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Jeudi
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CONTENTS / TABLE DES MATIÈRES

Thursday 1 May 2025 / Jeudi 1^{er} mai 2025

ORDERS OF THE DAY / ORDRE DU JOUR

Protect Ontario by Unleashing our Economy Act, 2025, Bill 5, Mr. Lecce / Loi de 2025 pour protéger l'Ontario en libérant son économie, projet de loi 5, M. Lecce

MPP Jamie West	245
Mr. Sol Mamakwa.....	249
Mr. Ted Hsu	251
Mr. Andrew Dowie	252
Ms. Peggy Sattler	252
Mr. Ted Hsu	252
Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto.....	252
Mr. Ted Hsu	253
Second reading debate deemed adjourned	253

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS / DÉCLARATIONS DES DÉPUTÉES ET DÉPUTÉS

King Charles III Coronation Medal

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto.....	253
------------------------	-----

Mental health services

MPP Catherine McKenney	253
------------------------------	-----

Mental health and addiction services

Ms. Lee Fairclough	254
--------------------------	-----

Vera Mitchell

MPP George Darouze	254
--------------------------	-----

United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues

Mr. Sol Mamakwa	254
-----------------------	-----

Mark Willmer

MPP Billy Denault.....	254
------------------------	-----

Orthodox Christian Week

Mr. Tom Rakocevic	255
-------------------------	-----

Charles Davis

Mr. Andrew Dowie	255
------------------------	-----

Doctors' Day

MPP Bill Rosenberg.....	255
-------------------------	-----

Kate Nixon

Mr. Mike Schreiner	256
--------------------------	-----

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS / PRÉSENTATION DES VISITEUSES ET VISITEURS

Mr. Peter Tabuns	256
Mr. Tyler Allsopp	256
Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens	256

Ms. Stephanie Bowman.....	256
Ms. Aislinn Clancy.....	256
MPP Chris Scott.....	256
MPP Andrea Hazell.....	256
MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam	256
Hon. Zee Hamid	256
Mr. Billy Pang.....	256
Mme France Gélinas	256
Mrs. Daisy Wai	256
Ms. Laura Smith.....	256

QUESTION PERIOD / PÉRIODE DE QUESTIONS

Automotive industry

Ms. Marit Stiles	256
Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy	257

Supportive housing

Ms. Marit Stiles	257
Hon. Rob Flack	257
Hon. Doug Ford	258

Justice system

Mr. John Fraser	258
Hon. Doug Downey.....	258

Justice system

Mr. John Fraser	259
Hon. Doug Downey.....	259

Justice system

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam	260
Hon. Doug Downey.....	260

Justice system

Mr. Stephen Blais.....	261
Hon. Doug Downey.....	261

Public safety

Mr. Andrew Dowie	261
Hon. Doug Downey.....	261

Ontario economy

Mr. Tom Rakocevic.....	262
Hon. Stephen Crawford.....	262

Justice system

Mme Lucille Collard	262
Hon. Doug Downey	263

Government accountability

Mr. Mike Schreiner	263
Hon. Victor Fedeli.....	263

Transportation infrastructure

MPP Bill Rosenberg.....	264
Mr. Hardeep Singh Grewal	264

Labour dispute	
MPP Lisa Gretzky	264
Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy	264
MPP Mohamed Firin	265
School boards	
Mr. Jonathan Tsao	265
Hon. Paul Calandra	265
Ontario economy	
Mr. Tyler Allsopp	266
Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy	266
Business of the House	
Mr. Steve Clark	266
Legislative pages	
The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly)	266

**INTRODUCTION OF GOVERNMENT BILLS /
DÉPÔT DE PROJETS DE LOI ÉMANANT
DU GOUVERNEMENT**

Municipal Accountability Act, 2025, Bill 9, Mr. Flack / Loi de 2025 sur la responsabilité au niveau municipal, projet de loi 9, M. Flack	
First reading agreed to	267
Hon. Rob Flack	267
Protect Ontario Through Safer Streets and Stronger Communities Act, 2025, Bill 10, Mr. Downey / Loi de 2025 pour protéger l'Ontario en rendant les rues plus sûres et les collectivités plus fortes, projet de loi 10, M. Downey	
First reading agreed to	267
Hon. Doug Downey	267

PETITIONS / PÉTITIONS

Mental health services	
MPP Jamie West	267
University funding	
Mr. Ted Hsu	268
Social assistance	
Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon	268
Northern Health Travel Grant	
MPP Jamie West	268
Labour legislation	
MPP Jamie West	268

ORDERS OF THE DAY / ORDRE DU JOUR

Protect Ontario by Unleashing our Economy Act, 2025, Bill 5, Mr. Lecce / Loi de 2025 pour protéger l'Ontario en libérant son économie, projet de loi 5, M. Lecce	
Mr. Ted Hsu	269
Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon	273

Ms. Lee Fairclough	275
Mr. Will Bouma	275
MPP Wayne Gates	275
Mr. Adil Shamji	276
Mme Dawn Gallagher Murphy	276
Mr. Will Bouma	276
Mrs. Daisy Wai	278
Mr. David Smith	278
MPP Wayne Gates	279
MPP Stephanie Smyth	279
Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto	279
MPP Alexa Gilmour	280
Ms. Lee Fairclough	280
Mr. Anthony Leardi	280
Mr. John Vanthof	281
Mr. Jonathan Tsao	283
Mr. Joseph Racinsky	283
Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong	283
Ms. Lee Fairclough	284
Mr. Logan Kanapathi	284
Mr. John Fraser	284
Mr. Anthony Leardi	286
MPP Jamie West	287
Ms. Stephanie Bowman	287
Mr. Matthew Rae	287
MPP Jamie West	287
Mr. Anthony Leardi	287
Mr. Chris Glover	288
Ms. Aislinn Clancy	288
Hon. Mike Harris	289
Ms. Jessica Bell	289
MPP Stephanie Smyth	289
Mr. Peter Tabuns	290
Mr. Anthony Leardi	292
Ms. Lee Fairclough	292
Mr. Chris Glover	293
Mr. Aris Babikian	293
MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam	293
Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto	293
Mr. Adil Shamji	294
Mr. Joseph Racinsky	296
MPP Jamie West	296
Mr. John Jordan	297
Ms. Jessica Bell	297
Ms. Lee Fairclough	297
Mr. Anthony Leardi	298
Hon. Mike Harris	298
Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto	299
Mr. Chris Glover	300
MPP Stephanie Smyth	301
Mr. Andrew Dowie	301
Mr. Chris Glover	301

Mr. Joseph Racinsky.....	302
Ms. Sandy Shaw	302
Mr. Anthony Leardi.....	304
MPP Jamie West.....	305
Mr. Andrew Dowie.....	305
Mr. Anthony Leardi.....	305
MPP Jamie West.....	305
Mr. Chris Glover.....	306
Mr. Anthony Leardi.....	306
Second reading debate deemed adjourned.....	307

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Thursday 1 May 2025

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 1^{er} mai 2025

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Good morning.
Prières.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): We will now have a moment of silence for inner thought.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PROTECT ONTARIO BY UNLEASHING
OUR ECONOMY ACT, 2025

LOI DE 2025 POUR PROTÉGER L'ONTARIO
EN LIBÉRANT SON ÉCONOMIE

Resuming the debate adjourned on April 29, 2025, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 5, An Act to enact the Special Economic Zones Act, 2025, to amend the Endangered Species Act, 2007 and to replace it with the Species Conservation Act, 2025, and to amend various Acts and revoke various regulations in relation to development and to procurement / *Projet de loi 5, Loi édictant la Loi de 2025 sur les zones économiques spéciales, modifiant la Loi de 2007 sur les espèces en voie de disparition et la remplaçant par la Loi de 2025 sur la conservation des espèces, puis modifiant diverses lois et abrogeant divers règlements en ce qui concerne le développement et l'approvisionnement.*

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

MPP Jamie West: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I know I've said it to you personally, but it's my first time in the House to say congratulations on the election.

Today I'll be debating Bill 5. Before I forget, I want to note that I'm going to be sharing my time with the official opposition deputy leader, the MPP for Kiiwetinoong. He's also the shadow minister for Indigenous and treaty relations and the shadow minister for northern economic development and growth, so I value his input on this bill.

Speaker, the stated aim of the legislation is to cut red tape and streamline approvals to speed up critical mineral and resource development projects, including in the Ring of Fire. In fact, the minister made the announcement in Sudbury, and part of what he said was that the new "one project, one process" approval model will streamline all approvals into one process, coordinated by a dedicated mine authorization and permitting delivery team. I listened to the beginning debate, when three of the ministers split their time, and, honestly, that's all they talked about. They pretended this entire bill was about streamlining process-

es, was about mining, was about helping extract ore out of the ground more quickly, but the devil is in the details.

I have to say, if that was the whole bill, we'd be in full agreement. I like the idea of "one project, one process." I like the idea of streamlining approvals. I like the idea of having a dedicated team helping industry be more successful. That's a great part of the bill. If it was the entire bill, I would urge debate to go as quickly as possible, I'd urge any committee work to go as quickly as possible, and I'd urge that we pass this bill as quickly as possible. But, honestly, I did the math on this and counted the pages, and this is less than 1% of this bill.

Right now, because of Donald Trump, the province is in crisis. People are worried about putting food on the table. People are worried about losing their jobs and paying their mortgage or covering their rent. They're worried about taking care of their kids. They're worried about taking care of their parents. They're worried about farmers. They're worried about their friends. Frankly, people in Canada are worried about their future, and they are coming together—elbows up—to stand with each other, and they are thirsty for leadership from us. They're not interested in partisan nonsense. They're not interested in us flying our colours or poison pills or anything else.

But instead of leadership, instead of a mining bill that's just about mining, the Premier is using that worry to reward his wealthiest donors, and the people of Ontario should be frustrated and angry and upset. Frankly, I'm upset about this.

I live in a mining town. I started paying my mortgage because I had a job in mining. My parents came to Sudbury to work in mining. My grandfather is a miner. My dad is a miner. My stepdad is a miner. Most of my friends still work in that industry. And nobody in my city is happy with this bill being less than 1% about mining and 99% about nonsense.

Let's be frank about this: It's not a mining bill. This is an omnibus bill. Nobody in the world needs 229 pages to say, "A 'one-project, one process' approval model, streamlining the approvals, with a dedicated team to help things be more efficient"—but you do need 229 pages if you want to scrap the Endangered Species Act. You need 229 pages if you want to ensure that your donors can open a dump in Lambton–Kent–Middlesex. You need those 229 pages if you want to pretend that Ontario Place somehow is part of mining. I have been to Ontario Place. I don't remember anyone mining there. You need 229 pages if you want to write a cheat code so you can magically call anything you want a special economic zone and you can ignore or rewrite bylaws and legislation.

The greenbelt grab: Right now, the RCMP is investigating that as a corruption scandal. You can repeat that with the cheat code of the special economic zone. It's not going to be corruption anymore. The RCMP won't be able to get you because now it's a special economic zone and you can ignore all the rules and regulations and bylaws.

