third reading without debate or amendment; and

That the votes on second and third reading of the bill shall not be deferred; and

That if a recorded division is requested on the second or third reading votes on the bill, the division bells shall be limited to five minutes. Agreed? I heard a no.

STEVE BUTLAND

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize the member from Sault Ste. Marie on a point of order.

MPP Chris Scott: I seek unanimous consent for a moment of silence for the passing of Steve Butland, former mayor of Sault Ste. Marie, former member of Parliament for Sault Ste. Marie and recipient of the city's medal of merit and key to the city.

He was a great member, a great community builder and I just ask for unanimous consent for a moment of silence to recognize this great leader of our community.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The member for Sault Ste. Marie is seeking unanimous consent for a moment of silence. Agreed? Agreed.

The House observed a moment's silence.

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

QUESTION PERIOD

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Ms. Marit Stiles: Speaker, can I just say before we get started, congratulations to the Toronto Blue Jays for an extraordinary win last night.

Applause.

Ms. Marit Stiles: What a night. What a night. Everybody's a little bit bleary-eyed this morning, but it was worth it.

But my question, Speaker, is to the Premier. Yesterday, the Trillium reported that 50% of groups that got Skills Development Fund millions were Conservative-donor-led. One of those donor-led groups was Get A-Head Inc., which was given \$7.5 million despite having a low-scoring application. The lobbyist for Get A-Head Inc.? None other than Michael Rudderham, the Paris groom himself.

So my question to the Premier is: Did the government pick winners and losers based on personal relationships and political donations?

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

Hon. David Piccini: Speaker, 60% of low-scoring projects in round 3 donated to members opposite. So we can play that game all day or we could focus—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Order.

Hon. David Piccini: Senior leadership of IBEW 353 donated \$20,000 to the NDP alone. But the reality is, when I look at IBEW 353, I don't see a union that hosted the member from Oshawa for acclimation; I see a union doing good work to train a next generation of Indigenous youth. And that's why we supported their tech truck that's going into Indigenous communities for their pathway program, that's training the next generation of Indigenous youth, that's breaking down barriers for women. And that's why we've seen a 40% increase in women registration into apprenticeship.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Supplementary?

Ms. Marit Stiles: Well, I shouldn't have to explain to the minister that it's his government that's making the decisions here. That wasn't really an answer.

Let's try another one. Salvatore Biasucci's company couldn't get their hands on any funding. They kept failing. They then hired the Premier's campaign manager, and apparently that was the magic sauce: \$3 million rained down from the heavens, or the Conservative government. He said to the Trillium, when asked about this, that Kory Teneycke's firm was "specifically recommended to him" for this program.

It looks like the government is creating more jobs for lobbyists than for actual workers. Did the minister's office—again, to the Premier—-instruct people to hire the Premier's campaign manager to get their projects funded, yes or no?

Hon. David Piccini: Again, in the latest round, another 40% of lower-scoring projects had donations to the members opposite.

But again, when we look at funding training programs that are going to change the next generation, we look at things like: Is it in construction to advance the incredible priorities, to build new highways, roads, bridges? Is it supporting our manufacturing sector, a sector decimated under the previous Liberal government, where manufacturing jobs fled Ontario? Is it supporting our mining sector, like Jennifer, one of the 100,000 unemployed who now got employment within 60 days of this program?

Speaker, there's not a program in government that's getting that many people a job within 60 days, and we're proud to support young women like Jennifer.

1050

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: Ontarians deserve transparency and, instead, all they're getting are canned answers and petty attacks like this.

It gets worse. It gets worse. Donations to this minister, Speaker, have skyrocketed since he started doling out public funds like Halloween candy. This is a culture of pay-to-play. It was an issue in the previous Liberal government, and it is continuing here under this government. The Premier has done nothing to hold his minister accountable.

Does the Premier condone pay-to-play culture or is he going to finally fire his minister?

Hon. David Piccini: We've got an incredible fund that's changing lives for Ontarians. Again, when that member opposite—I could go on all day, Speaker.

I've got a great letter here from a member of a union that not even two years ago was protesting outside of my office. But when I look at their SDF, I don't care who they support, Speaker. It's a project to reduce temporary help agencies by SEIU.

Ty Downey had this to say: "I'm taking time to shout-out David Piccini and his team for investing in WorkersFirst Technologies' staffing program through the Skills Development Fund. The investment is already helping transform how temporary staffing is done to health care."

This is a Premier who is going to stop at nothing to make sure we've got the health care workers to support an aging population, who is going to stop at nothing to make sure we have construction workers to build the projects that they all reject, Speaker. We're not going to apologize for doing it.

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Ms. Marit Stiles: My next question is to the Premier again. I guess accountability only matters when the Premier can point a finger at someone else.

"A slush fund for political friends" is how the Premier himself described the Liberals' Jobs and Prosperity Fund back in 2018. I remember that. And now, he's turning around and doing the same thing. The fund is not the problem; it is the politicians. Workers shouldn't have to pay to play to get the training they need.

My question to the Premier is, why doesn't he spend as much time actually delivering a jobs plan as he does on these pay-to-play schemes?

Hon. Doug Ford: To the Leader of the Opposition: We have a job plan as we move forward. Since 2018, there are over 1,070,000 people that are working today that weren't working under the previous government.

As you propped up this previous government, they chased 600,000 jobs out of this province. They raised taxes, they raised debt, they raised electricity rates. They closed 600 schools, fired nurses—compared to our record. Our record: We're investing in 100,000 new nurses. We've already let—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Order.

Hon. Doug Ford: We've seen hundreds of thousands of new manufacturing jobs come back to our province. That's what we're focused on.

We're going to continue growing this province because we have the environment and the conditions to continue to grow this province with more jobs, more—

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): A reminder to address your questions and responses through the Speaker.

I recognize the Leader of the Opposition.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Well, your debt is through the roof, and this Premier and this Minister of Labour's record is a jobs disaster in the province of Ontario.

When the Premier took office, Ontario's unemployment rate was 5.9%. Last month, it hit 8%—the highest in a decade—and 250,000 more people are unemployed today than when this Premier took office. That is a fact.

Just this morning, 1,200 people learned that they are going to be losing their jobs in Ingersoll. This Premier has the nerve to stand there and applaud himself with 1,200 families impacted, a community devastated.

My question is to the Premier: Is this really a record worth defending?

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

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: We support all the workers in this great province. We're going to continue to talk to GM and other companies right across the province because—you know what, Speaker? She mentioned debt. Now, that's interesting. In the time that we have been in power, do people know that the economy was \$860 billion? Now it's a \$1.2-trillion economy—1,070,000 more workers. Madam Speaker, they were busy for 15 years raising taxes and getting credit rating downgrades and building absolutely nothing. We've been cutting taxes, putting money in the pockets of consumers and businesses, getting credit rating upgrades and building Ontario with unprecedented infrastructure. That's what a government does.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The Minister of Natural Resources and the member for Orléans will please come to order.

I recognize the Leader of the Opposition.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Speaker, zero respect for taxpayer dollars, right? Zero respect—that's why this government is a jobs disaster. First, they use the housing crisis as an excuse to carve up the greenbelt and line the pockets of their insiders. Now, they're using the jobs disaster to hand over tax dollars to friends and donors. We see it. People see it out there.

This government says it's laser-focused on jobs, but it is clear that their only focus is making money for their friends and their insiders.

My question to the Premier is, when—again—is he going to put an end to this pay-to-play culture, and when is he going to fire his minister?

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

Hon. David Piccini: Speaker, the member talks about jobs and then turns her back on the Working Women Community Centre, in her own riding, that received

\$700,000 through the Skills Development Fund to help women upskill in management careers. And over the—

Interjections.

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

Hon. David Piccini: Speaker, I think to this weekend, where I visited Newcomer Women's Services, where we marked the 1000th woman that went through the Skills Development Fund Sister2Sister Program that's helping newcomer women, Speaker. It's an incredible program run by executive director Sara Asalya. We were there to support them because this Premier recognizes that at, any age, it's worthwhile investing in skills. That's what we're going to keep doing to make sure we have a world-class workforce that can weather these economic storms that are coming.

They have no ideas. They're offering nothing on the table, Speaker. This Premier and this government will keep working hard for workers.

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Mr. John Fraser: Here we are on the second day of school, and what did we all learn? Well, what we learned yesterday was that the Minister of Labour failed to declare a conflict of interest that involved a close personal friend. But if you were good students and you stayed up late passed the Jays game and read the Trillium article, you would have read that 63% of \$345 million in the latest round of the Skills Development Fund went to PC donors who donated—wait for it—\$1.3 million. That's right, folks, \$1.3 million.

Let's have another pop quiz: Can the Premier explain to us what the phrase "quid pro quo" means?

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

Hon. David Piccini: Speaker, the leader of the third party may be interested to know that a member of his own party, MPP Hsu, wrote to me about one of the SDFs in his riding. Do you know, what was unique about this—is

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The member for Kingston and the Islands will come to order.

Interjections.

Hon. David Piccini: Now he's writing to me asking that I support his fund.

But, you know, Speaker, I respect that member and know that this film project matters in eastern Ontario. The film sector matters in ridings like mine, where we filmed *It: Welcome to Derry*. We're going to keep working on focusing on supporting worthwhile projects that drive prosperity, that give workers better jobs—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Supplementary?

Mr. John Fraser: For the Premier's edification, *quid pro quo* is a Latin phrase meaning "something for something." It describes a reciprocal exchange of goods, services or favours. While it can be a simple fair trade, it often carries a negative connotation, especially in political

context, where it can refer to an illegal exchange such as a bribe or unethical use of power—

Interjections.

Mr. John Fraser: I withdraw.

1100

I'll demonstrate: A good example would be an organization hosting a \$120,000—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Order.

And I will caution the member on his references.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Please, the government side, come to order.

You can continue.

Mr. John Fraser: So, a good example would be an organization hosting a \$120,000 fundraiser for the Minister of Labour and then that organization getting the largest Skills Development Fund grant. Does that sound familiar?

So Speaker, I guess my question is, when is the Premier going to fire his Minister of Labour?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize the Premier of Ontario.

Hon. Doug Ford: Madam Speaker, coming from the most politically corrupt government—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I'm going to ask the Premier to withdraw.

Hon. Doug Ford: Withdraw.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Order.

I'm going to start warning and naming people, and you will be leaving the chamber.

You may continue.

Hon. Doug Ford: Yes, I did touch a nerve. They got pretty excited when I said that.

As your previous government—to the member: Remember this saying, "Let's not worry about manufacturing; let's focus on the service sector"? That went really well, didn't it? He saw 600,000 headlights heading south of the border.

Just this year, 21,100 full-time jobs in August, 44,000 in September, we had another 8,000 last month. People are still investing.

But I just sit back here with my colleague beside me, and I look—

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

Mr. John Fraser: Speaker, I know that organization I was just talking about does good work. I'm surprised they didn't mention it. But the point is—and the point that the Premier missed was—they shouldn't have to pay to get what they do already and do very well. That's the point.

So, out on the street, this activity would be described as a protection racket. That's what it would be. So, 63% of \$345 million for \$1.3 million in donations—but hey, folks, there's nothing to see here, nothing to see.

What is it going to take for the Premier to say, "You're fired, Minister"?

Hon. David Piccini: It sounds like we hit a nerve with an organization that used to employ their former, former leader—and that organization that cut corporate cheques previously to their party.

But that's not what this is about. Let me tell you about the Carpenters' Regional Council. I encourage you to have the courage of your convictions to go to Finn, to go to Kevin, who are here today, and say it to their face, because their program has helped. They had a target of 200 participants: women, youth, racialized youth. They exceeded that target by 112%. The number of participants who registered for apprenticeship: They almost met 100% registration.

But that doesn't matter to a party that oversaw the lowest registration of apprenticeships in the modern history of this province, because they don't care about building. We do. That's why these unions are supporting this Premier: because they know that when their workers go to work, they collect a paycheque working on homes, working on the 413, working on the new Ontario Line. Their members benefit when we build a prosperous Ontario.

That's what this Premier is going to keep doing. That's what this government is going to stay focused on.

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Mr. John Fraser: They shouldn't have to pay to do the thing they do well. That's the point.

Look, I don't know if you know, but the Minister of Labour is hosting an event tomorrow night. It's a \$1,000-a-plate fundraiser at an undisclosed location here in Toronto. We like to call it, "Round 6 of the Skills Development Fund is now open. Get your status quo ready"—or, sorry, *quid pro quo*. It is the status quo too, by the way.

I just don't understand why the Premier thinks this is all okay. I don't get it. There are people out there looking for work, looking for food, looking for help for their kid, looking for a family doctor, and you're letting this go on? Who are you protecting? You're protecting the minister. It's not protect Ontario; it's protect the minister.

When is the Premier going to fire this minister?

Hon. Doug Ford: Madam Speaker, if I remember correct, he was part of the \$25,000-a-plate fundraiser for your Premiers—

Interjection.

Hon. Doug Ford: It was you that stood up there, and you were shovelling the \$25,000 tickets.

We don't sell \$25,000 tickets. You know, the majority of our donations come from the \$5, the \$10—the hard-working blue-collar folks that used to support you. They have no faith in you whatsoever because they don't see any hope at all.

We're giving the people hope here in Ontario. We've seen an investment of \$46 billion in the EV sector, tens of billions in the tech sector, \$6 billion in health sciences and billions of dollars in manufacturing.

We are a super powerhouse anywhere in the world. We're going to continue being an economic powerhouse as we move forward.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Just to make it easy on everyone, just talk to me today, okay? Just talk to me. Thank you.

The leader of the third party.

Mr. John Fraser: My question is: Is SDF the "support David fund" or the "support Doug fund"? I'm not sure. Because after the minister became the minister, his riding association annual take went from \$50,000 to almost half a million dollars. Nothing to see here, folks. Keep driving, keep walking by—nothing to see. There's nothing to see here.

The Premier talks a lot about running the province like a business. If the Minister of Labour worked for any business in this province, he would have been fired last week.

So what's it going to take, Premier? What do you need to do? Are you going to fire the minister or are you going to protect the minister?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Order.

I recognize the Minister of Labour.

Hon. David Piccini: What this is about, Speaker, is empowering a next generation. SDF, the Skills Development Fund, is changing lives.

And it's about size, because these unions, these construction workers, recognize that when you actually build hospitals, when you don't pander to activist groups that say no but actually get shovels in the ground, your members go to work; health care workers who recognize that when you build hospitals, you expand capacity. SEIU, a union that used to campaign for them, recognizes that when you fund innovative programming that reduces dependency on agency staff, good things can happen.

That's what this fund is doing: rapid training with unions, with non-profits, with college and university partnerships to land better training for a better job with a bigger paycheque.

We're going to keep focused on doing just that to support Ontarians of this province. We're not going to pay attention to the distraction from members opposite.

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

Mr. John Fraser: It's like the minister is taking all his friends out to lunch—a really expensive lunch—and then, when the bill comes, he's just sliding it across the table to Ontarians—Ontarians who are looking for work, trying to put food on the table, trying to get help for their son or daughter at school, trying to find a family doctor. And the Premier is okay with the minister sliding the bill across the table because he's doing it too.

I don't think the Premier is protecting Ontario. I think the minister—

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I'm going to ask the member to withdraw.

Mr. John Fraser: Withdraw.

So I don't get it, Premier. I don't get it. I know anywhere else, he would not be doing what he's doing.

Ontarians work hard. It's their money. It's not your personal piggy bank. So are you going to fire the minister, or are you going to keep on protecting him and sliding the bill over to Ontarians?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I'm just going to remind people to direct your questions through the Speaker.

Back to the Minister of Labour.

Hon. David Piccini: Both that member and I, Speaker—we've never missed a lunch. I encourage him, next time he's going for lunch, to visit Day-View Electric in his own riding. They helped 80% of their target folks through the Skills Development Fund land a job. They join the ranks of over 100,000 workers—100,000 workers that found meaningful employment within 60 days or less through the Skills Development Fund. Finally a program has that sort of impact to help people get jobs, and that's what it's about.

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We've built a coalition with groups because we're out there working with unions, we're out there working with non-profits and we're out there working with college-university partnerships to ensure that we have rapid training programs that could help build a resilient workforce that's capable of withstanding anything.

We're doing it to support a Premier who is leading this country in response to an aggressive President in the south. We're never going to stop standing up for workers, those same workers who abandoned those parties in the last election because they know that this Premier, this government, has their backs.

CHILD CARE

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: My question is to the Premier. Today marks the 25th annual Child Care Worker and Early Childhood Educator Appreciation Day, a time to recognize the vital work early childhood educators do in caring for and educating the next generation, yet nearly half of ECEs leave the profession within three years, citing low wages, lack of benefits and unsustainable working conditions. The AG reports our ECEs make up 59.5% of program staff, and up to 10,000 additional RECEs are needed by 2026.

This government has failed to meet its own workforce targets. Will the Premier commit to a real plan that ensures fair wages, improved working conditions and career stability for this essential workforce?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: I do applaud the ECE workers. I spent a lot of time over the summer visiting daycares and child care centres across the province and really reflecting on the extraordinary work that they do.

The member will know, of course, that we are expanding access to child care. That means more ECEs. We are, unfortunately, in a bit of a holding pattern right now as we

wait for the federal government to come to the table with respect to the next five years of the CWELCC program. We honestly have been asking the federal government to meet since last April; we have yet to hear back from the federal government.

It's not only the province of Ontario; our friends in British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba are also asking the federal government to come back to the table. In their last offer to us, the federal government acknowledged that they were \$10 billion short of sustaining the program as it is today, but we are hoping that eventually they will come to the table.

Time is running short and parents need to have some certainty, but so do the workers who do such extraordinary jobs on behalf of getting our children ready for the future, getting them ready to be in our schools. So I'm with the member, I'm with the ECE—

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Back to the member from London—Fanshawe.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Speaker, appreciation must come with action, and without a stable workforce, there is no child care system. Uncertainty extends beyond the workforce: Families and operators are worried too. The Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care program is set to expire in March. Over 300,000 families rely on affordable child care under this program and 70,000 more are waiting, yet the government is one of two provinces that hasn't signed a deal for this program.

Premier, the clock is ticking. Will the Premier commit today to get his ministers to the negotiating table?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Not only is the province of Ontario willing to get to the negotiating table, so is the province of British Columbia, which signed a deal and is now regretting that deal they signed—so is the province of Alberta, so is Saskatchewan, so is Manitoba.

We have been begging the federal government to come to the table so that we can begin talking about an extension of the CWELCC program. We have sent letters to the federal government, we have called the federal government. We understand that the new minister does not yet have a mandate from her Treasury Board to begin negotiations with us. It is hard to negotiate with yourself at the table.