Are you fighting farmers for land in Wilmot? Make that a special economic zone. Use your cheat code.

Are you in trouble for using preferential treatment for minister's zoning orders? Cheat code: special economic zone.

Do you have a sketchy Ontario Place deal that you signed a 95-year lease for with a sketchy company? Did you give \$2.2 billion to allow a private luxury spa to build at Ontario Place, to a broke company that lied to you about their company assets—that they had six and technically only have five? Well, don't worry about that—cheat code: special economic zone.

Honestly, Speaker, this 229-page omnibus bill is technically about mining in the same way that my hair is technically curly. I mean, it's true; I'm not lying about it, but I'm not telling you everything, and I'm hiding a lot from you.

Speaking of not telling people everything, you have a bill about mining that—when they talked about it, they said, “It's not going to affect Indigenous consultation, treaty rights holder consultation,” but they didn't talk to anybody from First Nations. They didn't talk to any of the treaty rights holders. They didn't share any of this with them. In fact, the only reason First Nations and treaty rights holders know about the bill and have information about the bill and are providing feedback about the bill is because our party shared it with them. How do you talk about the Ring of Fire and have press conferences about a bill leading to extraction at the Ring of Fire but not talk to the people who live around the Ring of Fire? It doesn't make any sense to me.

I have 30 minutes to talk about this bill. I do want to say there is a portion about mining, because I don't want to be unfair, but I'm not going to have time to get through all 229 pages.

Schedule 5 is the Mining Act. You can tell it's about mining because it doesn't say “Ontario Place act,” like another schedule does, and this is the “one project, one process” part of the bill. There are a couple of flaws, but, honestly, it's pretty supportable.

One of the flaws is the duty to consult and accommodate—there's a line in there that allows the Conservative government to delegate this to a proponent, and “proponent,” we presume, means the mining company, the extraction company. I know that, traditionally, Liberal governments, Conservative governments have been delegating this to the proponent all along, haven't really been helping people.

We heard, with Bill 71, the last mining bill, from mining companies that came and spoke to us at committee saying, “We really need help with this.” Even companies like Vale or Glencore that are doing a very good job at this because they've been doing it for a long time—they have

made those early-on errors and mistakes and have built strong relationships and said, “We could really use some help,” and it's the duty of the government to do this. Instead, they're allowing companies to stumble around, hopefully to get it right, but you can really set back your project a long way if you're walking around a room with your hands over your eyes and trying to find the door. You can bump into a lot of furniture, and you can frustrate a lot of people who otherwise would be your allies. So the duty to consult and accommodate is constitutionally set out as a responsibility of the crown, of the government of the day—the Conservatives today, the Liberals before that. You can't really assign it to somebody else, and you shouldn't be assigning it to somebody else. If we want to help mining be more successful, especially junior mining companies—people who are new—the government should implement a plan to help us be more successful. This is what mining companies have been asking for. This is what they've been telling us. We asked for it in amendments in the last mining bill; we asked for a commitment, actually, to do it in the future, and in both those things we were voted down by the government side.

0910

So this is the part of the bill—the “one project, one process” part of the bill—that we agree with. We're 100% aligned with this. We think it's a great idea. There are some parts that need to be massaged, but we can live with that. This is six pages. It goes from pages 34 to 41—six out of 229 pages have to do with mining. Six. These six pages might reduce mining time by 50%—it might. I say that because the government has committed to cutting review time by 50%, but they've also said that the time it takes to open a mine is an average of 15 years. Our first day back, on Tuesday, during debate, I heard 17 years was the average. When we were reviewing the bill with the ministry delegates who were reviewing the bill with us, we said, “Well, does this mean that once this is implemented, we're going to cut that time down to eight years?”, which is a little more than 50%, and they could not commit to that. It feels weird to go around talking to the people of Ontario, saying that we're going to cut the 15 years in half, and when you get a straightforward question like, “Does that mean you get it down to eight?” they say, “Maybe.” So who knows? But I do think it's going to help.

There is some frustration. There's a lot of paperwork and networks to work on and paths to go down. When I reach out to people who do the work—the civil service people, who don't get enough credit for the work they do, for applications—the thing I heard, actually, is that the average time on their desk of paperwork being there is less than 14 days. The longest delays are because the applicants aren't filling out the paperwork properly, or not at all. So they'll get it and there will be a blank, and they'll send it back to them and say, “You need to fill out page 4,” as an example—I don't know what page. The companies aren't doing well on it. So I think having somebody help the company would actually streamline the approvals process and allow those delays—because my understanding is, the longest delay is actually from the appli-

cants' side and not from the civil servants' side. But anything we can do to help this work faster, I think, is a smart idea.

It doesn't really matter if we're talking about 17 years or 15 years—cutting to eight years. I mean, that's a great long-term goal. But the reality is that the Premier called an election in February because of Donald Trump. This is bill number 5 but technically the second bill that's not part of procedure. This bill apparently was called because of the chaos Donald Trump was causing and the need for us to have a critical mineral strategy and moving forward on it. If we are focused on Donald Trump—15 years from now, eight years from now, Donald Trump will no longer be the President. I know he's rumouring about maybe taking over—fiefdom. But the reality is, in their system, Donald Trump will not be president in four years; in their system, you can only have two terms, and this is his second term, so he won't be the President.

If we're working on a system right now that, let's say, is going to shorten opening a mine to eight years, well, that is too late for people today. Eight years from now is too late. It's too late for people who already lost their job. About 600 people in my riding, in the mining industry, have lost their job already due to threats before the tariffs came out, as companies began to streamline. Algoma Steel in Sault Ste. Marie is estimating between 1,500 and 1,800 layoffs because of threats of tariffs. Having a plan to open a mine eight years from now is not going to help us today. Donald Trump will be the President for next three years and three quarters of a year, and we need something that's going to help people today and in the short term. I'm not putting down the six pages of this bill that we agree with. I think we need a long-term plan. I think that's important. But we also need a short-term plan. So what could we be doing today, in the short term?

The first thing I want to do is, I want to talk about mining, and it's a difficult abstract for people who haven't worked in mining. The minerals typically aren't spread out everywhere. Imagine a chocolate chip muffin. The chocolate chips are the valuable parts, and the bread part of the muffin is rock, mostly. What you need to do is get enough capital to get to a chip, and when you mine the chip—that's the ore—you get the valuable resources that help you to pay for the pathway to that chip, but you also have to save enough of that to get to the next chip.

In our country, we have existing mine locations that have five-year, 10-year, 15-year plans based on the amount of capital they have that will get them to the next ore body, get them to the next chocolate chip.

If, as a province, we're committed to mining in Ontario, we could be investing in it. I'm telling you, in my city alone, the two biggest mining companies, Glencore and Vale, will gladly share with you the felled projects they have. These are projects where they cost-estimate net benefit to get to the next chocolate chip. They will share with you what they need for an investment to get there so we can start mining that ore quickly. That's something we can do.

The other thing we can do—the last time nickel, before I was elected, started to take a downturn, surprisingly, cobalt started coming up. I worked at the smelter. Cobalt was almost a waste product; it just wasn't that valuable. The time it took to extract more cobalt out of our material wasn't worth that time, so most of it got dumped as slag. Well, when nickel started to take a nosedive and cobalt began to rise in price as a critical mineral, we converted a converter. Basically, it just cooks the bath a little better. We converted one as a slag-cleaning vessel, and we pulled more cobalt out of that material that used to be waste. That process kept the lights on and the doors open and kept people employed. There are ideas at different mining sites that we could be investing in today that would bring more cobalt and more minerals, especially critical minerals, to market using existing infrastructure.

Another thing that we could be doing is, we could be taking materials that are already existing on the surface. It costs a ton of money to bring material from underground to surface. They call it muck, but it's huge chunks. There are people in the gallery—if you do the tour on the first floor, you'll see a big square of mineral near the big map of Ontario. Most of the ore that comes to surface doesn't look like that. That's a really rich ore; you can see it sparkling. It's from Sudbury. But most of the muck that comes up isn't that. It comes up as rock mixed in with ore, and you have to refine it. You pay to bring the ore up, which is really heavy; you pay to transport it to the mill, which is really heavy; you pay to pound it into powder, which is really heavy; you pay to float it, which costs a lot of money; you pay to separate it—part of that part that's separated goes to the tailings pond, which I'm going to talk about later as another great idea, and part of that goes into the furnaces to be extracted.

The extraction process isn't perfect. Mike McCann, the former manager at Vale, got mad at me once for saying we melt rocks and make money, but the short version is, we melt rocks and we make money. When you melt the rocks, because the minerals that are valuable are heavier than the waste rock, it separates like oil and water. You skim off the rock, the waste rock, to slag, and the other stuff we call matte, and you tap that from a lower hole in the furnace—so high hole and low hole. It's not a perfect mix. Some of those minerals end up being dumped on the side of the road in the slag dumps. If you have postcards from Sudbury, they might be a slag dumping thing. It used to be a tourist attraction. Well, we still dump that. So, because it's not perfect, there are minerals that get dropped there.

As well, when there are problems with the furnace—you have to keep the furnace running—sometimes we're just dumping matte out there. When we're emptying a furnace, we're dumping minerals out there. You can repurpose that with an investment from the government. They've already started at a slower model, but there's a lot there. The extraction process is better, but my company, Vale—and before that, Inco and Mond Nickel, and all the way back—has been doing this extraction for over 100 years; it was 100 years the year I was hired, and I was there for 17 years. The farther back you go, the more valuable

that slag, that waste product, is going to be, and we could be repurposing it and we could be extracting more critical minerals today, not seven or 15 years from now—not that I’m against that. It’s a good long-term plan. I’m talking about short-term plans.

0920

The other thing I want to talk about that I think is really important is that—Dr. Nadia Mykytczuk from MIRARCO Mining Innovation. I mentioned tailings earlier. What happens is, you turn it into a powder, you add liquid to it and some chemicals, and it floats—the more valuable material kind of spills over to the top—and you end up with a sludge. You end up with a wet product, a feed, that goes to the furnace and the smelter, and you end up with a waste product that we just call tailings. That gets pumped out to a tailing pond. When I think of a pond, I think of something that maybe you can skip a rock across. If you were to look at Google Maps and Copper Cliff and find the smokestack, which is pretty easy to find, the tailings pond is sort of to the east of that—just to the left on your computer screen. It goes from Copper Cliff to Lively to Creighton mine, so it’s basically the size of a lake, and we dump there and we dump there and we dump there all the time. That separation process isn’t perfect either, and years and years ago it wasn’t as good, so there are minerals that get dumped in there as well. Imagine this big pond: There’s water. Birds can swim on the top of it and stuff. I’ve heard there are fish. I wouldn’t recommend eating the fish. At the bottom, you have a toxic kind of sludge that has settled onto the bottom. This is a massive liability for companies.

I know through the work that I did previously that Vale does an amazing job of that, but I know it’s a huge cost for liability, and it’s a huge cost for engineers who specialize in tailing dams, and you need that. You need to pay that cost and you need that expertise because we’ve had tailings dam failures. British Columbia had one at Mount Polley that did a lot of environmental damage. And Brazil had one at Brumadinho, I think. That one killed people. It buried towns completely. That’s the situation we have in Sudbury, because our city is built right beside the smelter and the tailings ponds. I don’t want to scare people in these areas. These are very well constructed and well engineered, but we could reduce that risk by reprocessing the tailings that are already existing.

MIRARCO is working on this project already. From their web page: “In the near term, Ontario can strengthen our critical mineral supply chain by reprocessing tailings and mine wastes that are already at surface.” So they use bioleaching, and they estimate that they can extract between \$8 billion and \$10 billion in nickel and cobalt from the existing tailings ponds. That’s a great short-term plan—\$8 billion to \$10 billion. Also, they’re talking about a potential zero-waste solution after the process ends. So the by-product becomes sellable. It lowers your risk. It protects the environment. It puts money in our pocket from resources we already paid to extract from underground. And that’s something we can do in the short term, that’s not going to take eight to 15 years. This is a win-win-win.

The exciting part of this—and the former Minister of Mines is here with us today, and I know he is a fan of this project as well. The great thing about this is that this is a project that is made in Ontario. This is something that we would have our fingerprints all over. This is something that I think people around the world would be knocking down our door to figure out how to do, because tailings are issues all over the place.

If it doesn’t happen here, it will happen in the United States. I have a good relationship with the people at MIRARCO, and I have been told that the Americans are knocking on their door and the Americans are lined up to spend the money to get this done. It will either be an Ontario project or it will be an American project. I want it to be an Ontario project. I want us to own this.

The problem is that MIRARCO has been working to secure capital funding. The province has given some; I’m not putting down the province. I see my colleague giving me the thumbs up. The province has invested, but if we can help them find more investments, if we can increase their investment, we can help—because they have funding basically until December, and in December they’re going to pause. If they pause, the Americans are going to show up, and there’s only a certain amount of time, with the financial instability and people working at MIRARCO worrying about how they’re going to pay their bills and keep the lights on and get their kids into hockey—the money from the Americans looks pretty important. They don’t want to do it, but at some point, I can’t see how they could resist.

In short, I like the six pages of this bill. The other 223 pages, I don’t think I can support. They are a massive overreach for a Conservative government that, frankly, has not earned the trust of the people of Ontario to have unfettered power and access and overreach.

I can only imagine the people in Lambton–Kent–Middlesex, who were promised in a by-election, in the last provincial election, that this landfill site would not open, by the Premier, without a full, comprehensive environmental assessment—and then that promise was broken afterwards. I think I can imagine it, because I just read in the news that city council has approved \$50,000 to fight against this. I read all kinds of quotes from people in this area who were outraged about this. There is a cynical side of me that says, “Well, that’s what you get for voting for a Conservative who won’t return your calls and speak to you.” But also, I think this is a time when, they want politicians to be working together, and I am hoping that you’ll work with New Democrats, as a Conservative government, listen to the people in that riding who elected a member for your party, and do what needs to be done.

If the bill said—it would be legalese, so it takes six pages, but I can do it in a paragraph—“A ‘one project, one process’ approval model, streamlining the approvals into one process, with a dedicated team to help things be more efficient,” we would vote for this in a heartbeat. I would urge my House leader to help us expedite it passing as quickly as possible, so that we can open mines more quickly, so we can cut the time, potentially, from 15 or 17

years to eight years. Anything we can do to help mining be more successful, we are on board with as New Democrats. We just think it's important that we're doing it responsibly.

The problem is the other 223 pages of this bill we cannot support.

We can't support scrapping the Endangered Species Act and bringing in an act that just talks about where they live today, right now. It's like saying that your house is protected, but it's okay if we tear down everything around your house—the grocery stores, the school, everywhere else you go. That's fine, as long as your den is okay. You can't replace something solid with something incredibly watered down. Can you improve it? Yes, absolutely. But don't pretend this is improving it. This is destroying the Endangered Species Act.

I can't support 220 pages of a bill that just rewards wealthy Conservative donors and allows the Premier to break his promise to the people of Lambton–Kent–Middlesex. I can't support a bill that pretends that Ontario Place is part of mining. I can't support a bill that allows the government to write themselves a get-out-of-jail-free cheat code.

I come from mining and underground. I don't want to say the unclean version, the industrial version of this phrase, but I read this bill and the entire time, I kept thinking, “Don't spit in my ear and tell me it's raining.”

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

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Meegwetch, Speaker.

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I'm very honoured to be able to stand up and speak my language in this place. I've been here close to seven years, and one of the things I know is, until last year—I was able to speak my language here for the first time.

It's an honour, again, to be able to speak on Bill 5, Protect Ontario by Unleashing our Economy Act, 2025; to be able to speak on behalf of the people of Kiiwetinoong.

I'd like to thank the government for this bill. I'd like to thank the government for putting this forward. I thank them because it's a reminder that colonialism, oppression, still exists in this place, especially to the First Peoples of these lands in what we call now Ontario and Canada.

This bill should be called “Ontario first, First Nations last,” because we are just an afterthought. I know we have to understand, through the situation that we're in today, for Canadians and Ontarians, where we find ourselves right now—where their land is being threatened, where there's a foreign power talking about annexation, where they're being asked to give up resources and access to land. This is not new to First Nations people. Welcome to the club.

0930

I want to quote Sharon Venne from Treaty 6 territory. In one of her writings, she says, “All of North America is Indigenous land. At the time of the treaty-making, Indigenous peoples never gave up the land. When Indigenous peoples talk about the land and the making of treaty,

we are talking about our life and the life of future generations. Land is central to the process. We have a relationship with our Creation based on a legal system designed to protect and honour the land.”

As I said, over the years, I have heard many people say that non-Indigenous people brought treaty-making to Indigenous peoples. This is false. Indigenous peoples living on the great Turtle Island have always had treaty-making. Our people have always made treaties with our neighbouring nations. So when the crown came to our territories to make treaties, our treaty-making process was already well established.

One of the reasons treaties were signed here in Ontario was to create certainty for settlers, so they could access the natural resources of the First Nations people. Back then, it was mostly for hunting, fishing, mining and forestry rights. The infrastructure projects that make up Canada would not exist without the treaties. Our treaties were signed with the intention to open up the north for settlement and resource development. That sounds familiar, doesn't it? The government needed certainty so settlers could make money off the resources found in the north. I've often said it here, and I will continue to say it: The north is very rich. But when I say that, I'm not talking about money; I'm talking about the land, the water, the animals, the fish, our identity, and our ways of life.

Since 2018, being here, being a member of provincial Parliament—but first, I am a rights holder to treaty, and nobody can take that away from me.

“We agreed to share. We lived up to the terms of our agreement. We kept the peace ... allowed the white man to settle and live according to his laws....

“You said our rights would never be lost. You did not live up to the agreement.”

Those are the words of Grand Chief Andrew Rickard back in 1977, speaking to the Ontario cabinet. And those same words apply today on this current approach, where you use the tariff war to access the resources in the north while you're trampling on the rights of the people who live there.

One of the things I want to talk about is the language that we use around reconciliation. We now have a concept of economic reconciliation that gets used in place of reconciliation. It seems governments have shifted that language to suit their needs. This bill, Bill 5, is part of that shift. We even see it in this government, where we have a Minister of Indigenous Affairs and First Nations Economic Reconciliation. But what's presented today by the government as “economic reconciliation” doesn't do much unless it recognizes First Nations' full decision-making authority over our treaty lands—period. Most people using this term now only see economic reconciliation as natural resource development.

The Yellowhead Institute notes that economic reconciliation doesn't compensate First Nations for the environmental, social and economic damage caused historically by resource development on Indigenous lands, but, rather, identifies feasible ways to share economic opportunities arising from resource development. This

heavy focus on economic reconciliation exploits reconciliation as a whole and steers it towards a version that primarily benefits corporate and state interests while promising fringe benefits for Indigenous people. The Yellowhead Institute views this growing focus on economic reconciliation by politicians as well as right-wing think tanks and major financial institutions as a way of distracting from Canada's and Ontario's ongoing failure to complete the calls to action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

0940

Dr. Eva Jewell at the Yellowhead Institute has identified the rhetorical move to the concept of economic reconciliation by Conservative politicians as being about “creating conditions for Indigenous peoples to be more aligned with the capitalist system.” The Yellowhead Institute has argued that the concept of economic reconciliation has no direct connection to the 94 calls to action. The term “economic reconciliation” is not mentioned in the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and the concept is only referred to in one subsection of the 92nd call to action.

Speaker, this government claims that it supports responsible resource development, but I don't see it in this bill. Ontario public servants, in the minister's briefing on this bill, indicated that First Nations will have concerns—as well as municipalities—on the new requirements on permitting. According to the documents, the government's strategy to avoid criticism and opposition is to lean on messaging that says that any proposed changes will not change or alter the province's duty to consult with Indigenous communities, nor its responsibility to uphold health, safety and environmental protections. This legislation is being sold as the way to facilitate projects, but the criteria for these projects haven't even been developed by cabinet yet.

As it stands right now, this bill will severely undermine constitutionally protected Indigenous rights to consultation, accommodation and consent for any kind of project before it starts. The very concept of fast-tracking infrastructure on Indigenous lands, on our homelands, contradicts the legal principle of free, prior and informed consent contained in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

To me, when I say “free, prior and informed consent,” “free” means that the rights holders, the nations, should not have to pay a dime on that process, on that consultation; it is on the government. “Prior,” to me, means that before any drill goes into the ground on our homelands—that we should be talking first, not after. “Informed,” to me, means that the rights holders of these homelands understand, in our own language, to make sure we know what exactly is happening or what exactly these mines will be doing. “Consent,” to me, means that after the whole process of duty to consult—the free, prior and informed consent—the rights holders have the right to say if, yes or no, the project should proceed. We have to understand

how negatively the lands, the resources, the people will be impacted.

I must say, as well, that the timelines being put forward are very aggressive. They may be feasible if First Nations, the rights holders, are being engaged right from the beginning. But I do not see this happening. We know this is not happening—Ontario first, First Nations last.

There are a lot of examples in the Kiiwetinoong riding where mining companies come to First Nations with projects to consult on. These companies do not consistently engage with affected First Nations from the beginning of the projects. We have to understand that consultation is not just checking a box. Consultation is obtaining free, prior and informed consent and making sure that the benefits from mining and infrastructure projects flow to the people the land belongs to, not the other way around. When we signed the treaties, we agreed to share the benefits of that treaty, to share the benefits of these lands. This government is working backwards towards treaty. It is colonial. It is oppressive. It is racist.

One of the things I mentioned before: Governments are a lot better than they used to be about talking about reconciliation with First Nations. But I don't see it in action. It's just a lot of talk. I say that because First Nations issues get reduced to vague references to partnership and inclusion in these aggressive plans, these aggressive projects. We have to understand, the rights held by the First Nations people, the rights holders, and our governments are protected by the Constitution. And we can see how well—or not—governments value and respect the rule of law on how they meet the duty to consult.