We want an extension of the program. That is why I sent out a letter last April to parents—a year in advance of the expiry of the program—warning them that unless the federal government committed funding to their program that fees would go up. That's why Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and British Columbia are joining us.

I hope the federal minister will come to the table with us so that we can resolve some of the issues that we have and we can give parents certainty, we can give operators certainty and we can give those ECEs workers who do such a great job the certainty that they need as well.

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: My question is to the Premier. Loyalist College in Belleville suspended one- and two-

year culinary programs after years of investing in specialized equipment and industry partnerships. Domestic students were enrolled in those programs to give them opportunities to pursue an education and careers within their own community. Businesses in the hospitality and tourism sector in Prince Edward county and the Canadian Armed Forces rely on the highly skilled graduates from this program. In Picton, the Royal Hotel has nine alumni from Loyalist College working there.

Speaker, can the Premier explain to young people and local employers in the Bay of Quinte why millions of dollars were handed out through the Skills Development Fund like a slush fund to reward insiders, while Loyalist College can't even afford to keep its culinary programs open? Will the Premier fire the Minister of Labour, fund our colleges and fix the Skills Development Fund?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize the Minister of Colleges and Universities.

Hon. Nolan Quinn: As the member opposite would know, funding for our colleges and universities is higher than it's ever been. We can pass you over the 2025 budget; we've invested a billion dollars into the public sector. That is \$750 million into 20,000 new STEM seats, new nursing seats, new teaching seats—we've invested into the sector, on top of the \$1.3 billion that we invested last year.

But I think what that member opposite needs to know is that the federal government made many unilateral changes that have affected post-secondary right across the whole country. Ontario is not alone in the rebalancing that is taking place right now, so what I would recommend is that that member opposite phone his federal counterparts and ask them why they've messed up the post-secondary institutions right across all of Canada.

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

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Speaker, that was a program that was primarily enrolled with domestic students, not international students: the people within their own community looking for jobs and opportunities within it.

I used to work in the hospitality sector, and I know that in the county, it's an important driver of economic growth and jobs. I know the story of many young people from the Bay of Quinte area who can't afford to travel all the way to Toronto to enrol in a culinary program. What does the Premier expect those students to do? Where does the province expect hospitality businesses in the county to recruit their staff from? Should they go to tomorrow's fundraiser with the Minister of Labour to get in line for the next round of the Skills Development Fund?

Premier, you say that government should be run like a business. Well, if this was an actual business, you would have fired the Minister of Labour a long time ago. Will you do it now?

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

Hon. David Piccini: Speaker, as you heard from the minister, funding is up—these independent bodies that make those board decisions.

Immediately following that, I reached out to Mark Kirkpatrick. I have an upcoming meeting with their president and CEO. I also spoke to Karin Desveaux, who's the lead chef there. They've actually benefited from the Skills Development Fund at Loyalist College, and we've sat down to try to find solutions. Maybe that member would actually be interested in joining me to sit down at a table to find solutions, rather than this sort of mudslinging.

We're going to stay focused on empowering those workers through training. I think to so many programs in our local community that are supporting ECEs, that have launched a next generation of apprenticeships on heritage-building in the same region he's talking about.

Maybe if he cared so much about that region, he could show his face there, come sit down with those SDF recipients and me—

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Question?

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

MPP Silvia Gualtieri: My question is for the Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade. For decades, free trade between Canada and the United States has driven investment, created jobs and built shared prosperity. But today, that relationship is under strain because of Donald Trump. American tariffs are disrupting global markets, creating uncertainty and showing that the US is no longer the dependable partner it once was.

While this presents real challenges, it also opens a door for Ontario to step forward. We can show the world that Ontario is a stable, reliable and trusted partner in global trade. Can the minister share how our government is working to diversify Ontario's trade relationships and attract new investments in our province?

Hon. Victor Fedeli: We've heard from the Premier loud and clear: He wants every nut, every bolt, everything that could possibly be made here in Ontario to be made here in Ontario. And his instructions to me are: "Buddy, it's east, west, around the world; it's not down south anymore."

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And since our two-way trade is up in countries, we thought we'd share a couple of these stats with you. Switzerland: Our two-way trade with Switzerland is up 37%. Think of when we landed Roche or Jungbunzlauer in Niagara. Think about South Korea: It's up 85% today. That's NextStar, and that's all of the South Korean companies that have moved here to surround that plant and see the hiring of their 1000th employee last week. Think of India: We're up 59%. Think of those tech companies like HCL, Infosys and the dozens of more that we've landed here. Countries around the world know that this is the stable, reliable government that they need.

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

MPP Silvia Gualtieri: The US tariffs are being felt across the globe. It's not just here in Ontario. The instability of the global economy, driven by US tariffs, has workers and businesses in my community of Mississauga

worried about their future. Our government has always focused on creating conditions for companies to make long-term investments, creating good-paying jobs in the process. We've reduced the annual cost of doing business by more than \$11 billion, cutting red tape that was holding businesses back. As global companies look away from the US, we need to make sure they look to Ontario.

Speaker, can the minister show how our government is making sure the world knows that Ontario is the best place for companies to locate?

Hon. Victor Fedeli: Our messaging is obviously landing around the world, and that's why we've seen record levels of foreign direct investment. I'm not sure if this is the first time I've said it—I know you've said this in the Legislature in the past. Last year, 2024, we had 409 international companies land here in Ontario. They invested \$40 billion and they hired 24,711 people. Speaker, that is up 84% from the previous year. And even amid these unprecedented global economic uncertainties, we continue to see these companies looking here in Ontario. We were in Japan and South Korea earlier this year, and in our three-day mission, we landed \$400 million in new investment and 300 jobs. Those people are working today, all because we let the world know there's no better place to invest than in Ontario.

EDUCATION

Ms. Chandra Pasma: This government's record cuts to education funding have taken more than \$6 billion out of our education system, and our kids pay the price every single day: large class sizes, lack of mental health supports, cuts to special education, crumbling schools. And now, instead of reversing his cuts and investing in our kids, the Premier is attacking the right of parents and communities to have a say in our local schools.

Will the Premier please explain to parents across Ontario: Why does he think it's okay to shut us out of decisions that affect our kids?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: Well, I don't believe that we should do that at all. You talk about education funding. Colleagues, they just had an opportunity to vote with us to remove a trustee who took over \$100,000 out of the pockets of our schools, out of the pockets of children. Teachers—we have ETFO here—imagine those ETFO teachers: Every day, a teacher goes to school and they want the best for their students, and we have trustees flying to Italy, dining at Michelin restaurants, taking limousines. Today we had the opportunity to get that money back, to exact accountability, and the NDP, what did they do? They decided, "No, we're going to continue to support trustees like that who take money out of the classroom."

Madam Speaker, we're going to stand up for teachers, we're going to stand up for parents, we're going to stand up for students so that they get the best out of a \$40-billion education budget.

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

Ms. Chandra Pasma: If only the minister brought that attitude to the Skills Development Fund, Speaker, we'd have a bill to remove the Minister of Labour from office.

Through the Speaker, Minister, you've already appointed supervisors who are giving us a glimpse of our future if Bill 33 passes: cuts to special education supports for our most vulnerable kids, supervisors who hide from the public and refuse to answer emails, decisions made behind closed doors, restricted access to public meetings and misleading statements from supervisors who say publicly that they do not need to answer questions from anyone.

Does the Premier think this is okay, or will he show parents the respect we deserve by withdrawing Bill 33?

Hon. Paul Calandra: No, I'm not going to withdraw Bill 33. You know why? Because this government wants to ensure that there is accountability in the education system.

What I'm trying to do, what we're trying to do, what the Premier has asked me to do is build on the work of the previous ministers so that we can ensure that our students have the best quality of education possible. What does that mean? That means giving teachers the resources that they need to ensure that our students succeed. That means respecting parents, because when you do that, you build an education system where our students succeed.

It doesn't matter that we have record levels of funding—that doesn't matter. What matters is that our teachers can give our students the best possible education. You know what we're going to do? We're going to remove obstacles when that happens. When trustees go off the rails and start focusing on anything other than student achievement, I'll fire them. When school boards don't do the right thing and put money in the classroom, I'll remove them and put a supervisor in place, Madam Speaker. You know why? I want students to succeed, and for students to succeed, I need teachers to have the resources and the tools that they need. I'll stand up for those teachers, students and parents every day.

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

MPP Andrea Hazell: My question is for the Premier. This government has transformed taxpayer dollars into a personal piggy bank. The Skills Development Fund now stands at \$2.5 billion, yet the Auditor General reports a selection process that is neither fair nor accountable. It gets worse: An alarming 54% of funding applications were rated—get this—poor, low or medium. This is not new news.

While high-ranked applications were dismissed, how can this government justify mismanaging billions of dollars while the people in Ontario are struggling with job insecurity, child care and housing? They elected us to support them, not abandon them.

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

Hon. David Piccini: I'm happy to talk about our motives for a program that are transforming lives in critical, key sectors like construction: 154,000 construction workers trained, 124,000 manufacturing workers trained and in mining, Speaker—mining, something I know they don't support—35,000 mining workers.

I want to focus on Jennifer. Jennifer took the NORCAT common core mining program. Jennifer now works at Musselwhite mine. She was one of 100,000 people who were unemployed who have now found employment within 60 days. That's what this fund is doing, changing the lives for people like Jennifer. I would encourage that member to come out, meet her and talk to her about how important this fund has been to change lives.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize the member for Scarborough—Guildwood.

MPP Andrea Hazell: Let's try this again. Friends, donors and lobbyists got hundreds of millions of dollars while underserved organizations that applied for funding were rejected. These organizations from Scarborough and the west end have been trying to meet with you during the summer, yet their voices are ignored up to today.

Meanwhile, the unemployment rate for underserved youth in Ontario is at a staggering 21%. They want to work, they want to be trained and they deserve an equal opportunity without being a donor to the Ontario PC Party.

The most recent round of the skills development funding saw 63% of the \$345 million given to groups led by the PC donors—nothing new, again. That's nearly two thirds of the funding.

Does the Premier believe the Skills Development Fund should be used to train workers to work, or to train donors to donate?

Hon. David Piccini: Let's talk about one of the important programs supporting youth in the community of Scarborough, Building Up. They support graduates entering construction jobs, helping them succeed and remain in the industry. Retention is such a key thing I hear from employers. They reached 113% of their under-represented groups' participation targets, training over 244 youth; 100% of them achieved their employment targets because they admitted more people than spots they originally intended to offer.

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That's what these programs are doing: getting people jobs, finding meaningful employment. When you think of manufacturing, a sector decimated by that previous government, these sorts of career pathways matter—short, rapid-training opportunities to land a better job with a bigger paycheque.

HOMELESSNESS

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: My question is for the Premier. Last year, over 80,000 people in Ontario faced homelessness. It's a huge concern in my riding. When I asked my Ontario health team about it, they told me that the demographic growing largest in this dataset are seniors. It didn't surprise me.

I have seniors coming to me telling me that they're living in their cars; they're facing renoviction. When I visited a shelter, I saw a wall of walkers and people battling cancer, Parkinson's and Alzheimer's. That's why I'm co-sponsoring Bill 28 with the MPP from Etobicoke—Lakeshore called Homelessness Ends with Housing—because that's how you end homelessness, because I want seniors to have their golden years living in dignity.

Speaker, through you to the Premier: Will you say yes to this bill so we can develop a plan so that all people facing homelessness will have the support and housing they need?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Hon. Rob Flack: It's great to be back in the House with everyone. I want to acknowledge the great work my colleague opposite did this summer. My team met and we all listened to her bill. Obviously, when it comes to supportive housing for homelessness, this government needs no questions of impugnment towards what we've done: \$700 million towards homelessness prevention funding, up 40%.

We continue, Speaker, to dedicate everything we do to help those folks. I would say with the new Build Canada Homes efforts from the federal government, we met recently with Minister Robertson, and also with Mayor Chow and others. We met through the FPT to build on the opportunities of that program, how we can complement that program—\$13 billion. A lot of that money will be targeted towards affordable housing, towards homelessness.

At the end of the day, I'm always happy to listen and learn and help out entirely in this province and listen more about her bill.

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

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: My question again is to the Premier. This government does need to invest more in housing. We have a leaky roof, and we can't just wait and see. Every MPP in this place knows that it is bad.

Housing starts are at an all-time low, rents are at an all-time high. Wages, OAS, OW, ODSP have not kept pace, so people are becoming homeless. When people are homeless, they're more likely to use emergency rooms. One month in a hospital bed costs this government and our health care system \$60,000; jail costs \$15,000; supportive housing costs \$4,000.

In Dunn House, a project in Toronto, they've saved the health care system alone over \$2 million by providing supportive housing to people facing homelessness.

Speaker, to the Premier, will he say yes to saving taxpayer dollars, saving lives, creating jobs and ending homelessness?

Hon. Rob Flack: When I take a look at the member opposite's support in her region, Waterloo region, homelessness prevention funding has achieved \$17.85 million in 2025-26. The allocation for the Canada-Ontario Community Housing Initiative is \$6.9 million. The 2025-26 allocation for the Ontario Priorities Housing Initiative,

OPHI is \$2.6 million. Programs like Friendship Village and The Working Centre are excellent local examples of what's being done locally. The province recently invested \$4.1 million to expand access to primary care in Waterloo region, including community health care.

Speaker, this province under this Premier continues to invest in homelessness, affordable housing, and will take no lessons from the members opposite. We'll continue to invest, along with Build Canada Homes and get the job done.

ONTARIO ECONOMY

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: My question is to the Minister of Finance. The previous Liberal government let Ontario's economy fall behind because of their delays, their dithering and their deferrals. They raised taxes, ran deficits and allowed Ontario's credit rating to fall. Families and businesses paid the price.

Under the leadership of this Premier, our government is taking a different path. We're cutting costs, restoring confidence and strengthening Ontario's finances. After years of Liberal mismanagement, our government has restored fiscal discipline and put Ontario's finances back on track. That's real progress, Madam Speaker.

But, as Donald Trump threatens new tariffs and targets Ontario's economy, we must stay ready to respond. Speaker, can the minister please explain how our strong fiscal record ensures Ontario is ready to protect our workers and our economy from these global threats?

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Thank you to the hard-working member from Newmarket–Aurora for that very important question.

Last month, Ontario's 2025 public accounts confirmed our government received its eighth consecutive clean audit opinion and delivered a lower deficit of \$1.1 billion, on top of the two credit rating upgrades, the first in nearly 20 years. Speaker, it's simple: Under the previous Liberal government, taxes went up and Ontario's credit ratings went down. Under this government, we're cutting billions in taxes and fees for families and businesses. Our fiscal prudence has left us ready to respond against the unprecedented times we are facing. Now is the time to keep investing in our economy, supporting our workers and protecting Ontario's future.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Back to the member for Newmarket–Aurora.

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: Thank you again to the minister for his strong leadership. It's clear that our government is not standing still. While the previous Liberals sat on their hands, our government is taking bold action to protect Ontario's economy. We know that the status quo is not an option. Ontario's workers and businesses are facing real challenges and they need a government that will fight for them. From targeted supports to record infrastructure investments, our government has a clear plan—a plan to grow our economy, a plan to protect good-paying jobs.

Speaker, can the minister please provide an update on how our plan to protect Ontario will keep our economy strong and ready to compete on the world stage?

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: The great member for Newmarket–Aurora is right: The status quo is no longer an option. With US tariffs taking direct aim at Ontario businesses, the world's economic landscape has changed. The status quo is no longer an option, and Ontario is ready to fight back.

Under Premier Ford, our government is relentless. We're standing up for Ontario workers, protecting our industries and unleashing the full potential of the Ontario economy. That's why, Madam Speaker, I'm proud to inform this House that on November 6, I will release the 2025 fall economic statement, an update to protect Ontario. This will be a plan to protect all of Ontario, an update on the progress that we've made to make Ontario the most competitive economy in the G7 and the best place in the world to invest, work and create jobs.

MANUFACTURING JOBS

Ms. Sandy Shaw: My question to the Premier: We are witnessing in Ontario an unfolding jobs disaster. This morning, 1,200 workers learned their fate at CAMI. They lost their jobs last week. Stellantis announced it's moving production from Brampton to the US; 3,000 workers are losing their jobs. Families and communities are falling victim to this government's jobs disaster.

Speaker, we know that the Premier has promised to fight Trump's tariffs, but all we see are job losses and empty promises. I represent Hamilton. We are a proud steel town, and we want to know from this Premier what job losses can we expect for families in our community?

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

Hon. Victor Fedeli: Thank you for the opportunity to put some numbers out there.

In the three months leading up to President Trump's tariffs, there were actually 87,000 new jobs created in the province of Ontario. Now, those tariffs are putting a horrible chill on business on both sides of the border. We're actually seeing the Americans, for the first time, understand that these tariffs are taxes on them. As their inventories are running out and the new products are coming in, they're having sticker shock, and we certainly are not surprised. We told them this is exactly what's going to happen.

So that's why we continue to reduce red tape and lower the cost of doing business here in Ontario by \$12 billion annually. That's why we've seen one million new jobs created since 2018, including 20,000 new manufacturing jobs just in the last three months alone. We are going to continue, Speaker, to cut red tape and lower costs in Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize the member from Hamilton Centre.

MPP Robin Lennox: Back to the Premier: Already over 150 good steelmaking jobs were lost in Hamilton when Hamilton wire closed their doors forever this summer. Those 150 workers joined the 800,000 Ontarians currently out of work on this government's watch.

In Hamilton, nearly 10,000 jobs are tied to the steel industry, and there's another 3,000 in Sault Ste. Marie. When will this government finally act to protect those jobs by guaranteeing that Ontario-made steel must be used in all public infrastructure projects? It's a yes or no question, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Victor Fedeli: Speaker, we have reacted to the steel industry. Again, there's always more to do, but the \$500 million that Algoma just received—\$400 million from the federal government and \$100 million from the province of Ontario. We are working with them to help them pivot and add new lines to make different products out of their steel.

The same thing with Dofasco. We're working with Dofasco. We know that the tin that they make produces tin cans that are not made in Ontario. We are working with various tin can companies to make these kinds of products here in Ontario.

As I said earlier, you heard from the Premier, he wants every bolt, every nut, every product that we can possibly make in Ontario with Ontario's steel and Canadian products to be made here. That's what the Premier has asked for and that's what this province will deliver.

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: In my professional career, I worked for some great leaders who taught me, if you make a mistake, own it. Own it, rectify it and then apologize to the people who you may have hurt or harmed because of your mistake.

Speaker, 670 high-quality, high-scoring applicants were refused funding, but 64 low-to-medium applications worth \$126 million were approved. The minister rewarded low-scoring, low-priority programs instead of higher-scoring applications. It would be difficult to convince anyone that those low-scoring applicants weren't getting some kind of preferential treatment.