0950

In an article in the *Breach* last week, Dr. Pam Palmater stated that First Nations predate Canada and are recognized in domestic and international law as having inherent rights to govern over and benefit from our traditional lands and resources. These are not aspirational concepts. These are binding legal obligations to the crown.

We know that the federal and provincial elections are now over, and we now have to wait and see whether Indigenous rights remain a legal and a political priority at both levels of government. We can see with Bill 5 that these rights are going to get narrowed or even ignored under the weight of deregulation, speedy resource extraction and fiscal austerity.

For those of you who do not know, the duty to consult is triggered “any time the crown is considering something that might impact Indigenous rights.” That's when the duty to consult is supposed to be triggered. On this point, Ontario's own draft documents note that if pursuing a permit overhaul, its intention is “that the crown will continue to meet its constitutional obligations to consult with Indigenous communities.” But let me be very clear: Consultation is not consent—period. Consent is a gold standard in development projects, but we rarely, rarely get there.

When the government imposes its deadlines on a particular project or process, that is not always helpful in

moving a project forward. There is an opportunity here to create that new kind of path forward—one in which Aboriginal rights, treaty rights, inherent rights, and free, prior and informed consent are upheld. But, you have to understand, that can't happen if any of this legislation infringes on the rights of the First Nations people. This government needs to do better—no, this government must do better—but respecting First Nations jurisdiction and obtaining consent should be the goal.

Ontario has shown repeatedly that they regularly fail to fulfill their duty to consult. There is a long list of First Nations that have had to take Ontario to court over the crown's failure to meet its obligation. Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug—formerly Big Trout Lake; Eabametoong—that's Fort Hope; Six Nations; Saugeen Ojibway Nation; and Wabauskang First Nation are just some of the First Nations that have had to take Ontario to court because of the failures of duty to consult.

Speaker, there are other constitutional challenges to Ontario's Mining Act that will be heard this year. Applicants in these cases are arguing that the registration of mining claims triggers the duty to consult. We have to understand—we have to know—that duty to consult flows from the honour of the crown. It is an unwritten constitutional principle that requires the government to deal honourably with Indigenous people. This government has failed on this.

The duty to consult arises when the crown has knowledge—real or constructive—of the potential existence of an Aboriginal right or title and contemplates conduct that might adversely affect it. This government has repeatedly ignored this duty.

During the greenbelt scandal in 2022, Ontario was told by the Chiefs of Ontario, representing 133 First Nations, that Bill 23 could fast-track projects that have adverse effects on Indigenous lands, waters, wildlife and treaty rights. They said that the province had failed to engage meaningfully with First Nations “before passing the legislation late last month, despite a constitutional requirement to do so.” Attempts at correspondence with the government of Ontario were unanswered, and the government needed to be held accountable for the blatant disregard of the nation-to-nation relationship.

The then municipal affairs and housing minister, Steve Clark, said that Bill 23 received an endorsement from Ontario Aboriginal Housing Services. That endorsement was not consultation or engagement with First Nations since Ontario Aboriginal Housing Services does not hold any treaty rights. They are not rights holders. The province was also told that they cannot delegate consultation to municipalities as they do not have the constitutional duty to consult with First Nations, as their governments are not considered part of the crown.

I would like to remind this chamber today that the north is full of stories of resistance to projects they did not want—initially, it was the four First Nations in opposition to Ontario's proposal to construct hydroelectric power stations along the Severn River. I don't know how many

First Nations were involved, but they rejected it, and eventually it was formed into a Severn River coalition of eight First Nations to ensure that Ontario recognized the control and the authority of First Nations over their traditional territories.

1000

In February 2006, Platinex Inc., a junior mining company, set up a drilling camp in the traditional territory of Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug. Rights holders, community members, protested at the campsite, as the company did not have their permission to explore. The conflict received international attention when Chief Donny Morris and five council members were jailed in March 2008 for blocking Platinex from accessing the area. The KI6, as they became known, were released three months later, after the successful appeal of their sentence. There were so many First Nations opposed to it.

The history of Canada is one where national interests keep on happening.

Again, this bill is Ontario first, First Nations last.

Let me assure you, our homelands are not for sale. Meegwetch.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): It is now time for questions.

Mr. Ted Hsu: I thank my honourable colleague the member for Kiiwetinoong for his speech.

The question I have for him is whether he thinks the government should have consulted with Indigenous communities before putting together this bill. I think it's very appropriate, because when I asked, in the technical briefing, whether there was any consultation, the answer was no.

My colleague from Kiiwetinoong will remember, in the last Parliament, Bill 71, which was entitled the Building More Mines Act. He and I were in the same technical briefing for that bill. He was the one who asked whether there was consultation with First Nations and Indigenous communities before that bill. The answer, again, that time, was also no.

I'd like to invite my colleague from Kiiwetinoong to comment on that.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Meegwetch for the question.

There are proposed amendments to the Ontario Heritage Act, and one of the things—I got a letter from Grassy Narrows. In their letter, they talk about the proposed legislation, 66.1, and the team's position. You have to remember: They're searching for their ancestors at former sites of Indian residential schools, and they have a concern with the proposed changes that erode the protections of the act, which currently provides for preservation of potential archaeological sites and former Indian residential school sites.

Article 11 of the UNDRIP provides that “Indigenous people have the right to practise and revitalize their cultural traditions and customs.”

The proposed new section 66—ensuring the protection of Indian residential school sites, locations of known and

potential burials and significant archaeological sites, in consultation with affected First Nations, is not happening.

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

Mr. Andrew Dowie: I want to thank the member opposite for his very, very heartfelt words.

I want to zero in on a couple of things related to the Endangered Species Act.

In 2012, the former NDP member from Kenora–Rainy River said this in this House: “The Endangered Species Act is a deeply flawed piece of legislation, no matter which way you look at it. It fails to accomplish its goals of protecting endangered species and their habitat, and the public have lost faith in it, if they ever had faith in it to begin with.” She went on to say, “The Endangered Species Act, as it currently stands, is hurting endangered species.” Those are very strong words from the NDP at the time.

I have a question to my colleague: What changed, and why stand up for this flawed piece of legislation, as identified by one of your former colleagues?

MPP Jamie West: Thank you to the member opposite for the question.

What you’re talking about is an issue that was brought several years ago about the Endangered Species Act.

This bill, though—and if you’re proud of what the bill had, in the opening debate, any of the three ministers who spoke to it would have explained this portion of the bill, but they didn’t. They talked about it as if it was just about mining.

If there are ways to improve the Endangered Species Act, it is by not replacing it with the Environmental Assessment Act, which is completely watered down, and which erodes and misses the point of protecting species. The idea that just the habitat is protected, just where you live—the den is protected, but not where they have to migrate or travel, not where they go for food. That isn’t protecting species. The other flaws are that—the only way you have to protect some of these species is if you can identify it’s the only remaining one. How could you do that? How could you figure that out? It’s deeply flawed.

I would work with you on repairing the ESA, but not with this bill.

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

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I want to thank both of my colleagues for their very powerful words about this bill and the concerns that they have raised.

Certainly, I am hearing from Londoners, who are emailing me and calling me, who are opposed to Bill 5. In particular, they are opposed to the elimination of the Endangered Species Act—the redefinition of “habitat” that is giving the government the power to destroy grasslands and wetlands and forests in our province. They’re concerned about the extraordinary power that the government will have, under the special economic zones, to override provincial laws. They question how this is an appropriate way to support Ontario and face the threat of Trump’s tariffs.

My question to my colleague from Sudbury is, does this help Ontario respond to Trump’s tariffs?

MPP Jamie West: Thank you to my colleague for the question. It is important.

This bill was brought forward as if it was going to help with Donald Trump. As I said in my debate, people are scared right now. People have already lost their jobs. People in southern Ontario in auto manufacturing are losing their jobs and being laid off. In Sault Ste. Marie, there are threats of layoffs. There have been some layoffs in my riding as well.

I am frustrated with the Premier and the Conservative government using this as an opportunity to use those fears to bring in a laundry list of wish lists so they can do whatever they want—using a get-out-of-jail-free magic bill so they can ignore legislation and bylaws and so they can bulldoze endangered species, and so that they can reward their wealthiest donors and break election promises that they made to the good people of Lambton–Kent–Middlesex.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): I recognize the member for Kingston and the Islands.

Mr. Ted Hsu: I failed to thank my colleague from Sudbury, who spoke for the first part of the hour for the official opposition. I also want to thank him for his answer to the previous question, because I think it’s important to point out that this bill doesn’t address the very proximate threats from Donald Trump’s tariffs in the United States.

My question to the member is—let’s be fair. Does this bill contain measures that we might support?

Let me put something forward: There is a new section, 153.0.1 of the Mining Act. The idea behind that act is to cut the time for different government ministries to get together and approve mines. The idea is to coordinate them.

So my question to the member is, are there any parts of this bill that he would like to indicate support for?

1010

MPP Jamie West: Yes, in debate, I talked about how six out of the 229 pages of this bill are supportable. That’s the part that talks about streamlining the process and helping mining companies be more efficient with the permitting that they need. If I could draw a broad amendment, I would amend that we just get rid of the rest of the 223 pages of this bill that don’t really help move that forward. There may be sections in those other areas that are agreeable, if you pick them out. But, really, we’re talking about moving mining forward faster. Even if we’re talking about Donald Trump’s threats, Donald Trump will be the President for three years and three quarters of a year. If we’re opening mines and we’re moving it to seven years from now, that will be three years after Donald Trump is the President. That’s not going to help people today in Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): Quick question? I recognize the member from Mississauga–Lakeshore.

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and congratulations on being in the chair today.

This question will be to the member from Sudbury. I noticed that he was talking about nickel and cobalt. I'm not sure if he has ever read the book *Cobalt Red* that was written by a professor from Harvard regarding what's going on in the Congo right now. Some 75% of the cobalt that we use comes from the Congo, and 13 pounds of that cobalt goes into every electric car that is built around the world.

Do you agree that opening up our Canadian mines would be much better for the environment and much better for the world?

MPP Jamie West: Yes. That's why I recommended that we invest in existing mines right now, so that we can start processing that and reduce our reliance on foreign cobalt. There is cobalt in Ontario right now that we're extracting today—and also, a long-term plan in Ontario.

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

Mr. Ted Hsu: Before I start, let me just say that I will be sharing my time today with the marvellous member for Beaches–East York. It's an honour to join my dear colleague to lead off debate on Bill 5 for the Ontario Liberal caucus.

It has become a habit for this government to do some sloganeering with the short title of government bills. They called this bill, Bill 5, the Protect Ontario by Unleashing our Economy Act. However, upon studying the bill, I think a more appropriate short title would be “don't protect Ontario and use tariffs as cover to unleash lobbying act.” That is a summary of what I think is wrong in principle with Bill 5.

But before I go further, let me say, in fairness, that this bill does contain measures I would support, and I will point them out as I go along in my speech.

For example, they could have focused on the proposed new section 153.0.1 of the Mining Act, and they could have then called this bill the “cutting time to review and approve mines through coordination of different ministries and binding service standards.” I would support that, because it is true that mines take a long time to open. But you've got to do the proper reviews to make sure that you have rules, that we live in a society that's governed by rules and not arbitrary powers that might ignore important concerns.

To summarize, the big problem is that Bill 5 hands out too much unchecked discretionary power to ministers. It indemnifies government officials, as well, from legal actions in several places in the bill, thereby reinforcing the unchecked nature of these new discretionary powers. It does this to fulfill the throne speech's plan to speed up development projects as a response to Donald Trump's—

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): I'm sorry to interrupt the member, but it is now time for members' statements.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

KING CHARLES III CORONATION MEDAL

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: It's a pleasure to rise this morning to report that I recently had the great honour to present seven King Charles Coronation Medals, to recognize outstanding service and community leadership in Mississauga–Lakeshore.

Katie Vincent is a sprint canoeist from Lorne Park, who helped lead the campaign to include women's sprint canoe events in the Olympics, which happened in 2021. In Paris, last year, she was the first Canadian woman to win the Olympic gold medal in a canoe event.

Frank Giannone is the president of Fram Building Group, an award-winning community builder in Port Credit and the founder of the Port Credit Community Foundation, which has done so much to support our community events, like Paint the Town Red and the Southside Shuffle.

Tina Cole was named Industry Person of the Year at the Mississauga Music Awards, recognizing her work to develop and promote independent young Ontario artists.

Carmela Liparoti and Frank Trevisan founded the Mississauga Italian Canadian Benevolent Association, which supports families and seniors across our community.

Noreen Lista is a community leader and co-founder of the Old Credit brewery in Port Credit, recognized as one of the best microbreweries in Canada.

And William Crawford has volunteered with his Lions Club for over 60 years.

Speaker, they represent the absolute best of the Ontario spirit, and again, I want to thank them for everything they've done.

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

MPP Catherine McKenney: I want to take the opportunity, first, to congratulate Yasir Naqvi on his most recent win as member of Parliament in Ottawa Centre—I look forward to working with him to build permanent and deeply affordable housing—and to thank Joel Harden, our former MPP, for his years of service here at the Legislature and in the community.

Shortly after I was elected as MPP, I received a phone call from a woman who was desperately advocating on behalf of her son, who was recently diagnosed with mental illness. He had experienced a psychotic episode in October 2024 and was subsequently arrested on minor charges. In December, he was found not criminally responsible and ordered by a judge to be accepted to the Royal Ottawa Mental Health Centre, but there were no hospital beds. So he remains in custody, unwell and in need of health care. Over the past six months in detention, he has not been receiving the mental health treatment he requires for his recovery. His family fears greatly for his physical safety and his mental well-being.

I bring this to the attention of my colleagues here in the Legislature today to demonstrate the dire need for investment in mental health care beds so that we can remove people from prison who are unwell and do not belong there, and so that we can provide the health care they require to improve their well-being.

MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTION SERVICES

Ms. Lee Fairclough: I'm honoured to rise today to make my first member's statement as the MPP for Etobicoke–Lakeshore.

From May 5 to May 11, agencies, advocates, families and patients are marking mental health awareness week across Canada.

In Canada, one in four people will experience mental illness. We know that addressing mental health early is critical to prevent illness.

Tomorrow, I will be visiting the Jean Tweed Centre, a treatment centre in my riding for women looking to overcome challenges with substance use, gambling and mental health.

Next week, I'll be attending mental health night at my son's school, Silverthorn Collegiate, where he's a student in the high-performance athlete program. The invited speaker is a prominent advocate for mental health in the sports community. It's open to anyone to attend.

Young people aged 15 to 24 are more likely to experience mental illness and substance use disorders than any other age group. Some 39% of Ontario high school students indicate a moderate to serious level of psychological distress, including anxiety and depression.

We have come a long way in addressing stigma, but we have a ways to go in funding mental health like other health care challenges. Mental health is health.

I encourage all MPPs to seek out mental health providers in your communities and learn more about the essential role they play in supporting healthy families and vibrant and prosperous communities.

1020

VERA MITCHELL

MPP George Darouze: Good morning, Madam Speaker. It's my first member's statement this morning.

On April 18, 2025, Carleton lost an icon, with the passing of Vera Mitchell.

Vera was from a generational dairy farming family in rural Ottawa's Osgoode ward. Her life in farming equipped her with a strong work ethic, a sense of community, and exceptional levels of kindness, compassion and integrity. Those qualities gave her a strong foundation for her work as a registered nurse and as a township councillor.

Over the years, she received the Queen's Jubilee Medal for outstanding citizenship, and she was inducted into the Ontario Agricultural Hall of Fame. In 2015, she received the Order of Ottawa for her outstanding contribution to the

agricultural society and many other incredible achievements.

When I entered politics a decade ago, Vera was one of my strongest supporters. She was also very informed when it came to politics and the history of the Osgoode ward, which I proudly served for 10 years.

Her kind-heartedness and generosity will never leave me as I think back on the many occasions we had to share a cup of tea and laughs at her family home on Donevelyn Farms over the years.

Vera was 96 years old and such a special woman indeed. She leaves behind a legacy of selflessness which has inspired generations in our riding. She was also a Sens fan.

UNITED NATIONS PERMANENT FORUM ON INDIGENOUS ISSUES

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Good morning, Speaker. ᑭᓄᑦᑭᓄᑦ

At the end of April, a delegation of Matawa First Nations youth travelled to New York to speak and represent their nations at the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. They were accompanied by two members of the Matawa First Nations management board of directors. These youth were strong and outspoken advocates for our nations in northern Ontario. They reminded our various governments in Ontario, in Canada and globally of the importance of truly committing to a spirit of partnership and reconciliation. They met with other Indigenous youth from nations across the world and made significant connections. They also had critical discussions with leaders like Willie Littlechild and the Ontario Regional Chief Abram Benedict, and even including our former Premier, Ambassador Bob Rae.

While on the global stage, in their statements at the forum, they made sure to address issues close to home. They spoke on how government has the obligation to meaningfully implement treaty agreements and respect our lands and sovereignty as rights holders.

I just want to acknowledge them, recognize them and congratulate them for their leadership

And thank you to the board of directors for empowering our future leaders. Meegwetch.

MARK WILLMER

MPP Billy Denault: My member's statement today is to acknowledge the passing of a man who made tremendous impact during his life through public service to the communities, in my riding, of Arnprior and Madawaska Valley. Mayor Mark Willmer, mayor of Madawaska Valley, passed away unexpectedly during the Easter season.

Mark was a beloved partner, father, grandfather, brother, friend, former councillor for the town of Arnprior, and mayor of Madawaska Valley township. Above all, he was a true public servant.

He spent over 30 years serving the city of Nepean and Ottawa in recreation and municipal government, and 22

years as a councillor in Arnprior. After moving to Madawaska Valley, Mark continued his service as a councillor and mayor.

I had the privilege of knowing Mark during our corresponding time on municipal councils. His warmth, compassion and commitment to community were clear in every conversation we shared.

This evening, many will gather at the Paul Yakabuski centre in Barry's Bay to celebrate his life.

My thoughts and prayers are with Janet, his family, friends, and the many residents whose lives he touched.

As his obituary said so beautifully, "Thank you, Mark, for your love, your leadership, and your light. You changed lives, built communities, and left the world a better, kinder place."

ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN WEEK

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Ontario recognizes the diversity of our great province by commemorating special weeks and month of significance to honour the many different faiths and cultures that are present here.

In December 2024, we unanimously voted to establish an annual Orthodox Christian Week in Ontario and give Orthodox Christians the recognition they deserve.

April 20 of this year marked the inaugural Orthodox Christian Week in Ontario, and it was celebrated at Queen's Park by a gathering of religious leadership of many Orthodox Christian jurisdictions. This special reception was hosted by the Serbian Orthodox and Coptic Orthodox Church, and included the presence of His Eminence Metropolitan Mitrofan of the Serbian Orthodox Diocese of Canada; His Eminence Archbishop Marew of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church of Canada; His Grace Vicar Bishop Athenagoras from the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Canada; His Grace Bishop Mina from the Coptic Orthodox Archdioceses of Mississauga, Vancouver and western Canada; and many very reverend fathers from different Orthodox Christian jurisdictions.

This important delegation was welcomed and greeted by a strong MPP presence, including the leader of the official opposition, the Minister of Citizenship and Multiculturalism, Orthodox Christian and other MPPs and, of course, you, Madam Speaker.

The inaugural Orthodox Christian Week in Ontario was a resounding success, but it has only begun. With the help of Orthodox Christians across our great province, this special week will continue to grow in prominence, and its future is truly bright.

Thank you to all who celebrated and helped make this important annual recognition a part of the future of Ontario.

CHARLES DAVIS

Mr. Andrew Dowie: I rise today to honour a true Canadian hero, Charles Davis, a beloved member of the Windsor community and a decorated veteran of the Second World War.

Charlie was born in Port Dover, and he enlisted in the Royal Canadian Artillery in 1941. Just three months later, he was in the United Kingdom, training for the Allied liberation of Europe. While stationed there, he met the love of his life, Doris, in London's East End.

On June 10, 1944, four days after D-Day, Charlie landed in Normandy. He drove an ammunition truck from Juno Beach to the front lines, resupplying Canadian troops under constant threat. He took part in the liberation of France, Belgium and the Netherlands, and advanced into Germany with his comrades.

In 1994, Charlie returned to Juno Beach for the 50th anniversary of D-Day. He made that pilgrimage every five years; his last visit was just last year.

His courage, humility and dedication to country have left us a lasting legacy.

Charles Davis passed away on April 10 of this year, at the age of 102. His presence will be deeply missed in Windsor, especially among his many friends at the Royal Canadian Legion Branch 255 in Riverside.

To his children, Terri, Jacqueline, Patricia and Sandra, and all who loved him—and there are so many in the community who did: Thank you for sharing Charlie with us. Canada is forever in his debt, and we'll miss him dearly.

DOCTORS' DAY

MPP Bill Rosenberg: Today is Doctors' Day in Ontario, a chance to recognize the tremendous contributions of physicians across our province. From urban centres to remote, rural communities like mine, Ontario doctors are there when we need them most. They are the backbone of our health care system—from family doctors, who are the first point of contact, to specialists who provide expert care and help patients through some of the most complex moments of their lives.

Throughout April and May, MPPs are meeting with local physicians to learn more about the incredible work they do.

Recently, I had the opportunity to meet with Dr. Dannica Switzer to discuss solutions to some of the challenges facing northern Ontario, including the need for better access to care and stronger supports for the physician workforce. I look forward to continuing this important dialogue during an upcoming meeting with another dedicated local physician.

Doctors are on the front lines every day, diagnosing, treating and advocating—often going above and beyond to ensure that patients get the care they need.