Will the Premier ask the Minister of Labour to have the decency to admit that it was wrong to intervene on behalf of lobbyists, friends and donors, and have the integrity to apologize to the people of Ontario?

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

Hon. David Piccini: Speaker, that's just simply incorrect. When we ensure that we're training the next generation of Ontario workers, we look at critical parameters like manufacturing, like construction, like mining critical minerals and energy. The member opposite and her party have really struggled on whether or not they support clean nuclear jobs. We know under their watch they were planning on shutting down Pickering. I'm about to meet with Candu later on, and we're supporting groups like mill-

wrights through their introduction to millwrighting program.

When the Minister of Energy wants to make sure new hydroelectric dams come online, wants to make sure there's a talent pipeline to get those youth—that's why we support lower-scoring projects like introduction to millwrighting, to make sure we have the next generation of nuclear workers to support securing our energy future, Speaker. We're not going to apologize for doing that and we'll keep working hard to make sure we have that talent pipeline.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Back to the member for Kanata-Carleton.

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: Well, that was a thoroughly disappointing answer from this member. He needs to read the Auditor General report, and he needs to show some respect to the colleagues in this House and stop repeating the same tired talking points.

The Skills Development Fund has helped many people in Ontario. That is not the issue. It's a question of manipulating the system to reward insider friends and donors. Our work in this Legislature should always be about helping the people of Ontario, and yes, there will always be difficult decisions to be made. Most of us understand what is morally right and what is fundamentally wrong.

Will the Premier demonstrate that he takes this to heart and fire this minister now?

Hon. David Piccini: Speaker, let's look at a morally right decision that was made through the fund. Let's look at adults living with disabilities. They're not able, in many cases, with their applications, to meet certain parameters, so we selected a lower-scoring project like Melly's Workplace in Durham region. I would encourage that member to join me, to meet with the adults living with disabilities who we're supporting, getting the soft skills, linking to larger employers like the LCBO, where they have now found meaningful employment.

Yesterday, we met adults living with autism, Down syndrome and many more, and we spoke to them about their pathways into rewarding careers through important Skills Development Fund work. These are some of the things that I assess as minister when we're looking at supporting worthwhile projects that help tackle our declining productivity.

This Premier wants to make sure everybody achieves their full potential, and we've got a fund designed to help them do that. And I hope that member can understand and support me with supporting those worthwhile projects, Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): There being no further business, this House stands in recess until 3 p.m.

The House recessed from 1147 to 1500.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON FINANCE AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS

Hon. Ernie Hardeman: I beg leave to present a report from the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs on the estimates selected by the standing committee for consideration.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Mr. Wai Lam (William) Wong): Mr. Hardeman from the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs presents the committee's report as follows:

Pursuant to standing order 63, your committee has selected the 2025-26 estimates of the following ministries and offices for consideration: Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development; Ministry of Finance; Ministry of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade; Cabinet Office, Office of the Premier; and Treasury Board Secretariat.

Report presented.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE INTERIOR

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: I beg leave to present a report from the Standing Committee on the Interior on the estimates selected by the standing committee for consideration.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Mr. Wai Lam (William) Wong): Madame Gallagher Murphy from the Standing Committee on the Interior presents the committee's report as follows:

Pursuant to standing order 63, your committee has selected the 2025-26 estimates of the following ministries for consideration: Ministry of Energy and Mines; Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks; Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness; Ministry of Natural Resources; Ministry of Northern Economic Development and Growth; Ministry of Rural Affairs.

Report presented.

PETITIONS

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Ms. Chandra Pasma: I am very honoured to rise on behalf of thousands of people across Ottawa who are petitioning the Legislative Assembly to support and save the Academic Assistance for Adults with Developmental Disabilities Program at Algonquin College. This program helps young people and adults with developmental disabilities to further their academic studies after high school, in addition to learning essential life skills and valuable employment skills. This program is one of its kind. It has been on the chopping block, along with many programs at Algonquin College, because of the underfund-

ing of our post-secondary sector and the impact that that has on the ability of our colleges and universities to continue to offer the kind of programming people need.

For these young people, in particular, they are deeply affected by these cuts, because—for neurotypical kids, if a program closes, they can just choose another one. For these young people with developmental disabilities, there is no program for them if it closes.

The petitioners are calling on the Legislative Assembly to make sure that the funding is there so we can save this program and make sure that every young person in our province has the opportunity to pursue post-secondary education.

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

HOMELESSNESS

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I'm here to present a petition to pass Bill 28.

We know that homelessness ends with housing. Last year, we had 80,000 Ontarians who experienced homelessness, and that number is said to rise to 300,000 in the next decade, according to the Association of Municipalities of Ontario. And we know that the cost per month for housing is \$613, while other costs to the health care system and jail are more than that.

I would like to submit this petition. I endorse it, and I'll pass it to page Simone.

ANIMAL PROTECTION

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank Vivian Tannock from Lively in my riding for these petitions, but really they come from all over Ontario.

There has been a rise in the reported animal abuse cases across Ontario. Many of them have been shared in the media, and they're not funny to read. Although we feel that this is only a fraction of the number of cases of animal abuse—whereas the breeders, the shelters, the rescues, the private sellers, and even private citizens have no means of finding out who has been found guilty of animal abuse so that they can make the right decisions when it comes time to sell or to give an animal.

They're petitioning the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to establish a mandatory, publicly accessible Ontario animal abuser registry that would keep the names of the people for 10 years. It would be available to all so that the breeders, the shelters, the rescues, the private sellers, the private citizens would know, prior to the sale, the transfer, the adoption or the temporary care of an animal, who they are dealing with and avoid sending some of our lovely pets to people who have been known to abuse them.

I fully support this petition. I will affix my name to it and ask my good page James to bring it to the Clerk.

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. Anthony Leardi: I'd like to thank residents of my riding, John and Shelley Roun from Harrow, for sending in this petition.

This petition speaks about President Trump's tariffs and how they're causing chaos in the auto sector in North America and hurting businesses both in Canada and the United States.

It's also talking about how people are going to lose their jobs as a result of tariffs in the United States.

It encourages the government of Ontario to continue working to get those US tariffs lifted and also to continue protecting Ontario businesses and workers against Donald Trump's tariffs.

I fully endorse this petition. I will affix my name to it and give it to this fine page to bring to the Clerks' table.

ANTI-BULLYING INITIATIVES

Ms. Chandra Pasma: I am pleased to be able to rise to table a petition entitled "Love Your Lunch Day."

Unfortunately, there are many children in Ontario who experience lunch box shaming based on the food that they bring from home. We want every child to feel confident about the food that they are bringing to school, whether it is based on their culture or their community. We know that food is an important part of young people's sense of belonging, and we want everybody to feel like they belong at school.

The signatories are requesting that the Legislative Assembly of Ontario officially recognize September 19 in Ontario as Love Your Lunch Day to promote food diversity, inclusion and kindness in Ontario schools.

I endorse this petition. I will add my name to it and send it to the table with page Orion.

GOVERNMENT SERVICES

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank Carol and Richard Gagnon from Mattagami First Nation in my riding for signing this petition. It is called "ServiceOntario in Gogama."

Basically, the residents of Gogama and surrounding communities—so you're talking Biscotasing, Westree, Shining Tree, Mattagami First Nation, all around the watershed—would like to have access to a ServiceOntario kiosk like everybody else. There is no public transit, nothing like this. You're talking about northern, remote communities. Most people need to drive. Everybody needs a health card etc. The closest one for most people is, depending on where you live, over 200 kilometres one way—to make it to Sudbury or to make it to Timmins, to get to a ServiceOntario to have your picture taken for your driver's licence etc. They would like one of those ServiceOntarios to be set up in Gogama so that it makes it easier for them to renew a driver's licence, health card etc.

It would also make it easier for people who don't have access to online services. As you know, Speaker, in big

parts of my riding, there is no WiFi, there is no cell service. For all of those people, they have no choice but to go in person to a ServiceOntario kiosk, so they would like one in Gogama, which is really close to the watershed, which would make the travel time way easier for the people of Nickel Belt.

I fully support this petition. I will affix my name to it and ask my good page Ziming to bring it to the Clerk.

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. Deepak Anand: This petition is actually not only from these residents, but from my heart as well.

1510

I came to Canada in 2000. My first job was in automotive. The reason I say this is that the auto sector has always been the backbone of Ontario, and today it is under threat because of President Trump's tariffs.

This petition is exactly talking about the uncertainty and the chaos in North America's auto sector. But it's saying there's hope because we have a Premier in this Legislature—Captain Canada.

So they are asking Captain Canada to continue working to get the US to lift their tariffs immediately; keep fighting, especially with the recent things which we have seen; and protect Ontario businesses and workers who are being affected by the US's unjustified tariffs.

I absolutely agree with this petition. I'm going to sign it, and I'm going to give it to Alyssa.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Ms. Chandra Pasma: It's my honour to stand and table a petition that has been signed by hundreds of people across Ottawa, calling on the Legislative Assembly to withdraw Bill 33.

The petitioners note that we have had more than \$6.35 billion taken out of our education system over the past seven years due to funding cuts that have resulted in larger class sizes, a teacher shortage and growing concerns about mental health and school violence for our students.

The solution to addressing these challenges is not to attack the rights of parents and communities to have a say in our local schools; it is to invest in our schools.

We shouldn't allow the Minister of Education, who has already made these funding cuts, to have unchecked powers over our schools—particularly not with decisions being made in the dark, without consultation with parents, behind closed doors, with no transparency or even straight answers about what's happening.

So the petitioners are calling on the Legislative Assembly to withdraw Bill 33 and instead invest in our schools, reduce class sizes, hire more qualified educators, and address mental health and violence.

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

INTERPROVINCIAL TRADE

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): I recognize the member from Perth—Wellington.

Mr. Matthew Rae: Thank you, Speaker. It's lovely to see you in the chair this afternoon.

I have a petition here to the Legislative Assembly about internal trade barriers that cost our economy \$2 billion a year and lower our gross domestic product. I know we've heard over the summer from many of our constituents about the need to be a strong Canada, a strong Ontario, and really breaking down those barriers.

It calls upon the government of Ontario to lead the charge with Captain Canada, as my colleague from Mississauga—Malton mentioned, to unlock Canada's full potential, and to ensure that we're working with our provincial colleagues across Canada and with our territories so that every community—not just in Ontario, but all of Canada—can continue to thrive and continue to reap the benefits that is Canada and the great workers who live within its majestic boundaries.

It's my pleasure to affix my signature to it and give it to Alice.

APPAREILS ET ACCESSOIRES FONCTIONNELS

M^{me} France Gélinas: J'aimerais remercier M^{me} Albertine Ball de Hanmer dans mon comté pour ces pétitions.

La pétition s'appelle « Moderniser le Programme d'appareils et accessoires fonctionnels ». Le Programme d'appareils et accessoires fonctionnels en Ontario est là pour aider les gens qui ont une invalidité. Malheureusement, le programme exclut plusieurs appareils et accessoires fonctionnels et met des limites à certains accessoires. La limite dit que si tu as besoin d'un appareil auditif, on ne te remboursera pas plus que 500 \$ par appareil. La loi dit que tu as le droit de recevoir 75 % du prix de ton appareil fonctionnel, mais pour une raison ou pour une autre, le gouvernement met une limite à 500 \$.

On sait tous, monsieur le Président, que maintenant ça peut être 2 000 \$, 3 000 \$, 4 000 \$ pour un appareil auditif. Ça fonctionne merveilleusement bien, mais le gouvernement ne rencontre pas ses obligations de rembourser 75 % des coûts, plutôt que de mettre un plafond à 500 \$.

Donc, les gens ont signé la pétition pour faire changer ça. Je suis d'accord avec eux. Je vais signer la pétition, et je demande à Aditya de l'amener à la table des greffiers.

ENDANGERED SPECIES

MPP Jamie West: This petition is entitled “Withdraw Bill 5—Maintain the Endangered Species Act, 2007.” This is about what happened during Bill 5, where Bill 5 proposed to repeal the ESA and bring in something called the Species Conservation Act, 2025. The Endangered Species Act was brought in, or renewed, improved in 2007.

Part of what happens in Bill 5 is it concentrates the decision-making power of what happens to endangered species with the minister.

They obviously have many concerns in here. There's a lot more in the petition, but we're supposed to be summarizing them. Basically, they're very concerned about taking the broad opinions of experts in their field and concentrating it in one minister who may not have the full subject matter expertise on it.

In the petition, they say they would like that the government of Ontario withdraw Bill 5, maintain the Endangered Species Act of 2007, while ensuring economic growth does not come at the expense of biodiversity and ecological integrity. I think that's smart. You never know who the next minister is going to be and how skilled they're going to be.

I think it's important that we listen to the people of Ontario who have signed this petition.

I'll affix my signature and provide it to page Finley for the table.

COMMERCE INTERPROVINCIAL

M. Anthony Leardi: J'aimerais présenter cette pétition au nom de la famille Cyr. La famille Cyr vient de la ville de LaSalle, et cette pétition parle des barrières entre les provinces qui empêchent les échanges des biens et des services.

La famille Cyr demande que nous travaillions ensemble pour éliminer les barrières entre les provinces pour encourager l'échange des biens et des services entre les provinces pour améliorer la vie des familles.

Certainement, je suis d'accord avec cette pétition. Je vais la signer et je vais la donner à Avery pour l'avancer à la table. Merci, Avery.

VISION CARE

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank Lise and André Baronette from Coniston in my riding for these petitions. They're called “Ensuring Clear Vision for All Seniors.”

We all know that clear vision is a huge part of a good-quality life, as well as helping people stay independent and in good health and safe.

They also note that a number of seniors, particularly those living with low income, can't afford prescription glasses. Whereas most seniors over 65 require glasses to make sure that they can see clearly, a lot of them don't have the money to do this.

They petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario so that the government establish a rebate or reimbursement program for low-income seniors to gain access to prescription glasses. I think this is a good idea.

I support this petition. I will add my name to it and I will give it to page Bani to bring to the Clerk.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WORKING FOR WORKERS SEVEN ACT, 2025

LOI DE 2025 VISANT À ŒUVRER POUR LES TRAVAILLEURS, SEPT

Resuming the debate adjourned on October 20, 2025, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 30, An Act to amend various statutes with respect to employment and labour and other matters / Projet de loi 30, Loi modifiant diverses lois relatives à l'emploi et au travail ainsi qu'à d'autres questions.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): I believe we are at questions. Do we have questions for the previous speaker?

Mr. Matthew Rae: Ask your questions!

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

MPP Jamie West: The whip on the opposite side is very excited for questions.

I have a question for you.

When I had my debate yesterday, I talked about being supportive of the SDF in general, but of its use. During estimates, I had asked the minister about Scale Hospitality. Scale Hospitality is one of these groups that was ranked very low. They were going to train people for hospitality. We're coming out of the pandemic; I thought that it made sense that you would need some hospitality training. At the time I thought it was \$11 million, but, because of freedom of information, we found out it was \$17 million. At the time, I asked the minister, "What did the people of Ontario get for spending 17 million of taxpayers' dollars?" He wasn't able to answer this more than a year ago. I was wondering if you could provide it to me.

What are we getting? What's the return on investment for Scale Hospitality and this \$17 million? I don't want to hear about the ones that have done really well, where you can—skilled trades, police, firefighters, first responders. I want to know about Scale Hospitality. What did the people of Ontario get for \$17 million?

Mr. Matthew Rae: Thank you to my colleague across the way for the question. I'm parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, so I encourage my colleague to direct that question to the Minister of Labour.

But it does give me an opportunity to rise and speak about the over \$2 billion we're investing in the Skills Development Fund. As I mentioned in my remarks yesterday at the conclusion of debate, we're in unprecedented economic times, colleagues, with President Trump's unjustified tariffs. Our government is still putting forward an ambitious plan to build Ontario: \$20 billion over the next few years in infrastructure funding for hospitals, schools, roads, bridges all across Ontario, not just in the GTA or downtown Toronto but in northern Ontario as well, ensuring we're also training those workers through the Skills Development Fund.

I'm not going to talk about police or others we've supported. I'm happy to talk about the technical training group in my riding that has received skills development funding that is helping to bring on more millwrights and metal fabrication individuals as well. It's important projects like this that I'm proud to support through our government through the Skills Development Fund.

1520

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

Mr. Anthony Leardi: We have these organizations, these centres called Action Centres, and now we're going to call them POWER Centres. But whether they're called one thing or another, they're of incredibly good use for workers who are facing layoff or who are facing the need for assistance to find alternative employment or new employment. So these Action Centres or POWER Centres have already existed, and they're going to continue. We're going to call them POWER Centres from now on. I know that they've been of incredibly good and positive effect in my area, helping people who have been laid off find new employment, especially in the auto sector. I would imagine that they've been useful for other sectors as well. I'm personally familiar with the auto sector.

My question to the member is this: Does he have any familiarity with Action Centres or POWER Centres? What is his view of them? And has he personally viewed them as being of assistance to workers in his area or in his riding?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): The member for Perth—Wellington.

Mr. Matthew Rae: Thank you, Speaker, and through you, thank you to my colleague from Essex for that very important question around Action Centres, which are now being called POWER Centres. Importantly, as I mentioned in my remarks yesterday, there's \$28 million in additional investment from our government in these POWER Centres. And I know under my predecessor, in 2018, the St. Marys Maple Leaf food plant moved to London, and an Action Centre at the time—but a similar process—was there to support the workers looking to retrain or find that next career. So I saw that on the ground, the important work that these centres can offer. I know it's been talked about—the need for them. Unfortunately, because of Donald Trump's unjustified tariffs on Canada and Ontario and his attack on our steel and auto parts industries, among many others, it was very important to see in the provincial budget, which our government was proud to support—the opposition chose not to support it, again, which is unfortunate, Speaker—the \$20 million, but also \$50 million through Better Jobs Ontario as well, being there to support those individuals who need that help if they're facing an uncertain future around their employment.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Further questions? I had this just a moment ago—the member from Ottawa West—Nepean.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Thank you, Speaker. You're doing a great job on your first day.

Algonquin College in my riding of Ottawa West—Nepean has had to make cuts to eliminate a \$60-million

deficit. This has included closing 35 programs, including the Academic Assistance for Adults with Developmental Disabilities program that I mentioned earlier, which is the only program of its kind in Ottawa that provides job skills to young people with developmental disabilities. Algonquin has had to shutter the Perth campus, which provided skills development to people in the Ottawa Valley. All of these programs that have been cut are programs that were responding to needs within the Ottawa labour market. They were built in co-operation with employers in Ottawa to make sure that people had direct hands-on development training in the areas where we need them.

Algonquin couldn't get the money to keep those programs open, but \$350 million went to PC donors and PC lobbyists. So, apparently, Algonquin should have hired a lobbyist or made donations in order to get money.

Why does Working for Workers not include working on behalf of the members of the Ottawa labour market and post-secondary community who really want job training that is going to meet the needs of Ottawa and give these people good-paying jobs?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): I recognize the member for Perth—Wellington.

Mr. Matthew Rae: Thank you, Speaker, and thank you, through you, to my colleague for the question.

Interjection: Long question.

Mr. Matthew Rae: It was a long question, colleagues, but I am sure Algonquin College actually has staff whose job is government relations—most colleges and universities do; I meet with the ones in my area often. I'm sure they've met with our great minister of colleges and universities as well. As he mentioned in question period this morning, this provincial budget—we've invested an additional \$1 billion into the sector. That's on top of the \$1.5 billion we provided last year in support to our university and college sectors, dealing with arbitrary changes from the federal government around their changes to the immigration system, which directly impacted our colleges and universities. But it really is working with them hand in hand.

I know some of my colleagues and I attended the McMaster University reception last evening. It was great to hear that we're working with them, whether it's nuclear innovation, whether it's medical education, nurses, you name it—working with our university and post-secondary partners to ensure that we are building a strong Ontario and a strong Canada.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): I recognize the member from Mississauga—Malton.

Mr. Deepak Anand: To the member from Perth—Wellington: The question is very simple. Every time I go out and I talk about the Skills Development Fund, SDF—I'll give you a small example. For example, the Pinball Clemons Foundation got the funding to support 200 youth through mentorship, micro-credentials and job placement. The impact of that was that it helped to provide these youth with short-term training so they can be job-ready, and then

they can start having financial stability and financial independence.

My question is very simple: What are you hearing about the Skills Development Fund, and in your opinion, in your riding and around, how is this making a big impact to the people of Ontario?

Mr. Matthew Rae: Thank you to my colleague from Mississauga—Malton for his question. What I hear in my riding of Perth—Wellington around the skills development funding is the importance of it.

The additional investment we've made this year in our provincial budget was very well received from my local community, whether it was in the operating or traditional training stream, but also now the capital stream as well, which was recently brought in through the most recent iteration of the Skills Development Fund, because there are a variety of groups locally looking to apply for that fund and take advantage of it.

The technical training group has been successful in the past; so has Set7, which was through the municipality of North Perth—so a municipal partner, but really training PSWs in that case, something that was a need in our rural communities, in particular, with home care and long-term care.

I know there's great interest—whether it's in the arts, whether it's in the auto sector—across Perth—Wellington in skills development funding, and using that funding to train the next generation of workers in Ontario.

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

M^{me} France Gélinas: As you know, there are lots of mines in my riding. For the last 15 years or so, IAMgold has been working to open a mine. It has been opened. They poured their first gold last March, actually. During all those years, we have been asking the government to put homes that they own in Gogama up for sale.

The Premier was in Gogama, and we asked him, "When are you going to put those homes up for sale?" That was five years ago. Five years later, the workers cannot buy the homes that are available, that are being paid for and maintained by the taxpayers, because the government has not been able to put them up for sale.

When are we going to start to care about mining workers and make sure that the government puts up the houses for sale that are next to mines?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Thank you. The time for questions is over.

Do we have further debate? I recognize the member from Oshawa.

Interjections.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I thank the members across the way for their applause, although I feel like it was a tad premature, because I have lots to say today. So we'll see if they applaud at the end, Speaker.

I have the opportunity to stand in this place and speak about Working for Workers, Bill 30, which is before this House, which the government would tell you is the seventh Working for Workers bill, but really it's the ninth in the series. We'll talk a bit about that, about how they have put workers in their target sights a couple of times,

and we want to remember those things. But this bill misses the mark by a long shot.

Ontario's workers are very nervous about the future that is coming. They're looking for reassurances. They are looking for action. They are looking for a clear path ahead, and they're looking for a Premier and a government that is up to the task. Unfortunately, with this bill, we see that they aren't. They're not ready for that task ahead.

1530

Speaker, this is, as I said, technically the ninth bill aimed at workers. It doesn't do harm; it just does so little, right? There's so much wanting, and that's what we're going to focus on today, because the government, the Premier or whoever is at the helm decided that we would be best spending 136 days away from this place on an extended recess. But during that time, we took the opportunity to meet with workers, meet with our neighbours, listen to them and learn from them, so I am happy to come back with their voices, their concerns, their needs.

One of the things I want to remind us about is Bill 124. That's not on the list of their seven, but Bill 124, as we recall, capped public sector workers' wages at 1%. It was unconstitutional. It failed in the courts. It disproportionately affected women. As of March 2024, Ontario has had to pay public sector workers \$6 billion and counting in Bill 124 compensation costs. But in addition to that, taxpayers also got to pay for this Conservative government's fight and this Conservative government's appeal, so it has been an expensive mistake on many levels.

The other thing I wanted to mention—to take us back in time—is Bill 28, the Keeping Students in Class Act. A lot of us will remember that there were very active education workers who came to our offices to protest, to rally, to get the ear of this government. I was very glad to see that kind of enthusiasm across the whole province to support education workers. They deserve our support. Bill 28 prohibited any strikes by OSBCU/CUPE members by declaring their potential strike to be illegal. Remember that? Like Bill 124, Bill 28 also used the "notwithstanding" clause of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. That's what we're dealing with, with this government.

What we're also dealing with, with this government, is that even though we've heard the Captain Canada stuff and even though we've seen all kinds of mall-cop initiatives and whatnot, this is a Premier who is a jobs disaster. Speaker, 800,000 Ontarians are unemployed, a nearly 18% unemployment rate, and in Oshawa, we are hurting when it comes to unemployment. There is sky-high food bank use. We've got more than 22% youth unemployment—young people reaching for jobs that aren't there or can't get into those jobs. One in four youths who are in that employable age range are without a job.

We're going to get right into it, but what is top of my mind right now, coming here from Oshawa, are the auto workers. My neighbours in Oshawa are the folks who get up every day and want to build quality vehicles and build a better community. I've said in this House before that GM didn't build Oshawa; Oshawa built GM—and that's true.

But the money from those jobs from the automotive sector in Oshawa has meant that people had enough money to feed their families, make plans, buy homes, buy the vehicles that they build. They had enough money through the decades to be able to put back into the community, to donate to charities, to coach kids' sports, to participate in their community. That's what a good union job does. It provides security. It provides predictable wages and job protections. These are the kinds of jobs that we have to fight for.

I want to go back to 2018, Speaker, which feels like yesterday but was seven years ago. For those of you who were here and remember when General Motors was threatening to pull the plug in Oshawa, and we were really hurting—that was 2018. That was seven years ago. Something that everyone remembers is that the Premier said, "Oh, the ship has left the dock. It was a done deal." I remember that too, but here's what I remember from the debates in this House. I remember that I got up and asked the government what they were going to do, how they would support Oshawa, how they would fight for those workers. And I was chastised and schooled in this room about peddling false hope—that I was sharing that narrative of false hope to the community—because this was such a done deal.

Well, guess what? Seven years later, folks are still building quality vehicles in Oshawa. We still have employment in the automotive sector.

Interjections.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Thank you.

And it matters. So it wasn't false hope. Now, yes, I'm an optimist—you'd have to be, to be in opposition in this province. But I was optimistic, and I did believe that those jobs were worth fighting for, but more importantly, that those workers were worth fighting for—standing alongside and fighting for.

Now, I know that this Premier and the minister have got the T-shirts. They're wearing the T-shirts, the ball caps—I get it. But when the rubber meets the road, where are the protections for those jobs in Oshawa? Because we don't need GM to hit the road. We are standing here today on the day that a lot of folks are reeling over the CAMI situation. The 1,200 workers in Ingersoll found out today really frightening news.

I'm reading here from the CBC article: "General Motors has confirmed it is ending production of its BrightDrop electric delivery vans at the CAMI assembly plant in Ingersoll, leaving the future of the southwestern Ontario facility uncertain."

This is a big deal, and we need to know what the government is going to do to protect those jobs, to secure them, because photo ops and bumper stickers ain't gonna cut it. We're all really nervous. This is not just rhetoric. This is, "Okay, guys, what are we doing? What is happening behind the scenes?"

Those 136 days that the government was away from this place, away from accountability, away from answers—I'm going to hope, that optimist that I am, that

they were behind closed doors working out a plan. I don't know; I haven't seen it, Speaker.

But, again from the article: "The update from GM came as a major blow to the 1,200 workers, many of whom have been laid off since the spring.

"This news was devastating for all of us, especially for the membership of our local," said Mike Van Boekel, president of Unifor Local 88.... "We've shown up for every ask, every time. And now, to be met with this short-sighted decision is frustrating and disheartening."

He has said "workers are looking for answers and any glimpse of their future with the company." He has said, "Over the next couple of days, we will be meeting with the company to begin working through these issues and to get clarity on what this means for all of us, for our jobs, our families and our future."

Now, this article says that General Motors has "emphasized that Canada remains central to its North American operations, highlighting ongoing production in Oshawa and St. Catharines." That is cold comfort when we are living under this cloud of uncertainty. I don't want to be a naysayer. I don't want to say that it's a cloud of doom, but it does feel pretty oppressive and there's a lot of uncertainty. And all of our communities, but especially in Oshawa, are looking to this government for leadership and a very clear plan.

Speaker, talking to workers, workers need a lot of things to be successful. They need child care. They need child care that is there so that they can return to work and they can be in the workplace. Actually, one of my assistants in the community office has a new little kidlet that is doing very well at child care. He's catching all the germs though. There's lots going on there. But she had said to me that that child care centre doesn't have a guarantee of the CWELCC to get to the \$10-a-day daycare funding past March 2026. They don't know when they'll hear about the funding situation. They might have to pivot quickly.

They're worried that if the prices go up, they'll lose families who can't afford the previous prices, meaning they might have to lay off staff due to low numbers. That's a problem. If prices stay the same, they do have the physical space to accommodate more children, but they wouldn't have the funds to offer competitive salaries to attract more staff. So you see how they're in a mess.

We had my colleague today ask a question of the government about ECEs, as this is the 25th annual Child Care Worker and Early Childhood Educator Appreciation Day, and asked about how they're actually going to support this sector. As my colleague from London-Fanshawe had said, if this government truly values child care workers, will he commit to a real plan that ensures fair wages, better working conditions and career stability for this essential workforce? And will he get his ministers to the table to secure the future of affordable child care for Ontario families? These are important things to talk about. But more than important things to talk about, they're important things to deal with and to fix, because a lot of workers are parents, or, like in this room, some workers are soon-to-be parents. It's something that we all deal

with, and child care is something that should be a priority for this government.

1540

Speaker, I could spend my full 20 minutes talking about the needs in our housing sector. One of the things that I will say—there was a headline here, and I'll just touch on that: "Renters Need to Make Over \$78,000 to Have Affordable Rent in Vancouver and Toronto." Well, I'm not in Toronto, but our prices rival Toronto prices in terms of rent. We're in a mess, and we see that across the province, that people cannot find housing, and should they find housing, they're so worried that they will lose it. That was a thing when we were door-knocking in the winter. In a lot of apartments, there were people very concerned about above-guideline increases, that they couldn't budget for those. If they were successful, that they're counting every dollar, and that surprises like that or looming expenses like that that are not in the budget would mean that they would actually lose their housing. So even a lot of people that are housed are precariously housed, and workers are not making enough to keep up with those changes. And workers who want to work in the communities where they live have to win the lottery, basically, to find a job in the community where they do live, because maybe they can't afford the transit or the transit is not what they need or they can't find the housing if they have the job. It's not a good situation out there, and that, again, is where this government could fill in some of those gaps. But they're not listening to workers.

Here's a small piece of a letter regarding the return to office. This government is pretty tone-deaf when it comes to listening to workers or doing what it is that they're being asked to do. Here's a letter: "I am writing as a concerned citizen of Ontario to express my opposition to the mandatory return-to-office policy being imposed on Ontario public service (OPS) employees....

"The rising costs of gas, parking, vehicle maintenance and child care place additional financial strain on employees already coping with inflation. The assumption that returning to the office will increase local spending is misplaced—most workers will simply be trying to manage these new expenses, not spend more on lunches or other discretionary purchases.

"The increased commute will also take a toll on mental health and well-being. Ontario's highways, particularly the 401, are already among the most congested in North America. Forcing thousands more vehicles back onto the road will only heighten traffic delays, increase emissions, and lead to more road accidents....

"Moreover, the province's infrastructure is not fully prepared to accommodate a full-scale return to the office. Numerous government buildings do not have sufficient parking capacity, forcing employees to walk 20–25 minutes from available lots. These daily stressors compound to reduce morale and productivity, while undermining the government's own efforts to modernize public service operations."

This constituent goes on to say, "The mandatory return-to-office policy will likely cost the province more—in

terms of productivity losses, increased absenteeism, mental health strain, and infrastructure demands—than any potential economic benefit it aims to create. Ontario has the opportunity to lead by example by embracing modern, flexible work models that support both employees and the broader public interest.”

I appreciate letters. People sit down and write thoughtful letters. That’s not a form letter, right? People care. They’re concerned.

Speaker, I want to take a moment and delve into the Skills Development Fund. The Auditor General concluded that the selection process for this SDF funding was not fair, transparent or accountable. Without reading the report into the record here, the highlights are that there is a fund that the government has been touting, has been administering, that the Minister of Labour is at the helm of, taking applications—very thoughtful applications—to do very important work in this province to get folks trained, to support business, to support workplaces, to support workers. But here’s the catch: It isn’t the fund that’s the problem. The ministry’s bureaucrats, the non-partisan civil servants, had a robust system to assign values to ensure that it was fair, that highly scored applicants were given to the ministry, and it was all done appropriately. Then, as per the Auditor General’s report, it’s the minister’s office, ostensibly the minister himself, who chose the successful applicants, and chose many of them, the majority of them, from the bottom of the pile, that had been scored poorly, without rationale. I guess it’s because we’re not the boss of him. I don’t know. It is a lot of money. Also, what Premier gives any minister almost \$350 million to just dole out and doesn’t ask questions? To me, that is wild, but here we are.

I’m going to read from an organization in my community, the Durham Workforce Authority. They applied. They were not successful. The Durham Workforce Authority “and its partners worked extensively to develop a comprehensive skills plan for the sector”—for agriculture—“informed by employer input, local consultation, and labour market data.”

They were not successful, and it says here, “The ministry did not offer debrief sessions for unsuccessful applicants. While the ministry indicated that multiple factors were considered in funding decisions, no feedback was provided on areas of improvement.”

“Applications of this scale require significant time and resources from community organizations and employers. The absence of feedback has hindered the” Durham Workforce Authority’s “ability to maintain engagement with employers in the agriculture sector.”

Well, that’s not the direction we want to go. We want thoughtful organizations doing fantastic work—by the way, a shout-out to the Durham Workforce Authority. They had asked to be part of this, to have access to this kind of funding. They were told no without a reason, without feedback. They were notified. It’s not appropriate.

The minister tried to give me a hard time, by the way, about being in the local IBEW training centre, I think for my nomination meeting, I’m not sure what he was

hollering at me, but, regardless, yes, I’m there all the time. I took Marit Stiles there to visit a couple of times. I invite all of you. It is a training facility in Oshawa that is unrivaled in Canada. It’s amazing. Please come visit—and also feel free to use any of their meeting rooms and halls; they’re great. I’m sure that the folks there, the workers, reach for all sorts of parties and at different times as well.

People absolutely should have been considered for this funding. The fact that the minister mucked with it, muddled and has now put this cloud of suspicion over it devalues the actual fund and the program. I wonder why the minister’s office didn’t respect the work done by the non-partisan civil servants.

Don’t you trust your staff? If you don’t, then get rid of them and replace them with capable staff. But do you know what? I’ll bet they’re capable. I bet they’re professionals. You should respect the bureaucracy and listen to them and not make political decisions when it comes to taxpayer dollars.

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

Ms. Natalie Pierre: Thank you to the member opposite for your remarks today, talking about Bill 30, the Working for Workers Seven Act, and talking about unprecedented economic challenges as we confront tariffs imposed by US President Trump. As we navigate these tariffs, these challenging economic times, this legislation supports introducing job-seeking leave for workers to use in their job search—things like attending interviews, creating résumés, working up their networking.

I’m wondering if the member opposite would agree that providing these kinds of supports to workers who are staring down some of these economic challenges, potential layoffs, is an important benefit to them.

1550

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I appreciate the moment that we are in politically in North America. We’ve talked about unprecedented times; I could use some precedented times right about now. I don’t mean to make light of it, because the weight of the tariffs—we all know. We just went through two elections, provincial and federal, and everybody was talking about tariffs. In fact, I believe that’s why so many of the government members were elected—because of this whole Captain Canada schtick. People are looking for hope, and they’re looking for leadership.

The problem is, here we are, how many months down the road, and we are now facing jobs leaving. We’re facing the reality. The folks in Ingersoll got the news today. So we are not seeing how we’re protecting the jobs and how we’re protecting the workers.

When we’re making deals, are we attaching strings? How do we—and maybe the answer is, it’s more complicated than a quick fix.

What is your plan? I don’t see a plan from this Premier or from the government to protect real jobs that we have right now. Where is the Canadian-content stuff? Where is the made-in-Ontario? Where is that? Let’s see some of that.

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

M^{me} France Gélinas: The member mentioned that the Auditor General described the process for the Skills Development Fund as being not fair, not transparent and not accountable, and there was very little rationale to explain why the high-ranking applications were not chosen. The member went on to talk about the amount of money that the ministry awarded to low-ranking propositions—with 670 high-ranking applications that were denied without any explanations.

I would ask the member, does that process seem to you like it's a cash-for-access system to reward the wealthy and well-connected donors to the PCs?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: What I see is that there's a lot of good that could be done with that kind of money, and now it has been tainted because article after article is shining a light on the fact that this Minister of Labour—that 63% of the latest round's successful applicants were PC Party donors, and this minister overrode the recommendations of the non-partisan civil service who made recommendations and who ranked them. When folks in the world outside of Queen's Park look at that, that looks really, really suspect. When the Minister of Labour is in Paris and is at Leafs games and all that, the average person thinks, "Well, how does he get away with that?" They would never get away with that.

We want qualified people to get the money. There was a huge process—a fair one—but then the ultimate decision was unfair and partisan.

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

Mr. Lorne Coe: Bill 30, the Working for Workers Seven Act, 2025, reflects a commitment that I anticipated we would have all-party support for because it deals with worker safety and opportunity, retraining, and the legislation strengthens protections, expands training, and supports workers during transitions like layoffs.

My son is a member of LIUNA 183. He has just been laid off.

Speaker, isn't that exactly what Ontarians expect from a government that says it's working for the workers? That's exactly what we're doing. Why can't the NDP get behind this?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Get behind what? There's almost nothing in this.