I want to thank the Ontario Medical Association for helping to facilitate these productive conversations and for being a strong voice for doctors.

Tonight, landmarks across Ontario, including the CN Tower and Niagara Falls, will be lit blue in honour of Doctors' Day.

1030

To Ontario's doctors: Thank you. Your dedication and compassion do not go unnoticed. Happy Doctors' Day.

KATE NIXON

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I rise with a heavy heart today to recognize a young person from Guelph who dedicated her life to helping those in need. Kate Nixon was a founder of Your Downtown Guelph Friends, a trusted and vital source of support for people experiencing hunger and homelessness. Tragically, Kate passed away on December 29, 2024, after a short illness. She was 23 years old.

Kate had a special gift of being able to help people by meeting them where they are. Her empathy, compassion and creativity were evident in all that she did—whether providing people with food and clothing, or volunteering with the Guelph Humane Society, Hope House or Bracelet of Hope.

Kate was a tireless advocate. Just before her passing, she delegated to city council, calling for the need to preserve the charter rights of unhoused people. In her delegation, as in her life, Kate reminded us that everyone deserves to be treated with dignity.

Kate is deeply missed by the people in downtown Guelph who experienced her kindness and empathy.

Since her passing, the community has raised \$12,000 to support Your Downtown Guelph Friends.

Personally, Kate inspired me to be a voice for people in need in our community.

I want to extend my heartfelt condolences to Kate's family and her many friends in Guelph.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I'd like to welcome Cecelia LaRose and Nureesa LaRose from my riding. They're my constituents.

Welcome to the Legislature. I hope we're well behaved for you today.

Mr. Tyler Allsopp: I rise today to wish a very special happy fourth birthday to my twin daughters, Riley and Everly. Girls, I love you very much. I hope you have a great day. Please make sure you give Mom a big hug and a big thank you, because all that birthday magic doesn't happen on its own. I can't wait to see you and celebrate with you this weekend. Happy birthday.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Today I'd like to welcome to our House Marianne Tiwa Nkōmbou. She is the sister of the page from St. Catharines.

I want to say a special thank you to all of our pages, but especially to my page from St. Catharines, Kylian Antonin Tiwa. He's representing his peers from a school in downtown St. Catharines—Immaculate Conception.

Thank you for all you've done, Kylian.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: I'd like to acknowledge Finn Walsh from my riding of Don Valley West, who is serving as page captain today, and also welcome his parents and grandma, who are here today in support. I had lunch with Finn yesterday, and he's an amazing young man.

Thank you to all the pages; in particular, Finn.

Thank you, Finn.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I'd like to welcome Vic, our MSW placement student, and Courtney. They make our office a welcoming place for every single member of our community, especially the most vulnerable.

Thanks for the hard work you do.

MPP Chris Scott: I want to take a moment to recognize Daniel Giroux, the president of Collège Boréal, a great northern school. He's in town today. He's an absolute champion for Franco-Ontarians. I'm happy to have him here.

MPP Andrea Hazell: I'd like to welcome Lalin Hasanova and the Azerbaijan Art and Culture Centre to Queen's Park. Congratulations on your 10th anniversary. Welcome to your House.

Everyone is invited to visit the reception in rooms 227 and 228 at 12 p.m.

Welcome to your House.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: I'd like to welcome the Canadian Parents for French Ontario chapter. They hosted a lovely breakfast reception. I look forward to our meeting this afternoon.

And a very special welcome to all the trustees and educators here. And a very special welcome to my friend TDSB trustee Dee Williams.

Hon. Zee Hamid: I'd like to welcome a remarkable young man, Krish Agarwal, from my riding, who is finishing his page duty today. He is joined by his parents, Nidhi and Amit Agarwal.

Welcome to the House, and thank you.

Mr. Billy Pang: It's my pleasure to welcome Waleed Malik from Markham—Unionville to Queen's Park today. Waleed is the proud father of today's page captain Haajrah Malik.

Thank you for joining us. I can't wait to meet your parents, Mr. and Mrs. Malik, later today. Welcome to Queen's Park.

M^{me} France Gélinas: J'aimerais souhaiter la bienvenue au président du Collège Boréal, Daniel Giroux, qui est ici avec le groupe Canadian Parents for French. Bienvenue.

Mrs. Daisy Wai: I'd like to give a shout-out to my page from Richmond Hill, Leah Wong, and her proud mother.

Welcome to Queen's Park, Sachi Shen. I look forward to having lunch with you after question period.

Ms. Laura Smith: I'd like to thank everyone who is here for the 77th anniversary of Israel's Independence Day and for the flag-raising that's happening just after the proceedings.

QUESTION PERIOD

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Ms. Marit Stiles: The government's financial watchdog warned yesterday that we're heading for a recession—growth cut in half, jobs on the line. And what was the Premier's response? It was, "Well, let's just see what

happens.” That’s what he said, Speaker. He said, “Let’s see what happens.”

Well, we’ve seen what happens when the response is to wait around. More than 12,000 auto workers in Windsor are already off the job thanks to closures at Stellantis—temporary closures, but closures nonetheless.

I have to ask, does the Premier understand what’s at stake for Ontario workers right now?

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

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: This government absolutely knows what’s at stake. In fact, we ran a campaign just a few months ago—a campaign to protect jobs, to protect the economy, to protect communities, to protect families across this great province.

And one thing is very clear: The status quo is no longer an option.

We are going to do what it takes to support the hard-working men and women of this great province.

Some of the actions that we’ve taken to date include \$11 billion of relief for businesses and workers in this province. Do you know why we’re able to do that? Because we have a fiscal framework and a balance sheet that has never been stronger in the last couple of decades, because of our fiscal prudence, respecting taxpayer money, and making sure that we can support those families and hard-working—

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Supplementary.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Well, I’m going to go back to the Premier.

We have seen this before. In 2018, when tariffs were hitting our steel and aluminum industries, GM announced it was shutting down the Oshawa plant. And do you remember what the Premier said? He told workers, “The ship has already left the dock.” But it was workers, unions and New Democrats who refused to give up, and we kept good jobs in Oshawa.

It’s the same old story once again. Workers in Windsor are literally standing in front of trucks as the company is putting their equipment on those trucks. They’re seeing their jobs and their futures are being shipped south—

Interjections.

Ms. Marit Stiles: And they may think it’s a laughing matter, but I guarantee you, the workers of Windsor do not.

Will the Premier finally learn from his own mistakes and stop this laissez-faire approach? Fight like hell to save these jobs.

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: When those jobs were lost in Oshawa, do you know who went to Oshawa that night? This Premier. I was with this Premier. He met with the workers. He met with the businesses. Do you know what happened? On the drive back to Queen’s Park, he was on the phone taking call after call after call from those affected workers in that plant. He cared.

And do you know what this Premier has done? He has brought back a million jobs into this province since we got elected.

1040

Madam Speaker, while the NDP and the Liberals slept, 300,000 left this province, went south of the border and across the land—and so what did we do? We put the conditions in place to bring back those jobs—

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Supplementary.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Well, I wouldn’t be bragging so much when you’ve got 7.5% unemployment already and your own financial watchdog says we’re heading towards that recession.

We are seeing mixed messages from this Premier, and we’re used to that, right? But what people need right now is a clear message.

In 2018, Trump slapped tariffs on Ontario steel; the Premier backed down. In 2020, Trump threatened again, and this Premier still said he was 100% happy when Trump won last year. We remember. Ontarians remember. And now he’s saying he will protect Ontario. Speaker, which is it?

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: There’s a lot of chirping on this side of the House that’s coming from the Premier.

Madam Speaker, do you know what leadership looks like? Do you know what setting the conditions for job growth and GDP growth looks like? Boosting the economy? Canadian free trade—lowering the inter-provincial trade barriers. Under this Premier, the leadership of Doug Ford—he stood up and said, “We are going to lower the barriers in Ontario. We’re going to bring free trade to Canada.” He took a leadership role, along with the Premier of Nova Scotia. That’s what true leadership looks like. When that comes for a vote, I hope the Leader of the Opposition and the parties over there, including the Liberals, join us for free trade and the jobs in Ontario.

SUPPORTIVE HOUSING

Ms. Marit Stiles: I heard the Premier said he wants to answer the question. If only he was in charge, right? If only he was in charge.

Speaker, I want to talk about supportive housing. The Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing commissioned their own report from KPMG that showed that every one dollar spent on supportive housing saves the province up to \$2 million. The government had the numbers in hand, and yet they did nothing. Since then, the waiting list for that supportive housing has grown from 14,000 to 36,000. Now we see the consequences in our parks, in our shelters, in our emergency rooms.

When the Premier sees this crisis growing in plain sight, does he still believe that the cost of inaction is worth it?

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

Hon. Rob Flack: As you know, our government is focused on building Ontario’s housing supply—all types of housing. When you take a look at the bill we introduced yesterday, we’re going to continue to support all people and all needs in all parts of this province. We know the solution to making housing attainable is to make more

homes. That is what we're going to do. Speed is important. The cost of building is important.

Under this Premier, Ontario is working with our federal and municipal partners to support the construction of all types of homes. It's working. We're getting the job done. Take a look at the results. We're seeing our rental starts up 10% year over year and up 18,000 last year.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Supplementary?

Ms. Marit Stiles: Let me be very clear: The solution to people sleeping outside is housing. That is the solution, and you know that.

But this Premier, this government, buried the report. They buried that report, and they also ignored the Housing Affordability Task Force.

After seven years of inaction, of failing to build a single house, a single supportive housing unit, we are seeing encampments in every community.

Supportive housing isn't just smart; it is urgent. The housing and homelessness crisis is getting worse. As I said, experts—their own experts—say we need 36,000 new supportive housing units right now. But what has the government promised? Just 560. You think that's going to make a dent in the problem?

Does the Premier really think that 560 units will clear a wait-list of 36,000, or is he just hoping that Ontarians won't notice the math?

Hon. Rob Flack: Well, if you take a look at the legislation that we introduced yesterday, our government has listened to the people. This was part of our mandate, our election platform in the last election. We want safer municipalities throughout this province.

Remember one thing: Encampments are not a solution to homelessness. We want to make sure, in our whole housing continuum—everybody wants to enjoy public parks and spaces. They are meant to be fun, not to be feared. That is why we are clearing out encampments. That is why we are going to support, through our HART hubs throughout this province, to ensure that people have safe and affordable wraparound services.

The job is getting done. I don't find her approach to this is helping—because, ultimately, it's about investment and getting home builders involved. We are doing that. We're listening, we're learning, and we're investing in this province.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Supplementary?

Ms. Marit Stiles: We know what works, right? What they're doing does not work. It hasn't produced results. We hear words after words and empty promise after empty promise. It isn't getting it done.

You close, you kick people out of an encampment, they go to another park, because there is no housing.

More importantly, there is no supportive housing. We know supportive housing saves lives, and it also saves money.

Under this Premier, I want to be clear—and I would love to hear the Premier actually answer this question. Under his watch, the wait-list has more than doubled. That is his legacy. It is people in encampments. It is more pressure on our emergency rooms. It is more strain on our

hospitals and our jails. And it is more stress on our main streets.