You talked about layoffs. A worker who gives enough notice can have three days off, if they're laid off, to look for work, and that's only if—is it 50%?

MPP Jamie West: If 50 or more people are laid off.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Yes, if 50 or more people are laid off. So if you're one of 48, oh well, tough luck. So that's layoffs. That's dealing with layoffs. That's not about protection. That's a small thing. Okay, fine.

You want to talk about protections? Let's bring WSIB into this. Let's end deeming.

Anti-scab legislation: How many opportunities have you had to bring that in?

If you want to protect workers, stop wrecking their access to health care—if that would be something we

could do. Support injured workers. Layer in mental health supports.

Do we support the tinkering around the edges of the edges of the edges in this bill? Sure. Okay. But where's the rest of it?

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

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: My question is about slushies.

Before the 2018 provincial election, the Premier spoke very loudly and strongly about his criticisms about the Ontario Jobs and Prosperity Fund—at that time, referring to it as a Liberal slush fund, accusing the government of handing out money to well-connected companies without proper oversight.

So now we have the Skills Development Fund, and we've all heard about the friends-and-family plan, where, if you're a lobbyist or related to this government in some way, shape or form, your candidates may have had preferential treatment.

What's going on here? Why the change of face on this issue—or is it that they just like slushies?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: The Skills Development Fund, or the SDF—or maybe it's the "send David to France" fund; I'm not sure—is now coming under fire, and people do not trust the motives of the minister of the government. If it were a fair process, then the Auditor General would not have had to have made so many thoughtful, clear recommendations—recommendations like, programs should be selected from the highest-scoring applications; the minister's office should explain when these are not, where there are exceptional cases; that it should be on the ministry staff to seek clarification, not on the minister. The minister was just given free rein.

You talked about how vocal the Premier was during that earlier scandal. Yesterday, he didn't have too much to say. He was pretty quiet and let the minister speak for himself—which will be interesting to see, as the minister keeps speaking for himself. It will be really interesting, I think, because there's a lot of explaining to do.

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

MPP Mohamed Firin: Speaker, I had the opportunity to travel across this province over the last few months. I visited multiple skills development recipients, and I saw in real life what this program is doing for young people across this province.

I heard the member opposite speak. I just want to ask the member if she has had any opportunities to visit some of these programs and if she can share what some of those experiences have been like and what she has been able to see.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I really appreciate that question.

The NDP has always been very clear in our support for funding for the skilled trades, for funding for development, for growth.

I would love to be able to have more in my riding or in my neck of the woods, to go and celebrate with them—not only that "yay, they got the money," but also see what

they're building with it, to see how that training is going to have an impact on our community.

But the only thing that I have heard was from the Durham Workforce Authority. They're awesome, and they do really important, thoughtful work, and they put in a heck of an application—together with folks like Feed the Need, a small farm in Clarington. They were working together on an agriculture-sector-specific project and program, and they weren't successful; they don't know why. So all I'm hearing is now starting to be—as people are finding out about the Auditor General's report and wondering why they weren't accepted. I'd love to know who else was, and I'd like for the government to tell that story more—how it was decided.

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

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: It is a privilege to rise today to speak on Bill 30, the Working for Workers Seven Act.

It's interesting, as we've just heard from my colleague here in the NDP, about this act and how it's the seventh in a string of many acts talking about workers. Yet, in my three years as an MPP, I have yet to hear workers in my riding come and talk about these bills. These bills are not actually making a significant difference for workers in our province. Speaker, you really just have to look at the stats to know that that is the case.

Under this government, we have nine straight quarters of rising unemployment. Those are workers who cannot find jobs. We have a youth unemployment rate of 17.8%. Young people who want to start their careers, looking for their first summer job, can't find one.

1600

More startlingly, maybe, especially for a government that says it's pro-business, we have an average of 22,300 business exits per quarter since 2024. We are losing more businesses in our province—particularly small businesses—than we are creating, and that should make all of us nervous. I know it's making workers nervous.

In the last number of months, I've had a couple of constituents walk into my constituency office and say, "I'm out of work for the first time in my life, and I've been trying desperately to find a job." One of them was a project manager. She worked, I think, in the transportation industry. She's trying to look at other industries to put her skills to use. Another was a construction worker, a man probably in his mid-fifties. He said, "I'm scared that I'm going to be homeless soon. I can't find a job."

We know that there are jobs out there. There are some jobs. There are employers who are seeking employees in the skilled trades in particular, but we are having trouble matching those people to the jobs.

More and more of those jobs are disappearing. We know of Stellantis—the 3,000 jobs that disappeared from there. We know about, just recently, today, with Ingersoll and the CAMI plant—another 1,200 workers who are fearing for their livelihoods; fearing for how they might make their mortgage payments, if they're lucky enough to own a home; and worrying about putting food on the table and supporting their kids.

This bill doesn't do anything for those people. In fact, it actually loosens up the rules on layoffs.

I understand that businesses need to adjust when times get tough, but we also need to be thinking about our workers.

This government is spending billions of dollars on the Skills Development Fund, yet we have small businesses that are saying—their number one priority—"Do you know what? Give me a tax cut." They don't actually want grants and loans. They would prefer a tax cut, yet this government has denied that seven years running now.

They did not pass my bill to reduce small business taxes, they did not pass the motion where we called on them to do the same, and they did not put it in their last fall economic statement. Maybe they will put it in this one, I'm hoping. I asked them to do that today.

When I hear a government say that there's no government that has ever done more for workers, I just don't see it. I'd like them to go say that right now to those Stellantis workers who are unemployed in Brampton. I'd like them to go say that to the CAMI workers who lost their jobs today. What are they doing for those workers?

I've talked at length about the fiscal constraints that this government has put itself in, because there has never been a government that has spent so much to deliver so little. The Skills Development Fund is just another example. We've heard constantly now from this government, in the last one and a half days of the Legislature being back after a very long, extended break, about the success stories, and I'm glad to hear those stories. I don't hear them talking about the Auditor General's report. The Auditor General's report said this program is a mess. It's problematic. It's not fair, it's not transparent, and it's not accountable.

Those billions of dollars that were given out to PC friends and insiders, to companies that had hired lobbyists to come to the government and ask for that money—that money would have been better spent in giving a tax break to small businesses. Those are companies that are actually trying to keep their people employed. In fact, what they said they would do—if they got a tax break, they would use that money to keep their employees, to maybe give them some training, to innovate and expand their business. Instead, they're worried just about keeping their doors open.

So while this bill might get some details right—there are some things that we could get behind, of course, related to fraudulent job postings and things of that nature.

The municipal overreach here is another real problem. AMO issued a statement when this bill came out and said, "While the stated objective of supporting workers amidst potential job losses arising from the US-Canada trade dynamic is noted, one of its proposals raises significant concerns—exempting Skills Development Fund Capital Stream-supported capital projects from the requirements of the Municipal Act and the Planning Act." Basically, this is another situation of overreach for this government, and AMO is calling that out. It's calling that out for this government, to say, "No. Take another look. You should not be giving yourselves that kind of power." We have

seen it before, in the special economic zones. We see it in Dresden, where they give special treatment to a particular area where they have some, I guess, again, friends with benefits. So it's the overreach that's a big concern in this bill, and the concentration of power at the provincial level instead of letting our democratically elected local officials run their cities.

Today is Child Care Worker and ECE Appreciation Day. I've had the privilege to work with some of those wonderful people—most of them women, so I'm going to refer to them as women. They take great care of our kids, whether it's in daycares, in school, in JK or kindergarten classes. Those people also are worried about their jobs. They're worried about affordability. Their wages have been constrained, and yet they are caring for our most precious resource: our children, the next generation. They need to be treated with respect. They need to be treated like professionals. We want to make sure that those people have safe working conditions and a steady future, where they know that they can use their skills to do what they love, which is caring for kids. We should be spending more time talking about those kinds of workers, instead of Working for Workers 7 and 8—I'm sure there will be 8 and 9 to come.

Speaker, let's talk a little bit more about small businesses. The CFIB does a Business Barometer, where they reach out to their members, small businesses across the country. It shows that business confidence amongst those businesses is very low in the short term and the long term. In fact, Ontario ranks third-lowest in the country when it comes to business confidence. Think about that: Canada's largest province, called the economic engine of Canada on a regular basis, home to some of its most dynamic industries—and yet small businesses here feel less optimistic about their future than almost anywhere else in Canada. What's different?

It's kind of like the housing crisis. The interest rates are the same across the country. Other provinces are building houses, yet this province is dragging the rest of the country down. In the same way, they're dragging down business confidence in Canada because of their policies.

We're tied for first place for the highest tax rate for small businesses in this country. We have small businesses, as I said, that are exiting. They're leaving, and that means workers are losing their jobs. That means that new potential entrepreneurs don't have the same level of confidence they do in other provinces to open up a new business. We need to be thinking about those workers. They're not just statistics.

I've been speaking a lot to small business owners in my community. One of my favourite things to do is to go hear how they are doing and what their challenges are. It's also really encouraging. You see some really amazing things. I visited a hair salon that is using all organic products, and a lot of their products are actually made right here in Canada, so their supply chain is not too disrupted by what's going on south of the border. People are looking for innovative ways to continue to reach their customers and grow their business and employ their employees.

I also hear from businesses that definitely see reduced consumer demand because of the affordability crisis. Those people are having to say, "Do you know what? I can't hire that extra summer student this year. I just don't have the money. I'm going to have to pass on that just to keep my doors open and make sure I can keep paying my own rent."

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The other thing about this bill: We have a government that has a habit of bringing legislation forward and consulting after. That's just not collaboration, and it's not actually working towards solutions that are really going to work for our province and for our workers. Some of the things in this bill—maybe we could have had those sooner. We could have had them out of the way so we could be actually focusing on the important things right now, where we've got the auto sector, the manufacturing sector facing significant threats. But it's not just because of tariffs south of the border.

This government used to talk a lot about—they promised, in 2018, to bring back 300,000 manufacturing jobs. It's funny we don't hear the Premier talking about that anymore. Do you know why, Speaker? Because he has brought back less than 20,000 of them. So the 300,000 jobs that they talked about creating in manufacturing—they are way off in their goal, and it has been seven years.

This morning, we heard a new number from the Premier. We heard a number: 600,000 jobs. I don't know where that came from. He's clearly taking a new tack. Again, this government is great at distracting and deflecting. If it's not Mr. Trump, it's the federal government. If it's not the federal government, it's Mr. Trump. Distract and deflect is a really key skill if you want to become a Conservative MPP, I think. So what are they doing again here? Distracting and deflecting.

The previous Liberal government—go to StatsCan. That's one of the most reliable sources—surely, even this government can agree—that we have job data. If you go to StatsCan, you'll see that under Premier Kathleen Wynne, Ontario saw the creation of 438,000 jobs. Under Premier Dalton McGuinty, another 564,000 jobs were created. That's a total of about a million jobs created, not lost.

So I don't know where, again, the Premier is getting these numbers, but he really should, for once, listen to experts and get his numbers right.

We can have that debate about job creation, but that's actually not what we want to be doing. We want to be focused on what's going on here today.

Speaker, a few months ago, I called for this government to put forward a plan for summer students. We could actually have a win-win. We could help summer students trying to find summer jobs, and we could help small businesses or Ontario businesses. We could say, "Do you know what? We're going to do a program kind of like the Canada Summer Jobs Program. We're going to help fund a program where businesses that are based and owned here in Ontario can hire summer students, and we will help offset some or all of that cost." That would be a great use

of taxpayer money, because it would give summer students job experience, and it would give employers access to young, energetic, bright talent. That would be a win-win. That would be a real win for workers. I really hope the government thinks about doing something like that in their fall economic statement.

Speaker, we know that businesses are facing rising costs. We know that inflationary pressures continue. We know that with tariffs and the *de minimis* law, which was recently put into place in the US, small businesses that do exports to the US under \$800 are now being affected. They're trying to find out how else they can continue to have strong revenues with those kinds of policies in place.

So, again, I will say to this government: Listen to the experts—the experts at the CFIB, the experts at the chamber of commerce, the experts at business associations across this province—who are saying, “Reduce the small business tax rate.” It’s very simple. It actually would be a very simple bill. I tabled it last year. It’s a very simple piece of legislation. I think if people actually voted with their hearts, even the Conservative members could vote for that bill—but of course, they’re not. They’re continuing to spend hundreds of millions of dollars, billions of dollars on programs that are not making a difference.

The Skills Development Fund: We continue to learn more and more every day about it. I know the government will continue to try to distract and deflect and share the good success stories. And I acknowledge there are some success stories. But what do you say to the 670 companies that took the time and effort to fill out an application, got a result of high—they were really high-scoring—and yet they did not get a dime? That actually says that these government programs don’t work. The Auditor General told us they don’t work. She told us they weren’t fair. They weren’t transparent. They weren’t accountable.

So instead of creating more and more programs that clearly this government simply will interfere in, why don’t we do something simple and straightforward and cut small business taxes?

I think we do want to make sure that we’ve got a workforce that is trained and ready for the future, whether that is in the skilled trades, in transportation, in artificial intelligence, in the green economy, in energy broadly. So we really need to take a long-term view here.

While this bill, as I said, does some tinkering around the edges that could be viewed as positive—like I say, the job postings that are fraudulent, as one example—they really need to look at the big picture here.

I’ve been talking about a reindustrialization strategy for the province of Ontario. In addition to mining, we have a whole bunch of minerals that have already been extracted that we can be reusing and recycling into new products. There are, again, experts out there talking about this all the time. I would love to see the government put some money behind things like that, that will actually really make a difference in giving people opportunities, giving businesses opportunities, and giving workers opportunities to get retrained in the jobs for the future.

Recently, I was chatting with some software engineers, new grads. We want to keep those young kids here. Those are workers for today and for the future. A lot of them, though, are saying, “Do you know what? I won’t be able to afford to buy a house here. My family doctor just retired. I can go work at Google in the US and make twice what I’m going to make here. They’ll give me paid benefits. I can afford to buy a home in a suburb, probably within a few years. Why would I stay here?” That really broke my heart to hear that, honestly. These are young kids, peers of my children who are young adults, and to hear them say that they don’t see a future for themselves here in Ontario is heartbreaking. That’s what this government should be focused on.

Instead, we have a Premier pouring out bottles of Crown Royal and talking about his escapades at Home Depot. I actually wanted to ask why he was shopping at Home Depot and not a local small business. That’s one question I’d like to ask the Premier.

Mr. Stephen Blais: Canadian-owned Home Hardware.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Yes, let’s go find a Canadian-owned place where you can buy some plants, Premier. I’ll send you a few suggestions.

Speaker, we need a government that is serious about jobs and workers, and this bill just doesn’t cut it. There is so much more to do.

And now, of course, we have a government that is going to be distracted by the Skills Development Fund scandal, because it is going to be another scandal like the greenbelt. It would be better for them to admit it and move on so they really could focus on helping workers.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Thank you.

Before we get to questions, I’m pleased to announce that we have a former member in the members’ gallery: Bill Walker, MPP for Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound from the 40th to the 42nd Parliaments.

Welcome, sir.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): And with that, I would go to questions.

MPP Jamie West: Thank you to the member from Don Valley West.

Recently, in the news, a story broke about the Minister of Labour’s riding association having record funding increases at the same time as the stories about the SDF, where it feels like not all of the funding, but a substantial—more than 50% of the funding was marked low—had to do with the fact that they were donors to the party. This can be direct, or this can be inferred.

1620

Do you think it’s appropriate to have a minister perpetuate a stereotype—where if you donate heavily to their riding association, if you’re lowly scored, you’ll get funding over somebody or another organization with high scoring?

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Thank you to the member for the question. It’s an important topic.

We all get political donations, and we welcome them. That's how we finance our campaigns. It's how we get elected.

The issue here that we're talking about now is the pay-to-play, as has been said. I think that actually requires some more investigation. Getting a donation from somebody is absolutely legitimate, as long as they're following the rules. The problem is, we are seeing significant connections, correlations—whatever you want to call it—and then the question is, was that the cause?

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

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: —correlation and cause, we need to know the difference. If that donation became the cause for why they got Skills Development Fund money, then that, for sure, is a problem.

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

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: The Auditor General said the SDF funding process was not accountable, fair or transparent. I see in this Working for Workers that it expands the power of the ministry to get rid of municipal laws when there is money invested in this.

Do you see how this expands the possibility for bad acting?

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Thank you to the member for the question.

Yes, certainly, when we see this government continue to overreach into municipal affairs, we know that can be a problem. We've got the situation with speed cameras now, where people are saying, "Why are we removing speed cameras when they help to protect people's lives?" In the same way, when we're now consolidating power here amongst the cabinet and the Premier's office, you have to wonder what else can go wrong—because that is what's happening in our city. We're talking about removing things that protect people because someone called the Premier, I guess, and told him he didn't like them. So, in the same way, we need to make sure that cities are staying in their lane, provinces are staying in their lane. That's how our system works, and I would encourage the government to rethink it, just like AMO asked them to do.

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

Mr. John Jordan: This is Working for Workers 7. This is a continuum of helping workers in Ontario at a time when they need as much help as they can get.

To the member opposite: One of the things that's in this bill is to crack down on fraudulent job postings that scam job seekers. This costs millions of dollars. These scams exploit vulnerable people looking for work and undermine trust in the job market. This bill protects workers from fraud and ensures they can find legitimate opportunities, something we should all support. Does the member opposite support this crackdown on fraud?

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Yes, as I said in my remarks, I think those kinds of tweaks to legislation are helpful, and they will protect people who are trying to get information from job seekers for nefarious purposes. As I said, that's one of the decent things in this bill. The problem is, that's a minor tweak when we've got, as I said, much bigger issues.

We have nine consecutive quarters—that's 36 months—of rising unemployment under this government. That's what we should be focused on, and this bill just doesn't do it.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: I can speak to what happened in my riding this summer—talking about jobs. The members from Oshawa and Don Valley West spoke about youth unemployment. We wanted to hold a job fair, and they said, "Don't bother. There are no jobs, no small businesses that can employ these young students." This is a huge issue.

I want to know—we see the government so focused on the big funds, the big dollars from their friends, the donors, but this Premier purports to want to help the little guy as well, fighting off the thieves at Home Depot.

What would have happened if some of those millions of dollars could be diverted—as you've been asking for and will continue asking—for cuts to small businesses that can in turn then employ this next generation of workers that are being overlooked and not cared for at this point in time? What is the difference it could make with those funds going somewhere that really matters, not to their friends?

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Thank you to the member from Toronto—St. Paul's for the question. It's a very important one.

Small businesses used to be one of the main places young people would go to get a first job or to get a summer job and help pay for college or university. In 2024, Ontario small businesses supported three million jobs and contributed 62.6% of all private-sector jobs in the province. You know what? That's down from a high of 67.3% in 2017. The number of jobs that small businesses are providing is shrinking and that is absolutely hurting our youth and workers of all ages who would love to get a job in a local small business. The money is better directed to them, providing that tax relief.

Again, as I said, the CFIB survey says—what would members do with that tax relief? Their members would actually provide jobs.

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

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I'm glad to continue the conversation around the mess now that is the Skills Development Fund and how it is perceived. I want to come back to what the Auditor General concluded in the special report.

Quoting from page 22: "Given that the minister's office selects the applicants for funding and does not select only the applicants that have the highest overall score, this can create an appearance of real or potential preferential treatment by the minister's office in its selection of applicants to fund. It is also not fair, transparent or accountable to those applying for funding or to the public."

We have talked a lot about what we've been reading in the paper, what we're hearing from folks: the harm that this minister has done to the potential of that fund. I guess I would like to ask you to focus in on that, but also on the unsuccessful applicants who scored high and had worth-

while projects and programs in their communities. What does that mean for them?

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Thank you to the member from Oshawa for the question.

As the member outlined, the Auditor General found the process wasn't fair, wasn't transparent and wasn't accountable. What that does is really destroy trust among those organizations who did actually come up with a very solid application that scored high by the civil servants who work in these ministries and went to a whole bunch of effort to review thousands of applications.

When the minister interferes and says, "Oh, we're going to use some different criteria"—I mean, the ministry came up with the criteria. When they say, "No, no, we're doing something to help government priorities"—yes, government priorities to help their insider friends. That is the priority.

Speaker, we need to make sure that if they continue with this fund—it's another \$800 million they're talking about spending in the next couple of years on this fund—it needs to be acknowledged that it has to be fair, transparent and accountable.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): The member from Mississauga—Malton.

Mr. Deepak Anand: I see I don't have much time, so I'm going to ask the question very simply put. The member talked about the increasing unemployment numbers. I don't know. Where are we living? We know there is a tariff and it's real. Is that something the member is saying, that there is no impact from the tariffs in the province of Ontario and in Canada? If that is the case, why are we even talking about tariffs so much? Why are we so concerned?

To the member: The reality is, the tariff is real, the impact is real, and that is what we are seeing. Thank God we have Captain Canada and our caucus doing a great job.

Back to you: Do you think the tariff problem is real or not?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Very quickly: the member from Don Valley West.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Thank you to the member for Mississauga—Malton for the question. I always enjoy chatting with him, so let's chat a little bit about this.

Three years ago, the government—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): That is all the time we have for the questions and answers.

We move to further debate.

1630

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I wanted to just give my two cents, or 25, on this next iteration of Working for Workers. I do have to start off by saying thank you to the government. There are a lot of good things in here, like adding AEDs to workplaces so that people feel safer on the job. There are lots of bits in here that add a bit of flexibility. But I'm going to talk also about what I think should be in there and what I think shouldn't be in there.

One thing that should be in there is more accountability for wage theft. Lots of residents in my riding work for a company called Dutchie's. These are newcomers that have come to my office—English is not their first language.

Some of them have fled war. I met with a group of people from Ukraine. Imagine fleeing a war in Russia, coming to Canada, and your first job is with an employer who has a rap sheet a mile long. There have been 80 complaints; 23 of those have gone to court. He currently owes \$500,000 and is opening up a new branch in Brantford—Brant, so he will be expanding his business, enjoying his car, enjoying his home, while the refugee from Ukraine is pissed off about getting gypped her money. She has been stolen from and robbed, harassed and abused at the workplace, and there has not been accountability to this entrepreneur who is making his profits off of the backs of these vulnerable workers.

And we know that this isn't just those employees, right? We know that there are hundreds of millions of dollars that are stolen from Ontario workers and we need to have some teeth so that we can ensure that these folks are held accountable for the theft. If we want to be tough on crime, let's be tough on this kind of theft—the theft from Ontario workers.

My other concern is with expanding powers to the SDF. This "slush development fund" is now going to have the powers through Working for Workers 7 to not have to abide by municipal laws when they want to build capital investments. I see in my riding the closure of college campuses because we're moving money away from our college system into private hands in a way that, according to the Auditor General, is not fair, accountable or transparent. So we're starving our college system to put money into a system that is not fair, transparent or accountable and now we're not allowing these very parties who are getting money from the ministry—influenced by the Minister of Labour—to not have to abide by municipal planning laws.

This expansion of power in this way, especially after this scathing Auditor General report, I don't think is appropriate. Yes, I do think workers need this now more than ever. I'm grateful that the government is going to, kind of, step forward in times of these tariffs, but I think there are some tweaks I'd add to this bill that would make sure that we're really there for the workers of Ontario.

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

Mme France Gélinas: The member started by saying there are some good things in the bill because now workplaces will have to carry AEDs. Those are defibrillators. That works wonderfully well; very well used. But did you know, Speaker, that five years ago—I would say five long years ago—we passed a bill in this House that says that the location of the AED should be known by the 911 operator, because most of the time when you come to someone who just had a heart attack and is not responsive, what do we do? We dial 911.

Well, the 911 operators, five years later, still don't know where those AEDs are, and most people are so stressed that they will forget that they have one close by. Although it is a small, good step, how could it take five years for a government to put in place the list of AEDs

shared with 911 when every other province has already done it?

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I was not aware of that bill. It makes a lot of sense. As we add AEDs, we need to ensure that we're following through on some of the things that we said we were going to do in the first place. None of this bill even matters unless we actually translate that into action, so thank you for letting me know.

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

Mr. Matthew Rae: Thank you to my colleague from Kitchener Centre for her brief remarks this afternoon. My question to that member is, have they ever written a letter or email in support of a skills development application from their riding? Yes or no?

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I don't think so, but I'm not the one making the decision. I think there's a difference when you hold a balance of power. I could get recommendations—when people get hired, they could get a million letters of recommendation, but ultimately, it's the person who is in the position of hiring that has to acknowledge whether they have a conflict of interest. When I was a city councillor, I stepped out of decision-making power for the WCDSB because I was working for the WCDSB, because that's a conflict of interest. I stepped out of decision-making moments when I was somebody's neighbour or I was somebody's friend. That is the difference. When you're in the position of power, you—

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

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Look, I want to be fair to the government. I mean, we are facing a crisis in unemployment as it stands. And in fact, 25% of youth don't have a job. But there is a type of job for youth, or young people, that under this government has been absolutely flourishing, and that's young lobbyists. Those young lobbyists have been making money hand over fist. They've probably never been so successful. Why don't you join me in commending them for the incredible work they're doing to help employ young lobbyists?

Interjection.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: Yes. How do I even respond to that? I don't even know how to respond to that.

I will say that there are good parts of this bill, but I do hope that when we have a good process—we did have a good process, but then when you intervene as a minister and make choices, it overrides all the good process. You will never be on the front page of the paper when you have an awesome process and you follow that process and when you step out when you have a personal relationship with any of the decisions you're making when you have power and control over public dollars.

Unfortunately, lobbyists, yes, they're hired by the private sector, so they don't govern by the same levels of accountability. So, unfortunately, I don't know if the young people who are applying for those jobs will have a fair process in accessing—

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

Ms. Natalie Pierre: Thank you to the member for Kitchener Centre for her remarks. I heard you a couple of times talk about the good things in this bill. There are good parts of the bill. I'm wondering if you could just summarize what you think the good parts in the bill are for us today, please. Thank you.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I have to say, you can tell when things are coming from a good place, like the AED: We can all agree across party lines that we don't want somebody to have a heart attack at work and not have access to life-saving health care. I do think that that's great.

I believe in climate change, and I know that the health—right now our employment standards are built for really young men. They're not built for an aging workforce in industrial jobs. I'm actually worried that as we have more days of extreme heat, like we had this year, we are going to have more and more workers facing health consequences because of extreme heat on the workplace because our employment standards haven't evolved to address a fulsome demographic of everybody's needs. So that's one area. I know the flexibility—

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

MPP Mohamed Firin: I'll be sharing my time with the honourable member from Mississauga—Malton.

It's an honour to rise in this House today in strong support of Bill 30, the Working for Workers Seven Act, 2025. I want to begin by recognizing Premier Ford for his strong leadership and Minister David Piccini for his relentless drive to deliver real results for Ontario's workers.

Speaker, through Working for Workers 7, this government is once again proving that we will always stand up for the people who keep Ontario moving: the men and women who build our homes, keep our lights on, care for our families, and drive our economy forward. This is about protecting workers, strengthening their rights and ensuring that no matter where you live or what job you do, Ontario remains the best place to live, work and raise a family.

And I want to give you a story, Speaker, before I continue. I heard a member earlier say that this bill does not do enough. But what I say to that is, Working for Workers 1 to 6, it's an accumulation of little things and big things that keep building up.

I'll give you a story of myself. About 15 years ago, I was working at a job where I was asked to pay for the shirt that I wore to work. I bought two shirts that cost me \$80 apiece, and that took 30% of my first paycheque. Now, the little guy that's out there that's working a minimum wage can feel these types of pain, as I felt that type of pain, where someone took 30% of your paycheque. Working for Workers addressed that issue, and these are the things and the steps that we take as a government that help the little guy that's out there.

1640

Speaker, this bill builds on the progress of six previous Working for Workers acts, as I said. Each one has delivered real results for Ontario's workforce: stronger protections, fairer workplaces and better opportunities.

And now, Working for Workers Seven takes the next step forward in protecting workers and job seekers, because when we talk about building opportunity for workers, we're talking about building opportunity for all of Ontario.

Ontario's strength comes from workers, from the tradespeople building the homes and transit of tomorrow to the auto manufacturing workers leading innovation to the first responders, health care heroes who protect and care for us every single day. It's also a province built by workers, people who came to Ontario seeking opportunity, like my father and many others, and now they contribute every day to our shared prosperity.

Working for Workers Seven is about those people, Speaker. It's about the people who get up early, work hard and want nothing more than an opportunity to build a better life. But we are living through uncertain times. Global instability, supply chain disruptions and aggressive US tariffs by President Trump on Ontario goods are threatening jobs and our communities. And yet, in the face of all this change, Ontario's workers continue to rise to the occasion.

It's our responsibility as legislators to ensure that they have the support, protections, and opportunities that they deserve. And that is what Bill 30 does. The Working for Workers Seven Act is built around three key pillars: protecting Ontario workers, fighting worker abuse and supporting the skilled trades and building a strong and resilient workforce. Together these measures form a comprehensive plan to protect workers, grow our economy and secure Ontario's future.

Nowhere is that more urgent than in our construction sector, the very backbone of Ontario's economy. Construction workers are the front lines of building Ontario's infrastructure, and as parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development, I saw first-hand how essential their work is to building the highways, the roads, schools, hospitals and critical infrastructure that keeps our province moving. In my own riding, they're building roads that connect our neighbourhoods, schools that educate our children and transit systems that move our families.

Yet they face unique risks on the job, including a higher risk of cardiac emergencies. Speaker, from a personal experience, I witnessed a friend who had a stroke in front of me. These types of cardiac arrests are issues that are very dangerous. Within a split second, someone can lose their life. Working for Workers Seven will make job sites safer by requiring construction projects with 20 or more workers and that last three months or longer to have defibrillators—AEDs—on site and a worker trained to use them. That means safer job sites for Ontario's construction workforce. And to ensure that small businesses aren't left behind, WSIB will reimburse employers for the cost of purchasing these devices. This is all about saving lives and supporting the small contractors and builders that, literally, are laying the foundation of Ontario's future, whether it's the next major highway project or a new LRT line.

This bill also works to protect workers from the impacts of global trade disruptions. The auto manufacturing sector,

which employs over 750,000 people in Ontario, is deeply connected to US markets and vulnerable to tariffs. This bill proposes changes to the Employment Standards Act to extend temporary layoff periods in certain circumstances. That means workers can stay connected to their jobs during a temporary downturn instead of being terminated unnecessarily. And for those who do face layoffs, this bill will introduce a new job-seeking leave, the first of its kind in Canada, so workers can take up to three days off during their notice period to search for new employment and attend interviews or access retraining services. These measures will make a real difference in Ontario, where many families rely on manufacturing, logistics, and warehousing jobs—sectors most exposed to global trade shifts.

Speaker, this isn't tinkering. These are concrete actions, measurable actions to protect workers, strengthen safety and build a more resilient workforce in every corner of our province.

Protecting workers also means holding bad actors to account. The vast majority of employers, from small, family-owned businesses to large manufacturing companies, play by the rules and treat their workers with respect, but a small number try to cheat the system, and that is unacceptable. This bill gives stronger enforcement tools under the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act to go after employers who suppress claims, falsify records or evade paying WSIB premiums. This sends a clear message to bad actors that if you cheat the system, there will be consequences.

Speaker, I also know that constituents in my own riding have been affected by job ad fraud. Ontario workers alone lost up to \$15 million because of this type of fraud. Many job seekers, especially newcomers and youth, are targeted by these scams.

This bill will require job-posting platforms to implement clear reporting mechanisms and publish policies for handling fraudulent postings. This will make job-search processes safer and more trustworthy, protecting those who may be vulnerable to exploitation.

Speaker, Ontario's greatest strength will always be our highly skilled and world-class workforce.

This bill seeks to expand on the Skills Ontario Trades and Tech Truck Program, which are mobile learning labs that bring hands-on skilled trades experiences directly to students. With the demand far outpacing capacity, this bill will double the fleet from four to eight, reaching more schools and communities and sparking early interest in high-demand careers.

Lastly, this bill will cut unnecessary red tape to streamline approvals for new training centres, funded through the Skills Development Fund, SDF, so that they can build faster.

Speaker, I'll give you some examples.

In Windsor, the IBEW union Local 773 is just one example. With the help from the Skills Development Fund, they hope to expand their training capacity to help build the next generation of skilled electricians. This is about providing training locally for careers that last a

lifetime. That project has been halted by delay after delay because of these same permits. This does not need to be the case, especially when one in three tradespeople is set to retire in the next 10 years. That's critical for our fast-growing province, where demand for training infrastructure is rising as our population grows.

Speaker, Working for Workers 7 is part of a larger plan to support workers and strengthen Ontario's economy—a plan that will benefit our families and businesses. This reflects a government that isn't just reacting to challenges, but building Ontario's future—a future where every worker is protected, a future where opportunity continues to grow and where Ontario stands strong as an economic powerhouse for generations to come.

Speaker, Working for Workers 7 is about people—people who will make this province run. It's about the construction workers whose lives will be saved because a defibrillator is on-site. It's about the manufacturing worker who can stay connected to their employer during a temporary layoff. It's about a newcomer who can safely search for a job without the fear of fraud. And it's about the student who will discover a lifelong career in the skilled trades.

Speaker, this bill responds to the challenges of today and prepares Ontario for the workforce and economy of tomorrow.

I'm proud to support this bill, and I urge all members of this House to do the same. Together, let's keep working for workers and build a brighter future for our province.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): I recognize the member for Mississauga—Malton.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Before I start, I want to say thank you to the honourable member from York South—Weston for his incredible remarks and the work he is doing for his community—a big round of applause for him.

Speaker, it is always an honour to rise in the House to speak about the people who build Ontario: the men and women serving on job sites, classrooms, plants, offices, and shaping the province that we are proud to call home.

I always start my remarks by thanking the supreme God for giving me the mental and physical health, since last time, to stand in this House and represent the residents of Mississauga—Malton.

Thank you to the staff, thank you to the residents, thank you to family, and thank you to my caucus colleagues for serving our province. It's not an easy task. But together we know we are facing a challenge, and together we will continue to work and fight that challenge.

And we're not alone. The people of Ontario are with us. That's why they gave us a mandate to serve the people of Ontario.

And that's why our government's Working for Workers Seven Act continues this mission to protect people, strengthen our workforce, and keep Ontario's economy strong in the face of global uncertainty. It's not just delivering real, practical solutions; it's going above and beyond, making sure the solutions will save lives on construction sites, protect job seekers from fake and

fraudulent job ads, and support workers facing layoffs with time and tools to find their next opportunity.

1650

We're accelerating the construction of training centres across the province, cracking down on WSIB fraud to protect honest employers while doing so.

There are a lot of people who are already here and have applied for Ontario immigration programs. We are making sure we're modernizing the OINP program so that we can have skilled workers on the jobs faster.

Let's look at the data simply put. In Mississauga—Malton, we have seen that the manufacturing sector alone is employing 70,000 people, while small businesses, those with fewer than 20 employees, make up 84% of the local economy. That's the backbone of our riding, and that's the backbone of our province.

So what is this doing? Through this bill, Ontario will be the first jurisdiction in Canada to require AEDs on designated construction projects. This is life-saving equipment, with double the chance of survival when paired with CPR. When those moments are there, when we talk about the data—if we see the data says one in 1,000 or one in 10,000 or one in 100,000, it may sound like small data. But for that person and for that family, it is not one in 1,000; it is 100%. Those 20 seconds could be the difference between a life and a death. That is why we are protecting our workers facing such a situation by providing up to \$2,500 per AED. When seconds matter, Ontario's workers deserve protection, not paperwork.

Let's look at something else that we're doing through this bill. We are building training centres faster. We've been talking about the SDF. I do remember I went to one of the events, and one of the recipients of the SDF asked me a question: "Who's paying for it?" I said, "You're paying for it." It's a vicious cycle. It's very simple: The hard-working Ontarians—when we collect the tax, we take a piece of it. We help to train by using that money, and once those people get jobs, they start paying. When they start paying, the government gets the first cut. The government gets these taxes, and this is how we're able to recover that money so that we can take that money and help the next worker. We can only do this if we have the training centres. So, through this bill, we're making sure that we're building training centres faster. This government is known for cutting red tape that has delayed construction projects. And that is what we're doing—reducing the red tape so that we can build those training centres faster. When local organizations want to expand their training spaces to get more people working, the government should be there to help, not hinder. That's exactly what this bill is doing. We're cutting red tape, not cutting corners, because the next generation of skilled workers cannot afford to wait.

In Mississauga—Malton—Speaker, I want to give you some of the examples of the SDF. I'll give you one example: The Aircraft Maintenance Engineers Association of Ontario is training, upskilling 177 participants, engaging 1,500 youth in aerospace careers through advanced modules in aircraft assembly and composite

material. What it is actually doing is upskilling, uplifting those people—or the organizations like Achēv, which is supporting 30 youth in the machinist and millwright trades with Humber College, also supporting 132 participants, women and recent immigrants, to train for senior care roles.

Some of the examples of the SDF are game-changing. Ask those families. This is not just financial stability or financial independence; it's a game-changer. It's making their life, making their career, while giving back to the communities.

That is what Working for Workers 7 is all about. It's about aligning our education, our training and our labour policies so that no talent is left untapped and no community is left behind.