If the Premier won't invest in supportive housing because it's the right thing to do, will he at least do it because it is the cost-effective thing to do?

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

Interjections.

Hon. Doug Ford: Thank you for that standing ovation. I greatly appreciate it.

Well, just to refresh the Leader of the Opposition's memory: We led the charge on removing the HST on purpose-built rentals. But guess what? You voted against that. We eliminated the municipal fees on affordable non-profit housing that you talk about. But why did you vote against it? We introduced over \$3 billion in new funding for municipalities to help build a housing-enabling fund. Why did you vote against it? Both of you voted against it. This includes \$1.2 billion for those who met or exceeded their housing targets. Again, you talk about it, but you voted against it—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The opposition will come to order.

Hon. Doug Ford: We expanded by giving \$120 million to small and northern rural communities, but all of you voted against it again.

You vote against everything. Yes, you talk a lot, but you do absolutely nothing, and that is why you lost for the third time in a row.

JUSTICE SYSTEM

Mr. John Fraser: My question is for the Premier.

But before I get started, Premier, I saw your picture on Twitter yesterday. I love your shirt. I always knew that deep down you wanted to be just like me.

Yesterday, the Premier had a lot of things to say—a lot. He was quite chatty, I would say. Here is a quote: “Last time I checked there hasn't been any judges elected. Maybe that's the problem—we should do what the US does. Let's start electing our judges, holding them accountable....”

My question to the Premier is, did he mean this, or was he just trying to distract from the fact that he gave a foreign company \$2.2 billion in taxpayers' money and a 95-year lease—a company that had literally no money and no experience?

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

Hon. Doug Downey: Our government was given a very strong mandate, just recently, earlier in February.

1050

The current bail system is not working the way that it should be. We are after the feds to do their part, but we're not waiting for them; we're doing what we can to tighten up that system. People are frustrated with not feeling safe in their homes, not feeling safe in their driveways, not feeling safe at work, and on the way in between. We have

to do something for the victims of justice—we are doing something; you will hear more about it later today.

We are making investments—everything from training spaces for police to hiring police to doing bail review to adding prosecutors, specialized teams, guns and gangs, adding judges.

We are doing things across the system. All I hear from the Liberals is, “Don’t do anything any time soon, and we just want to talk about things that nobody wants to hear about.”

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

Mr. John Fraser: Speaker, the Attorney General would know that the reason that we have an independent judiciary is to hold all of us, including the Premier, accountable. That’s a pillar of democracy.

Here’s another gem: “I have an idea ... why don’t we have the next election the PC Party, the Liberal Party, the NDP party, the Green Party and the judges’ party, because they like to overturn everything, like bike lanes.”

So my question to the Premier is, why are you so hell-bent on bringing US-style courts to our province?

Hon. Doug Downey: One of two things is true, Madam Speaker: Either the Liberals aren’t hearing what we’re hearing from the Ontarians who contact us—and I suspect that may be the truth because that is reflected in the results of the last election—or it’s that they’re hearing it and they just don’t care.

We will not put up with that. We are making investments in our system from toe to top. We’re making sure that the judges, the prosecutors, the police, the victim service workers, the navigators and all of the players in the justice system have the resources that they need to bring justice quickly so that people have the ability to have their matters heard, and so that we can protect victims and give the supports that they need—everything from pre-crime, where we’re dealing with HART hubs and wraparound support services, to justice centres, when people enter the space, to fast hearings.

We are doing everything across the board, and the Liberals are saying, “Do you know what? Just don’t worry about that. We want to talk about nonsense.”

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Supplementary?

Mr. John Fraser: I don’t think we sent the Premier to Washington so he could import the US judicial system. I don’t think that’s the purpose.

Where I come from, if you say something out loud, a whole bunch of things out loud, you have to at least have the cojones to stand up and respond to it.

Interjection.

Mr. John Fraser: I withdraw.

Interjection.

Mr. John Fraser: You’re exactly right. It was worth it.

Here’s another gem, guys: “These judges that are bleeding hearts, I can’t wait until they retire. Matter of fact, I’ll pay them to retire earlier. I’ll pay you out for two, three, four years. Just get out of the system...”

Is there a reason that the Premier wants to undermine confidence in our judges and our judicial system in this

province? Does he want to discredit the courts the way that Donald Trump does? Is he watching that? Is that what he’s doing? Is he mimicking and imitating him?

Hon. Doug Downey: Madam Speaker, the level of frustration that we hear from the public when crime is happening in their communities, the crime that people are experiencing, their neighbours—there are communities that have had to hire their own private security, they feel so unsafe in their own yard. This needs to stop.

We are putting resources in, from hiring police to having hearings to creating wraparound services. We’ve increased the threshold for income eligibility for individuals in the system through legal aid. We are doing things in every part of the system.

What the Liberals are telling us is, “We hear the community, but we don’t believe you, and we don’t care.”

JUSTICE SYSTEM

Mr. John Fraser: That’s the problem. They don’t care. That’s the problem.

Speaker, back to the Premier: This is the same Premier who tried to hire one of his closest friends as the commissioner of the OPP, the biggest police force in Ontario, until a retired judge, an Integrity Commissioner, wrote a 108-page report.

So it sounds to me like the Premier wants to have both ends of the system. He wants to be the arbiter of who’s guilty, of who gets charged, and he says this too—“The system is broken and there’s a lot of terrible, terrible, bleeding-heart judges.” Does the Premier really believe this, or is he just performing for the cameras?

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

Hon. Doug Downey: There you have it, Madam Speaker: The Liberals are saying the system is working fine. Well, the system isn’t working fine. The system needs help.

That’s why, last year, we made a commitment of \$29 million, to add a minimum of 25 new judges to the system. Now, when we add a judge to the system, it’s not just a judge; it’s a prosecutor, it’s a clerk, it’s a victim support worker—it’s about seven members of the administration for each judge. We added 25 last year, but more needs to be done. That’s why I said on Monday that we’re adding 17 more. That’s 42 new judges and wraparound supports for the system. This is not just historic; this is seismic. This will change the speed and the ability to have people have a fair and impartial hearing, faster.

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

Mr. John Fraser: Not if the Premier is doing that hearing.

Here’s another quote—but this one is not from the Premier. This is from the Attorney General, who has got a great quote this morning—that he doesn’t care. I will add this—and he says this in reference to the Premier: “You should see what he says in private.” We all kind of know what he says in private, because we’ve got the greenbelt,

we've got MZO's, we've got Therme—so it's about what he says in public that concerns me most.

A couple of years ago, a young father, Umar Zameer, was charged with a terrible, terrible, terrible crime. He had a young family. And the Premier spoke publicly, literally within 24 hours, presuming the guilt of that man. Publicly, the Premier, the top political office in this province, said that. He was later found not guilty.

Would the Premier like to apologize to Umar and his family today?

Hon. Doug Downey: I don't know how that connects to anything that we were just talking about. But I'm happy to address the great work of those in our system.

We have the gold standard of judges in this province. The system we use to appoint them is superior to the federal system. I'm very proud of the work that we do. And the Chief Justices we have in this province are the best in the country—all three of them.

I can tell you that the working relationship our government has with the courts as we move forward through MAG and through other parts of government is second to none.

I am very proud of the work we are doing to improve the system, whether it be for individuals who are encountering it for the first time, or whether they're going through tough times in family law, or whether they're going through civil litigation. We are changing the system, because we are fixing the system. We are not content to let it sit by and be an apologist, as the Liberals are.

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

Mr. John Fraser: I'm just going to take that as, "There is no need to apologize."

The government has appointed their own people—actually, former staffers—to the JAAC, and even one who was a gun lobbyist at the time. So I don't know what the problem is with appointing judges here. Maybe somebody can talk to the Attorney General.

Our courts have to be independent and fair. It's not good for any of us to talk like Donald Trump and call into question the judgment of the people we put on the bench, just because we don't like what we see, just because we don't want to be held accountable, just because we want to say, "I, the Premier, am the top voice of morality and judgment and law in this province." It's not his job.

Speaker, I'm going to ask one more time: Will the Premier apologize to Umar and his family?

Hon. Doug Downey: We received a very clear mandate from the people of Ontario to fix the system, to fix the bail system, to make sure that the resources are there so that the system can work. We are frustrated beyond belief that the federal government has not done its part yet, but we will be on them. As the Premier says, he'll be on them like an 800-pound gorilla, because we have to fix this. But we're not waiting for them. We're doing our part first. You're going to hear more about it this afternoon. We are putting the resources in, we're changing structural pieces, and we're going to make the system move faster.

There is nothing that the Liberals have to offer, that they are saying, that is constructive. It's all throwing mud on the way by, but I hope they up their game during the debates.

1100

JUSTICE SYSTEM

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: My question is back to the Attorney General.

Yesterday, the Premier proposed abolishing judicial independence in Ontario by electing judges, as they do in the United States. This is because one independent judge approved a temporary injunction to pause the removal of Toronto bike lanes so that he could prepare his final ruling.

Can the Attorney General name even one single legal organization in Canada that supports the Premier's plan to eliminate our independent judiciary?

Hon. Doug Downey: It's unfortunate the House leader of the Liberals' lead question stole half of that question—because it's the same answer: We were elected to fix the system. We were elected to fix the bail system.

Here's what we are doing about bail. The Solicitor General has done an awesome job of making sure that we have bail compliance teams, that we have police officers checking in with people to make sure that they are doing—and that they are where they're supposed to be. That wasn't happening before—not in the volume that it should. So we added resources to these ROPE teams, and they're out there. But we're doing more, because we are putting in place specialized prosecutors so that when individuals aren't doing what they're supposed to do in the places where they're supposed to be, there are consequences.

The public expects there to be a consequence for actions, and we are making that happen.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Speaker, please note that the Attorney General failed to answer that question, which is why he's getting another one.

During a time when Canadians are standing proud in the fight against Donald Trump's attack on our sovereignty, this Premier wants to throw open the back doors for him by Americanizing our independent court system. It's a shame that the Premier doesn't understand that judges don't work for him or any other politicians, nor should they.

When will the Premier stop acting like Trump and start acting on the recommendations of the Law Society of Ontario to fix the horrific court backlogs?

Hon. Doug Downey: I talk to all legal organizations, I talk to the law society—I talk to all of them, and they appreciate the resources that we're putting into the system. When we added 42 new judges, they understand what that means. When we put in guns and gangs specialized prosecution teams to deal with illegal firearms coming across our border and keep our community safe, they understand what that means. When we're doing the Civil Rules Review—the Rules of Civil Procedure have not been reviewed in a comprehensive way in over 40 years—they are excited about that.

So I will take no lessons from the NDP about what's good for the system. I will continue to move forward to revitalize the system, change it, make it more relevant, and meet the expectations of the people of Ontario.

JUSTICE SYSTEM

Mr. Stephen Blais: My question is for the Premier.