Talking about the fairness, we are cracking down on fraudulent job ads that exploit newcomers and young people, costing Ontarians more than \$15 million in scams last year. No one is looking for a job that they have to be worried about. That is why our government is requiring job platforms to implement clear reporting systems and accountability policies to protect people when they're at their most vulnerable. When people are looking for work, they deserve trust and transparency, not trickery.

Working for Workers is all about real people, the ones who build, protect and power this province.

As we navigate through the challenging economic times, we want to make sure that we're supporting our workers facing layoffs. We're introducing job-seeking leave, giving workers up to three unpaid days for job hunting during mass termination periods and requiring employers to provide referral information services to government employment services.

We are making sure that we are amending the Planning Act and the Municipal Act.

We are strengthening WSIB enforcement, creating new administrative penalties for those committing WSIB fraud, including false statements, evasion and record falsification.

We are also modernizing the Ontario Immigrant Nominee Program through the launch of a digital employer portal, allowing employers to directly submit applications electronically, so that those people who have applied for those OINP—they can be sure that they have the documents already submitted.

In conclusion, it's about protecting people from danger on the job, from fraud when they're looking for work, and from red tape when they are training for the next opportunity.

With strong partners like our local organizations, colleges and employers, Ontario will continue to be the best place to live, work, raise a family and grow.

Through this bill, we're protecting lives, protecting paycheques, protecting the future of this province.

Through you, Speaker, I want to urge each and every member of this House—this bill is about the people of Ontario. This bill is about supporting our workers. This bill is non-partisan. This bill is good news. So let's come

together, support our workers and build a better, stronger province.

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

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Thank you to the member for Mississauga—Malton for his comments. I completely agree with him. He said that workers can't afford to wait. How true.

In 2018, when this government took office, the unemployment rate was 5.9% and 453,000 people were unemployed. Seven years later, under this government, workers are really waiting for jobs. And do you know how many? It's 706,000. The unemployment rate is 7.9%. So while, yes, we can blame Trump tariffs—but under this government, for three years now, unemployment has been rising, according to Stats Canada.

So my question to the member is simple: Do you believe Stats Canada data?

Mr. Deepak Anand: I was listening to the radio this morning, and I heard Prime Minister Carney saying that non-resident people in Canada used to be 3% of the total population. He talked about the previous Prime Minister. He said, "Before I came in as a Prime Minister, that number became 7.5%." In other words, he said, the number of people who came in the last seven, eight, 10 years was way more than we could have handled. Many of those people came to Ontario, but thank God we had Premier Ford and we had the government, who is always there to support and bring prosperity to the province of Ontario. That is why we've seen the revenue going up from \$154 billion to over \$220 billion. We were able to invest and support the workers, which we will continue to do through Working for Workers 7.

1700

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

Mr. John Jordan: I'll direct my question to the member for Mississauga—Malton.

The work environment, as we all know, is a critical factor in both recruitment and retention. Protecting workers means creating conditions where people feel safe, respected and supported every time they go to work.

Can the member share how Working for Workers 7 helps create that environment and protects workers while they're on the job site?

Mr. Deepak Anand: The member could have just asked me simply next, but he wanted to make sure it's not only for me to know his question—it is to the people of Ontario.

So thank you for asking that important question—and to the people of Ontario and the workers.

This legislation, if passed, proposes—the first in Canada—a requirement of AEDs on construction sites, because seconds matter when a life is on the line. Construction workers face some of the toughest conditions in the labour force. Through this, we want to make sure that—God willing, it should never happen that they would need the use of an AED, but if they're in a situation where every second matters, the AED is there to give them a life, which could be in danger.

Thank you, member, for asking this question, and thank you for giving me an opportunity to reply.

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

MPP Jamie West: Speaker, in this bill, there is a section about reporting fraudulent job postings. The member opposite talked very passionately about how it's going to help workers. But the reality of the bill is that all that is required is a website has a button you can click and that company will keep records of them. There is no action afterwards. There's no requirement for them to remove the job posting, no requirement to involve the Ministry of Labour. And they call that working for workers.

Something, as New Democrats, we'd ask for is—there's \$200 million that has been stolen from workers. In the last 10 years, they got about one eighth of that back. Wouldn't it make more sense, if you're working for workers, to go after that—

Interruption.

MPP Jamie West: Look at that. The police are sending out a search warrant now.

To go after the rest of that \$200 million that was stolen from workers—that's a lot of money stolen out of workers' pockets that could pay for rent and food and the other stuff.

I'd love to know his answer.

MPP Mohamed Firin: I would like to thank the member for the question.

Speaker, I've come across many people who have been impacted by fraudulent job searches. I have personal experiences. I have many friends who have actually experienced that in real time.

So this government is taking action to protect those workers. I understand the member feels we're not going far enough.

But I can tell you, when you've been impacted by these fraudulent job searches, this actually does make an impact.

I stand by this bill. And we're going to continue to get it done.

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

Mr. Stephen Blais: My question is for the member for Mississauga—Malton.

Thank you for your remarks today and for talking about the importance of having AEDs on job sites and in public. Obviously, it's a very important thing to do, and it's an important initiative.

I think we can agree that many job sites are very big. If you think about this place, where we're working today, it's a very big building. There are some AEDs in our building. I would suspect that you don't know where they all are within the building; I know I don't. I carry one with me, so it's not as big a problem for me as it is for maybe some of you. In this place, many of us are of an age and of a lifestyle where a cardiac event is more likely to happen, or not.

We've already heard that there is a law that would require 911 operators to know where AEDs are located. As I've said, if you think about a hospital site or university

construction site, those are enormous sites. They might have one on-site.

So, you, as the MPP for Mississauga—Malton, what are you going to do to ensure that 911 operators and work site coordinators actually know where the AEDs are so that those life-saving seconds and moments aren't wasted looking for one or trying to find one and can actually be used to save a life?

Mr. Deepak Anand: Thank you to the member from Orléans for standing up for the workers and talking about the AEDs.

The first thing that I'm going to want to make sure of is that the people in Mississauga—Malton and all the businesses in Mississauga—Malton are aware of this bill and make sure that they get the AEDs on that site. The reason for that is very simple: because those moments, God willing, should never come, but if they come, the AED should be there to support those workers.

Again, I want to say thank you to the minister for thinking about those workers, and I cannot wait to see the businesses having those AEDs supported by WSIB.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): I recognize the Associate Minister of Energy-Intensive Industries.

Hon. Sam Oosterhoff: I want to thank both of my colleagues for speaking this afternoon. My question is going to be for the member from Mississauga—Malton, because I've had him through the riding a couple of times for visiting some local skilled trades workers and folks who are getting into the trades or those who are already in the trades and looking to hire more. I've always appreciated his attention to detail when he comes down and the questions he asks.

I want to ask him about the culture shift that he's seen. I mean, he's been here for seven years now. You're a veteran. You've seen the shift in this province from, I would say, a government that didn't treat the skilled trades with the respect that they deserved, and as a result of that, I would say parents weren't encouraging their children to get into the skilled trades, young people weren't thinking about the skilled trades and our high schools weren't, frankly, preparing young people for the trades as a viable option.

What has the culture shift been in the time that you've been here, and how does this legislation help to continue that culture shift to a more positive view of the skilled trades?

Mr. Deepak Anand: Great question, as always; about the culture shift, I do remember when I went to St. Marcellinus, where my daughter had her graduation. We were having this conversation about the skilled trades. The guidance counsellor said, "It's not about the students; actually, we need to change the mindset of the parents first," because many of the parents don't believe that there are enough opportunities in skilled trades.

What I've seen in the last seven years is a huge shift through the Level Up! career fairs that we do every year. We have invited the parents to those Level Up! career fairs, and we have seen the parents are now encouraging

the students to get out and go into the skilled trades, make the six-figure salaries and be the entrepreneur.

Thank you to Working for Workers bills, including the Working for Workers 7. We're making sure that when these kids join the skilled trades, they have the ability to get trained, because through this bill, we're reducing the red tape to build those training centres faster. Through this bill, through Working for Workers, we are supporting our Ontarians.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): I've got the member from Kitchener Centre for a quick question.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: In my riding, a campus of a college closed. Now, we're expanding powers for the slush development fund to be used to build new training facilities. If we're going to be using taxpayer dollars efficiently, does it make sense to have campuses that are empty and we start building new training facilities when we've closed ones down the street?

MPP Mohamed Firin: Speaker, I'd like to thank the member for the question. Our government is investing record numbers of money into the college sector. As the minister announced earlier today, we've invested over a billion additional dollars.

Talking about the Skills Development Fund, we've partnered up. We have over 200 college-partnered-up programs where this government has invested more than \$330 million. What that means is organizations and companies partnered up with colleges, and that's the amount that we invested.

Recently, I had the opportunity to visit Durham College—

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

MPP Mohamed Firin: Apologies, sir.

Recently, I had the opportunity to visit Durham College, where I met Stephanie, who is now becoming an electrician, and these are some of the programs that we invest in.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Further debate? I recognize the member from Humber Creek–Black River.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Humber River–Black Creek.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Humber River–Black Creek.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: I don't have an easy riding name, nor an easy last name. I don't envy the Speaker when I get up.

All right, so we're back to Working for Workers. This is the seventh instalment. It's like an MCU movie, right? Many of the bills that they've put out there have affected workers. It's just usually been in a very negative way.

1710

For instance, there was Bill 124, as an example. This is one of those movies they don't want to talk about. This was a bill that ultimately capped workers'—health care workers, in the midst of a pandemic, for instance—wages at about 1%. Really, really, really, the kind of respect that they deserve, they were not getting under this government—the people we called health care heroes. Ultimately, in the end, what that not-working-for-workers bill

ended up doing is causing a whole bunch of back pay, billions of dollars, court fights—something they're really good at getting into—and that of course cost the taxpayers as well.

We had Bill 28, which essentially stopped education workers from going on strike before they could go on strike. I mean, these are education workers working really hard every day for our students, for our families and for our school communities that are having to go to food banks for themselves and their children. Again, this was another worker bill that the government tabled. It's not part of this list of Working for Workers bills, but it certainly had terrible and negative effects on workers.

So here we have instalment number 7, but, of course, it's probably, like, the 20th instalment that affects workers in some way, shape or form. In it, there are things that are all right, that are decent, things like the AEDs, making sure that workers have access to those. That's important. In fact, it's so important that members on this side in the opposition have been talking about it for years. And years later, in the seventh instalment of a bill, we finally see something about that.

Now, there are a number of schedules in here that actually tie into the Skills Development Fund itself. Because it appears, based on some of these schedules, that if you receive an SDF grant, it gives you some sort of development superpowers: exemptions and other things. We know that these guys have all sorts of time for exemptions when it comes to developments, like around the greenbelt and whatnot. It has found its way in here as well.

Within schedule 2, they talk about fake listings, and that's really important as well, because we don't want to see fake job listings that are out there. It's not really clear how they're going to address this in a practical way as part of this legislation, but it is something that's important, certainly, to talk about.

As well, we have short-term layoffs. Now, this is another one. You're a worker, and now you've been notified that you're going to be experiencing a layoff, let's say, in a month's time. What is this government going to do? Well, it's going to allow you to take up to three days off to go job hunting, but unpaid. Imagine that. You know that you're facing unemployment for at least a temporary portion of time in, let's say, a month, and the government will allow you to forgo a few days of work, without pay, without money at all, but then they can't fire you for that. Okay.

It begs the question—and I go back in time to the winter. We know that about half a year prior to that, the people, the powers behind the throne of the government, the big thinkers, the ones that are not elected but make a lot of the decisions that ultimately affect the policy here—and it just so happens that those big thinkers got SDF money. Those big thinkers were saying, "Guys, you've got to go to an election. You've got to get back in there because it's going to be really tough the longer you wait." So in the summer, about a year ago, they were saying, "All right, how do we go to an election?" They really didn't have an excuse. All throughout the fall they were looking:

“How do we do it? How do we do it?” The SDF recipients, or the pre-SDF recipients, were telling them, “Guys, you’ve got to do this. It’s going to save your bacon. You’ve got to do it.” Then finally in the winter—I can only imagine the sound, the organ being played, the halo of light when the President of the United States of America declared tariffs, and then, we went to an election.

Why do I bring this up? Because at that time the argument was, we need this Premier to go and fight against that President, ultimately, to protect our economy and to protect jobs. So, presumably, we had to elect this government and this Premier because this Premier and this government had a huge plan to protect workers and to protect jobs. Why else would we do it? So we went through about a month of the Premier cutting promos like it was a wrestling commercial against Trump—that hasn’t stopped. We still continue to hear that.

Lo and behold, the pre-SDF recipients led them to the greener pastures, and here they are, back again. It took quite a while for us to get back into the Legislature. We got into the Legislature, and during that period of time, this Working for Workers bill dropped towards the end, just before the House rose. Again, within it are okay things, but are they the kind of things that you could really hang your hat on or that the people in this province who are fighting for work or really worried about their futures can say, “This is going to protect us”? Absolutely not; not at all.

This Premier and this government have literal deflection superpowers. It is literally unbelievable. Any time they seem to be in trouble, all they have to do is wait a couple of weeks and some crisis occurs on a world stage that they can turn your attention away from and somehow be the beneficiaries. It’s unbelievable. There must be secret lottery winners on this side.

But I’ve got to tell you, when that happened, they got back into power. And nothing ever sticks to these guys, no matter how bad it gets. When I’m talking about how bad it gets, it is absolutely terrible for workers in this province. These are the highest levels of unemployment we’ve seen in about a decade. In fact, there are a quarter of a million more unemployed people now in the province of Ontario than before the Premier took power in 2018. Think about that: a quarter of a million people more. This government, in the last eight years they have been here and elected—seven or eight years—has done nothing to improve the situation.

All we’ve seen is that the situation continues to get worse and worse and worse. Some 25% of youth don’t have a job in this province—25% of youth. I touched on this. I have to be fair to the government. We have never seen young lobbyists having such lucrative work as we’ve seen now. Certainly, in that field, we are seeing a very lucrative market for lobbyists—and of all ages, really. You just need to know these guys; it doesn’t matter how old you are. If you’ve helped or given them good advice, you’re set. That does make me think, if this government doesn’t do good by the people of Ontario, I don’t think there’s ever been a government so good to their friends as

this government. I guess some people will respect that type of loyalty, but that is really what it’s about.

Now, the SDF—and this is really what’s rich about it. Let’s go back to 2018. Again, I mentioned this in a question. We used to have the Ontario Jobs and Prosperity Fund, and this was something that the Liberals created. It was a subsidy program that they had created. What did it do? It provided grants and loans to businesses in sectors like advanced manufacturing, IT and agri-food. Of course, one could argue that, hey, look, we were seeing losses in manufacturing and whatnot; IT, of course, as we see things become more and more technological. I guess this was the idea that they had had. How much was that fund? Well, it was \$900 million, which is about a third of what the Skills Development Fund is.

During the 2018 election, lo and behold, the Premier, who at the time was a candidate for Premier, had referred to it as a Liberal slush fund. He had said, and they had said, that what this fund was, was nothing more than the government handing out money to well-connected companies without proper insight. They had said, at that time, “Elect us.”

To be fair to them, they weren’t really explicit in what they were going to do. It wasn’t like they had a very developed platform. There was just a hysteria to get the Liberals out at the time, and they put their hands up and people chose them. But if you listened to the things that they said, especially during that campaign, they have done all of the things that they said they wouldn’t. All the things that they said they would change and fight against, they have developed a master class in.

This is exactly one of those things. And what did their leader, their boss, at the time say? That he pledged to eliminate the fund, and said what? That it lacked transparency. Well, the fund was eventually phased out, and then we have the Skills Development Fund, which is about triple the amount of money.

1720

Is there money that went to recipients that were good? Sure. But when you look at the AG report—and this is what it is—54% of the money that went out really went to the ones that staff and others said were not the top-tier, best use of the money. It went out to whom? The people that they had connections to, in large, large numbers.

When you really imagine it, and you relate this back to the greenbelt, it feels kind of like when this government made government in 2018; it was like they won the lottery. I want every member in here to imagine what that’s like. Imagine you won the Lotto 649 when the jackpot gets really big—it’s like \$70 million—and you win all this money, and now you’ve got money that you never dreamed of. You’ve got power that you’ve never dreamed of.

What ends up happening? Your friends and your family reach out to you, and they say, “You know what? I lent you money in college. I put you through this; I helped you with that. To be honest, I drove you to buy the ticket that day. I could use a little money too.” We’ve seen, in many different overtures over the course of the last seven to

eight years, the government finding ways for this money to end up into the pockets of people within their universe, within their orbits, people that have given them advice, people that were very close to them, people that were their biggest supporters through thick and thin.

What we ended up seeing with regard to this fund is that exact same thing, just like during the greenbelt. And what did we see? Well, as was mentioned, the Ministry of Labour became the ministry of favour. And at the time, you see all these individuals in that orbit doing really well, and then you see ministers standing behind the glass at hockey games. They're travelling the world.

It's funny, because years ago—some of you weren't here at the time—this government had us here debating in the middle of the night a bill that would make it technically illegal to spend money in advertisements insulting this government. We were all here debating it at the time, and I had an opportunity for, like, a 10-minute speech at 3 a.m. and I had painted the picture of how difficult it must have been at the time for government members to have to leave their summer vacations. I drew reference to hypothetical ministers on the yacht of a friend who had made a lot of money in the government being there in the last few years. And again, lo and behold, we have ministers not in Paris, Ontario, but in Paris proper.

It's funny because I got so much flack and heckling—*Interjection.*

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Guys, thank you. Honestly, where were you guys? It's been too long without a heckle, right?

And at that time, there was so much heckling when I talked about that, and then all of a sudden, we're now seeing the world tour for this government, the 2025 world tour. People are very—

Mr. Tyler Allsopp: No yacht.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: You're right; not a yacht.

And so it goes on and on, right. Now, I want to go back again. I don't know if anyone remembers this, because prior to you, the Liberals had incredible Teflon-like skin. I mean, it lasted 15 years of that Teflon and then it all flaked off, right at the very end. But what happened years ago when we had the former Premier McGuinty at the time—does anyone remember the Trillium fund? They had \$30 million plus that went out and resulted in an investigation without charges, I think. But what ended up happening, this money went out to different individuals and different groups at the time that, lo and behold, were connected, by absolute coincidence—just like now, I'm sure—to donors, friends, workers of the Liberal Party. And that actually prompted government members—one who was here in the chamber until, I think, the last election, Lisa MacLeod said, "It was more about who you knew than what you needed," with reference to the Trillium fund. The member from Oxford who is still in the chamber said—

Interjection.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: He's a great guy. He deserves applause. He said the minister must be held accountable and that stepping aside is the right thing to do. These were the wise words of one of your wisest members.

There was a history in the past government that ultimately—I know; we didn't have too much time to go that deep in the Hansard. But I'm sure—it's my last quote, guys. Next time—

Hon. Steve Clark: You've got to dig deep. John Vanthof knows how.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: I know. I should have reached out to him.

The reality is, if you mine the Hansard and you look at the things like cash for access, the funds that were created by the previous government, including the Trillium fund, you essentially saw the exact same playbook as you see right now. And what's happening? I guess Vegas is a much worse city than Paris in the eyes of this government. But the reality is simply this: You are looking at history repeating itself in the exact same ways. They got rid of one fund, renamed it something else, tripled the amount—and again, a lot of the money that was doled out came through the recommendations of people who were so close to them, just like it happened in the greenbelt.

There is so much more that needs to be done for workers in this province. I get it; you're going to help the lobbyists. But one thing that was mentioned just recently, by our fantastic member from Sudbury in a question, was about wage theft as an example. There's about \$200 million in wage theft that has happened from employers to their employees, and 75% of people lost between \$500 to \$5,000, and 25% lost more than that. Many are scared to report what's happening to them. I understand that your boss wants to turn Home Depot parking lots into fight clubs, and that's all right; it gets a lot of attention, that's for sure. But the reality is—why aren't you going after these employers in the same way?

What we're seeing by this government is a lot of eye-catching gimmicks, again, probably prompted successfully by the SDF grant recipients who are their genius advisers behind the scenes who work in multiple roles. What we end up seeing is the slow pouring of a Crown Royal during the bottling issue. Do you remember how the Premier started pouring it out and taking his time? When Stellantis happened, I have to tell you—like all of us, we were very concerned for the workers of Ontario. I was really scared, because I thought, "What are they going to do? Crash a Jeep into a brick wall? Are they going to take a brand new Jeep and put it in a compactor?" They had already—

Mr. Matthew Rae: There's still time.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: There's still time.

So what ends up happening from this government in a desperate time of need for workers, in the midst of a crisis of unemployment, are gimmicks: pouring alcohol, wrestling promos against the President.

I'll bet you, if any of these members had dual citizenship and you checked their voting record, they probably would have voted for the same guy who's tariffing us right now. And I bet you they were all at celebration parties on the win. So it is pretty rich when their best friend and a guy they probably look up to in a very serious way is now doing this with regard to tariffs.

The reality is, workers in this province need help, and this government is absolutely not delivering it to them in any way, shape or form. What they are simply doing is finding incredibly clever ways to take taxpayer money—a lot of it which they spend on many different things, as the debt is now up to \$150 billion, and people are getting so little for how much they've paid, which is a record—and finding ways to put it into the pockets of the people who are not only just in their orbits but who are closest to them. This is not what workers expected. And it's just going to keep piling up and piling up, because they are building the kind of ego and confidence to be able to pull whatever it is they wish to pull. They've certainly demonstrated that they are doing no better than the government before them. In fact, they've taken that playbook and they've turned it into a master class. The people of Ontario and the workers of Ontario deserve better.

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

1730

Hon. Graham McGregor: I want to thank my colleague for the speech. I listened intently. He talked a lot about our friends—and I consider the member opposite a friend. When you look at the Skills Development Fund, you see the government did support 700,000 friends to get retrained, and 100,000 of them did get a job. I know he's got an issue with some of the friends of the government—I want to list some of them here for you—who might not be friends of his party anymore, but they're certainly friends of the government: the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, the International Union of Painters and Allied Trades, LIUNA, the International Brotherhood of Boilermakers, the Ontario Professional Fire Fighters Association, and the International Union of Operating Engineers. These are just a few of the friends of this government.

I'm wondering if he could tell us which friend of the government should be ineligible for the Skills Development Fund and whose funding we should pull.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: The friends I'm talking about are the ones who have their cellphone numbers. When I'm talking about those particular ones—these are the consultants. So what happens under this government is that if you're looking for a project, perhaps as much or more so than the government before them, it depends on who—and I'll use the words again of Lisa MacLeod: "It was more about who you knew than what you needed." What the guarantee was by this government is that it depended on who was advocating for you in the funds.

As I said before, there is money that went to the SDF, that went to people who, in many cases, were deserving. But as the Auditor General pointed out, the ones at the bottom came to the top, and the common denominator was the fact that they were donors and friends who were close to this government.

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

Mme France Gélinas: I want to ask my colleague, were you surprised when you saw the number of reports that came out showing us that 50% of the applications that had been approved by the Ministry of Labour were poorly

ranked? After what happened with the greenbelt, where preferential treatment was given, where the Ford government is now under RCMP investigation, and then every day we get new reports that somebody who used to work for the government got their hands in the pie, and millions of dollars were given to them—\$742 million of the Skills Development Fund—were you surprised when you heard what had happened with the Skills Development Fund?

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Considering the kind of uproar they put up when the Liberals did the exact same thing, it is surprising that they would do that.

It's very interesting; there, I believe, was one of the cases where one such applicant had applied diligently year after year after year after year, and it just wasn't working. What they did was, they went out and got the right consultant, and then with that right consultant came the money, came the support, came the funds. Of course, it's obviously a coincidence, right?

The reality is that the Auditor General pointed out a process that was deeply flawed, was untransparent and had clear links—that if the people representing the people asking for money had deep, close links to this government, the money was basically assured. You do the math.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): I recognize the Minister of Citizenship and Multiculturalism.

Hon. Graham McGregor: I appreciate the colleagues answering the questions.

One of the low-scoring applications was, as I understand it, an AI platform supporting police mental health in Peel region. The Peel region officers who keep us safe every day—you know I'm a Brampton boy, and the criminals there can make it a real nasty place. Peel police officers took over 200 guns off the streets of Peel region. That's about one gun every 36 hours that was taken off the streets of Peel. And they see some stuff, frankly, that nobody should ever have to see and that would have an impact on anyone to deal with. This project—and again, this is one of the low-scoring applications, supporting police mental health.

Is the member opposite suggesting now that with these findings the government should pull funding for this program and stop investing in the mental health of Peel police officers?

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: I really appreciate him taking time away from trying to keep those auto insurance rates down in Brampton, to be able to be here and to engage in this debate.

There was one such applicant who spent the money on themselves. They were a company owner and a business owner and then in turn had no employees; they just used the money to train themselves.

With regard to the police, they don't seem to agree with you when it comes to speeding in Toronto. As much as you seem to be on the side of police, all of a sudden we've got legislation facing us about keeping speeding to a minimum in Toronto, and you've got this government, and then you've got the police on the other side. So I don't know; it must be very difficult to pick and choose when

you support police and when you fight them. It can't be easy.

I do appreciate that he was listening intently to my speech, and he is a friend to me. So I appreciate the question.

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

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Thank you to my colleague from Humber River—Black Creek for another excellent speech. It kind of gave me a desire to have popcorn and a slushie while you were talking about how this government has become everything that they've hated.

I couldn't help but wonder, as you were talking about the money going to Conservative insiders and donors, what this government could have done for workers in Ontario who are genuinely struggling, who are looking for work, who are worried about losing their job, who are in incredibly challenging working conditions in our hospitals and schools.

What could the government do if they were actually interested in working for workers rather than funnelling money to friends and playing Paul Blart: Mall Cop?

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: I like that—mall cop.

Well, there's so much more they could be doing for workers.

Take the case of health care workers. They're leaving the industry in droves because of the lack of respect they get in their jobs—the fact that private agencies are taking over, the fact that health care workers in hospitals and other different public settings are not getting the wages they deserve.

In so many different fields, you have workers who are being underpaid, and they're not getting the supports that are necessary.

So what we have is that they've taken an old Liberal fund, changed the name, tripled the amount of funding, and took phone calls from consultants to make sure that it went to certain candidates that weren't in the top rung of applications, and according to their own processes.

What this government is doing is essentially presiding over an unemployment crisis—it's literally a jobs disaster that's being led by this government—and what they're doing for workers is simply, absolutely just not enough.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): The member for Perth—Wellington.

Mr. Matthew Rae: Thank you to my colleague from Humber River—Black Creek for his remarks this afternoon.

I would like to share with the House this afternoon that I have the distinction of having the lowest unemployment in the entire country—and that is in Ontario, colleagues. I just bring that up because each region is obviously different—and we are thinking of our colleague from Oxford today. And I know the Premier has said some comments already this afternoon on how he feels about GM, and I'll let those stand.

My question to the member opposite—he talked about many things this afternoon, colleagues. I'm wondering, with bated breath, this afternoon, is he going to vote for

the bill we're debating, Working for Workers Seven Act, Bill 30, yes or no?

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: I appreciate the question.

I'm not that kind of person who ruins the end of a movie for people. You go there, you spend all that time—in this case, a debate, hours and hours of debate here. I know, as you say, you're on bated breath, wondering—because, of course, in this majority government it's really important to get those other votes too. You're just going to have to wait, all right? I'm sorry, but I can't ruin this for you.

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

M^{me} France Gélinas: I'll come back to the AED that is in that bill and the fact that five years ago this Legislature passed a bill that said that the location of the AEDs should be shared with 911. What do you think of the fact that, five years later, it's not done?

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Five years is five years too late. They absolutely need to move on that. It's good that they are dealing with AEDs as part of their legislation, but there's so much more work that needs to be done.

1740

Since the clock hasn't stopped, does that mean I can just filibuster until forever?

Anyway, thank you very much for the question.

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

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: I suspect I'm somewhere now in between Oktoberfest celebrations and not.

It's always a pleasure to follow my colleague from Humber River—Black Creek. It's always entertaining—and informative, I think, sometimes as well.

I'm glad to see the government getting around to implementing some basic reforms that workers have been asking for for years. I think there are some practical and long-overdue measures that should already be the law in Ontario. Better late than never, I would say, is a good thing. There are things that I want to see passed in this bill—things that make life fairer and safer for everyone in our beautiful province.

But every time the government kind of forces a choice, right? If we want to protect workers, we've got to hand over more power, more control to the Premier, ministers, and, I guess, some of their friends as well—holding AEDs in workplaces or other worker protections hostage to employer-friendly layoff rules, for example.

The government is really doing, I think, the bare minimum on this.

It's a great title. I love it: Working for Workers. I think every member in this House—or at least almost every member in this House—is working for workers in our own communities and in corners of the province and in other communities in our province as well.

I like provisions around fraud prevention in job postings. I think that's a good thing. It would benefit a lot of people. It's kind of like those illicit job postings—hopefully, they will be illicit job postings. It's like catfishing—here's something, and it's really something else. It's like an online dating profile, in some ways.

Interjection.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: It really is, right? And you get it.

Somebody who's desperate—they're looking for a job, and they get taken advantage of. Maybe they've got to send some money or maybe, frankly, their time is wasted.

So I think these are really good provisions in legislation to see. It's better late than never. Having these mandatory reporting mechanisms and written anti-fraud policies in there—always very good. I think it will help clean up some of those online job markets. I'm not sure how much it will do with Craigslist or not—but at the end of the day, I think it is a good thing. But those who rely on short-term contracts or apps could be left vulnerable, still, with this.

At the end of the day, how can workers, how can Ontarians really trust what this government is talking about, what this government is proposing to do now and into the future?

We know, in 2019, the government passed legislation allowing unconstitutional wage suppression that capped public sector wages at only 1%, affecting teachers, PSWs and other essential workers.

And in 2020, the government opposed paid sick leave throughout the pandemic, forcing workers to choose between health and their income, and the government only changed their mind after public and political pressure.

It seems like that in a lot of these things—maybe the Skills Development Fund is a precursor to that as well.

At the end of the day, I don't believe that you can rebuild an economy or grow our economy on the backs of workers who have been betrayed time and time again.

In a lot of ways, I think, when you talk to average folks about what they're going through—I was down in Windsor recently and speaking with somebody who used to work in the auto sector, who has now transitioned to working in long-term-care facilities as a PSW and worked on his own to organize his workplace, to fight for better protections for PSWs working in a private long-term-care centre—doing a lot of work in his union with the members there, with the workers there who are stressed, who experience extreme turnover in the workplace because of their working conditions. What about those workers? What about that gentleman who's doing that work in his workplace to stand up and fight for workers? Is that recognized by this government? I don't really think so.

If you speak to a nurse, if you speak to a teacher, an ECE, a personal support worker, an EA, they know that this government is not their friend. A government that takes you to court is not one on your side.

I heard it quite a bit, knocking on doors in the provincial election. Me coming to their door was a breath of fresh air because it was a new vision and it was a new approach to listening about these issues and talking about these issues, and somebody was going to be on their side.

I'm deeply concerned about many provisions in the bill. Instead of providing additional protections for workers, the government is making some of these jobs less than stable with employer-friendly rules allowing for extended layoffs, allowing non-unionized employers to extend layoffs for up to 52 weeks in a 78-week period. Once a worker consents, they can't withdraw, giving employers more leverage during economic uncertainty. That power

imbalance is going to be baked in, and workers shouldn't have to choose between signing away job security or losing their position entirely.

Now, in parts of the province, we're seeing, in unionized workplaces, layoffs taking place—Ingersoll, in Oxford county, announced today. We are seeing manufacturing plants in our province close. We are seeing a lot of good-paying work disappear in this province. That's concerning. That's really concerning to me.

But it's not just the big employers. It's not just some of these big manufacturing facilities; it's small ones as well. It's small tool-and-die shops that haven't been protected by this government and have been forced to shut down, to close because they can't sustain their operations anymore.

Earlier this year, speaking to some family members, I learned that was the case of one of the businesses that a family member was running. They gave up. They said, "We can't handle this anymore. We're going to close up shop, pretty much get nothing on that."

What about those businesses? What about those workers? Where are their protections from this government? It's all fine and dandy to parade around the province with nice signs that say, "Protect Ontario." Great—it looks great. Great messaging, great name of the bill, but are we really protecting Ontario? Are we really protecting workers?

Around skills training centres—and this is an interesting one here because we know for colleges and universities, they were exempt from Planning Act requirements to build student residences. I know this bill is proposing to do the same with skills training centres. But we know—I know, at least—of school boards, of educational associations that have written to this government suggesting that schools should be exempt from the Planning Act so that they can build faster, that they don't have to do that site plan approval. That does add time to the process.

We know schools—they do this. School boards do this quite a bit. They build schools all the time. I know this government would love to speed up the building of schools, but for some reason, that isn't considered, but this is. I've heard it from my own school board in Durham region. That's something that the school board has said, and they have written to this government about as well.

The goal of any Working for Workers bill should be to help workers, not expand government power. Legislation should make Ontario fairer, more secure, not more centralized and less democratic. Life-saving technology like defibrillators should never come at the cost of weakening worker protections, and we see that in other areas.

If this government truly cared about working people, they would pass the really good parts of this bill today. I think they would be well served to do a lot more consultation and work with folks like the Ontario Federation of Labour, with other organizations that do want to come to the table and sit down and have a conversation on how we make life better for workers.

There are things that really tie into working that the government should be doing, and that's child care, getting more people into the workplace, helping people start

families sooner. It's vital to support families, childhood development and, really, economic growth. We know, from study to study, that affordable and accessible child care really can help drive that.

Child care is a provincial responsibility. I know we all welcome the federal government's assistance in helping families access it, but the fact that we're not at \$10-a-day child care—I was talking to some folks in the skilled trades unions last week. A topic that came up quite a bit was child care, about how we recruit more women to work as apprentices and work in the skilled trades. Child care is a really important way to do that with increased economic pressure and return-to-office mandates—downtown employers, the provincial government as well. I believe this is the week that we have our provincial employees that are working in person in the office. I believe it's four days a week right now.

1750

Well, you've got to have the child care to go with it. Because you're adding longer commutes, you need that kind of child care. We don't really have that right now in the province. When you're building new schools, there are child care facilities attached to a lot of these schools. For some of the existing schools, those child care facilities—they've been cancelled in some areas, actually, because there wasn't enough money to put into building those child care centres; approved child care centres, additions onto the schools, cancelled. If we want to make Ontario a place where we're working for workers, we've got to work for better child care.

With interprovincial trade—and it does tie up in terms of harmonizing our workplace standards. I know it's not in this bill right here, but again, the conversation that we had with folks around the committee table was harmonizing up to have really strong standards to match and exceed those standards. That's something that Ontario can be doing in Working for Workers. It kind of feeds into the centralization of power and control that this bill is going to help go down—the more power that's in ministers' hands or the government's hands on this. I think, more likely, frankly, they're going to trip over themselves, number one. But number two, we're going to see it. Just watch, everybody. We're going to see it, okay?

I want to mention something today tied into this: Red Seal examination delays impacting workers and businesses. A business owner in our riding today contacted my office that his apprentice has been waiting for more than

five months to write his exam to become a Red Seal-certified mechanic. This delay isn't an isolated case. It reflects a growing backlog that we're seeing and folks that I'm talking to in the sector that are keeping qualified trades people—people who want to have a higher wage, who want to work and advance their career and are being held behind because of delays in that process. The province is a big contributor and player when it comes to that.

So this apprentice has completed their training. They've completed their work. They can't be certified due to lack of government action and available exam sittings, where we're seeing some folks have to travel really far in the province just to be able to write that exam. It's holding back this individual's career and others—and their earning progression—who are ready to contribute to Ontario's economy.

Employers who take on apprentices often experience reduced productivity until that worker is certified and able to operate independently. Those delays really hurt those small and medium-sized businesses that depend on apprenticeships to fill critical skills gaps. Employers have the resources to support and train these individuals. There are not enough seats and exam centres to fill that current demand. Supporting workers means supporting the training of workers. A government that values the trades must invest in getting people certified, not leaving them waiting months to enter the workforce.

Mental health—it's a workplace safety issue. It affects absenteeism—

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

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

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Orders of the day?

Hon. Steve Clark: I seek unanimous consent to see the clock at 6.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): The government House leader is seeking unanimous consent to see the clock at 6 o'clock. Do we have agreement?

It is agreed.

Report continues in volume B.

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French, Jennifer K. (NDP)	Oshawa	Leader, Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti progressiste-conservateur de l'Ontario
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Grewal, Hardeep Singh (PC)	Brampton East / Brampton-Est	
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Rae, Matthew (PC)	Perth—Wellington	
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Rosenberg, Bill (PC)	Algoma—Manitoulin	
Sabawy, Sheref (PC)	Mississauga—Erin Mills	
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Sarkaria, Hon. / L'hon. Prabmeet Singh (PC)	Brampton South / Brampton-Sud	Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports
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Schreiner, Mike (GRN)	Guelph	
Scott, Chris (IND)	Sault Ste. Marie	
Scott, Hon. / L'hon. Laurie (PC)	Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock	
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Tangri, Hon. / L'hon. Nina (PC)	Mississauga—Streetsville	Associate Minister of Small Business / Ministre associée des Petites Entreprises

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		Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
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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	