What the Premier is proposing by electing judges isn't just reckless; it's exactly what we've come to expect from this government: cash-for-access decision-making, political overreach—and now, an open invitation to influence our courts. This has been a long time coming. Remember, the Premier appointed his former deputy, a gun lobbyist, to chair the Judicial Appointments Advisory Committee.

We don't need American-style chaos in the system. We don't need a justice system that looks like Donald Trump's, where loyalty matters more than the rule of law. The Premier said he would stand up to Donald Trump, not become a maple syrup version of him.

Will the Premier admit it isn't just a rant; that it is a road map, and that he's willing to trade judicial independence for political control over our courts?

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The leader of the third party will come to order.

Hon. Doug Downey: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

For those who weren't here before 2018 or who weren't necessarily involved in politics—I cannot believe that the Liberals even say the words “cash for access.” That is unbelievable.

In the supplementary, I expect to hear about gas plants—but it could be upside-down bridges. It could be any number of things.

Let's go back to basics. We were elected to put boots on the ground; to have consequences for actions; to make sure that when people are on bail, they do what they're supposed to do in the places they're supposed to be, and that when somebody uses a gun in a crime, they are held to account.

But we're going beyond that. We're setting up—it's already set up—a specialized prosecution team for cyber crime, a first in Canada.

We are doing so many things to combat crime, and I wish the opposition would stand with us.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Before we continue—I do not want to hear the term “cash for access” in this chamber.

I recognize the member for Orléans.

Mr. Stephen Blais: They were elected to put Ontario first, not to transform into maple MAGAs right in front of us.

This isn't just a bad week for the Premier; it's a pattern. First, he stacked the appointments committee with his political allies. Now, he's floating American-style judicial elections—the kind of elections that turn courtrooms into campaign stops and judges into fundraisers.

Let's be clear: This isn't reform. It is a power grab.

If the Premier thinks that he can quietly politicize our courts while Ontarians aren't watching, he's desperately mistaken.

We don't elect judges in Canada for a reason: because justice should be blind, not driven by political ideology or campaign donations.

Will the Premier come clean and just tell this House whether he still believes in judicial independence or not?

Hon. Doug Downey: Members of their caucus want to defund the police. That's a non-starter for us. And now they don't want criminals behind bars. So it's very difficult to have a rational conversation when their premise is wrong.

Mr. Stephen Blais: Say that outside. See how it goes for you.

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

Hon. Doug Downey: Clearly, pushed a button, Madam Speaker.

They want us to name things and one thing of this and one thing of that. I would challenge the member opposite to name one judge we have appointed who he thinks is not right.

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Andrew Dowie: My question is for the Attorney General.

Speaker, the people of Windsor–Tecumseh and across Ontario are concerned about the growing threat of rising crime. They want to feel safe in their homes, on their streets and in their communities. They want a justice system that is fast and fair and that puts victims first, not criminals. They want real change, not more excuses from NDP and Liberal governments. This was vocalized very clearly on Monday. This is also why our government made a clear promise during the last election: We'll crack down on crime, protect families and make Ontario safer.

Our government must keep acting to strengthen our courts, make bail tougher, and work with police to stop serious crime.

Can the Attorney General please tell the House more about the new measures that we are taking to protect Ontario and keep people safe?

Hon. Doug Downey: I really appreciate the question from the member for Windsor–Tecumseh. He's so dedicated in his community. I was talking to a radio show down there about what a great mayor you have down in your space. And the police chief out of Windsor is fantastic.

The legislation we're talking about is about public safety and protecting our communities. It is a top priority for us. We moved very quickly after the last election. We're working with law enforcement, the justice sector. We're expanding measures to crack down on serious crime—and not just violent firearm crime, but auto theft, as you've heard from us before, and cyber attacks, which I just mentioned a moment ago.

The proposed measures would strengthen Ontario's court and correctional systems by improving the administration of bail, streamlining the process for judicial appointments, and expanding justice centres across the province. We are proposing stronger measures to improve the efficiency and efficacy of our courts.

I'll have more to say in the second question.

Mr. Andrew Dowie: Speaker, we know that crime is changing. Whether it's auto theft, drug crime or online attacks, the people of Ontario want a justice system that can keep up. They want action. They want to know that the courts, the police and our laws are working together to keep them safe. That's why our government must keep moving forward.

It's encouraging to see real action—like tougher bail rules, more judges, and stronger laws to fight crime. These efforts show that our government is serious about protecting victims and making sure that those who break the law face real consequences.

1110

Speaker, can the Attorney General explain how these new measures will give our justice system the tools that it needs to better protect Ontario families and communities like mine?

Hon. Doug Downey: Thank you for the question. It is true: We're not just focused on the criminals—although we are very focused on the criminals. But we're also focused on the victims. And with the new legislation, we're targeting action to keep the people of Ontario safe in their communities by increasing the tools that address serious crime.

If passed, the legislation is going to increase tools to address intimate partner violence by amending the Family Law Act and the Children's Law Reform Act to make family law restraining orders against abusers more accessible.

We're improving bail collection, and we're starting a process to comprehensively review that bail system, and we will be after the federal government to do their part.

We're exploring legislative options to crack down on illicit drug production and trafficking.

We're continuing our auto theft efforts with our major prosecution teams.

And we're making the justice system more effective by adding 17 more judges, for a total of 42, to the complement.

These proposals will strengthen our system and ensure that everybody has the tools they need to combat crime.

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: My question is for the Premier.

In a time of harmful tariffs and threatening talk of annexation, Canadians want to do the right thing and support Canadian jobs and businesses. So let's give Ontarians the information they want and need.

Yesterday, we in the official opposition tabled a motion to make big box stores clearly label goods and foods made in Ontario and Canada, or imported from the United

States, so we can easily buy Ontario and buy Canada with our hard-earned money. They voted no.

How could you vote against that?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize the Minister of Public and Business Service Delivery and Procurement.

Hon. Stephen Crawford: The member opposite talks about supporting Ontario. This is the government that brought in signs, as you cross the border into Ontario from Manitoba, from New York, from Quebec—it says, "Open for business." This government is committed to supporting Ontario businesses throughout the province.

Many businesses right here in the province have voluntarily put signs up highlighting products that are made in Ontario, made in Canada.

Speaker, consumers are speaking. They're going to Ontario-made and Canadian-made products.

But what we don't want to do is put more burden, more regulation on the small businesses of Ontario.

We've talked to them. I suggest you talk to them and get their input.

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

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Big grocers are raking in record profits, colluding to fix the price of bread, and punishing Ontario families with sky-high, gouging food costs.

If big grocery chains can stick a label on a product when it goes on sale, they can certainly stick on a label to show us when they hike the price of that same product.

Our motion yesterday demanded that big box stores and large grocery stores clearly label it when they hike prices. But this government disagreed.

Why does this government keep calling consumer protection and transparency "red tape"?

Hon. Stephen Crawford: Again, I would caution the member opposite to actually go out and talk to businesses, talk to consumers.

We believe in free enterprise. We don't believe in controlling prices. That just doesn't make sense.

Let me say that I do agree with the member opposite on one thing: Ontarians do deserve to make informed choices, especially when it comes to spending their hard-earned money. That's why we're taking real action to both protect Ontario consumers and support the businesses that drive our economy.

But let's be clear: We are not going to burden the hard-working small businesses with unnecessary red tape. This is only going to confuse customers, confuse businesses. We have a minister of red tape right here. We have the most regulations of any subnational government in Canada—380,000. Our goal is to make it easier for consumers—not with more regulation, more red tape.

We'll continue supporting consumers in the province of Ontario.

JUSTICE SYSTEM

M^{me} Lucille Collard: The Premier's recent comments attacking members of Ontario's judiciary, calling them

“bleeding hearts,” suggesting they should be paid to retire, and even proposing we elect judges like in the United States, are not just inflammatory; they are deeply dangerous. Judicial independence is not a luxury. It is a pillar of our democracy, and when the Premier dismisses that independence because he doesn’t like a ruling, he isn’t just criticizing a decision; he’s undermining confidence in the rule of law itself—and the three Ontario Chief Justices just agreed with that, as they publicly stated.

My question is to the Attorney General. Will he stand in this House today and unequivocally affirm the independence of Ontario’s judiciary and reject the Premier’s Trump-inspired suggestion that judges should be elected or removed based on ideology?

Hon. Doug Downey: The Liberals across cling to quotes and cling to this and cling—they’re not even paying attention to the victims. We’re talking about a frustration that is boiling over in this province. It is the expression of frustration that the system is not working properly for the people of Ontario. When we knocked on tens of thousands of doors, we heard it at the doors—we hear it from our constituents. They want this province to do better.

We are committed to fixing this. This is why we got elected. We’re putting the resources in, we’re putting the people in—we are making the system work better. We welcome the federal government to come join us to make it work as best as it can. But we’re not going to stand and throw quotes back and forth, back and forth.

Their premise is wrong. Their inability to say that we should even be hiring police makes it very difficult to follow their path.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Back to the member from Ottawa–Vanier.

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Speaker, what we heard from the Premier is not leadership. It is a reckless attack on the very foundation of our justice system. When judges are pressured to rule in favour of political interests or face threats of public dismissal, it undermines the rule of law.

The Attorney General’s silence in the face of these comments is also troubling. His role is not to cheer-lead for the Premier but to defend the integrity of our legal system.

I will ask again: Will the Attorney General clearly denounce the Premier’s remarks, commit to protecting judicial independence, and assure Ontarians that decisions in our courts will be based on law, not political pressure?

Hon. Doug Downey: This is the problem with pre-printed questions—she says my “silence”? I’ve gone through more water today than I have in the last week.

This is about the victims. This is about the people, our constituents, who we hear from, who are afraid in their own homes. People are breaking into homes to get keys, to take cars, with guns, with gangs. This is not acceptable in our province. We will not put up with it, and we will fix it.

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Mr. Mike Schreiner: My question is for the Premier.

The special economic zones in Bill 5 will give cabinet unprecedented powers to allow them to hand-pick any corporation that won’t have to obey any law—including labour, health and safety standards, environmental rules, and provincial and local planning laws. These zones will have zero legislative oversight, zero rules and zero consultation with everyday people and First Nations.

I want to be clear: I’ll work across party lines to fight Trump, but not for a bill that is a race to the bottom. Bill 5 is the kind of power grab and end-run around legislative democracy that caused the Premier of BC to backtrack last month.

My question for the Premier: Will he also backtrack on Bill 5, put forward a bill that will build—

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

Hon. Victor Fedeli: We are in an economic war. We just returned from Germany, Japan and South Korea, and businesses are grappling on how to deal with this unprecedented amount of uncertainty. It’s affecting the entire global economy. Businesses are looking for stability—a reliable partner that can give them that certainty, that predictability, and we’ve told them that Ontario is that partner. They want to know that their projects won’t be held up in red tape, bureaucracy and lengthy permitting processes. The competition to land these investments is going to be greater than ever before, and we need to show them that Ontario is the place to be for their new investments.

1120

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Speaker, we are in an economic war, and that’s exactly why we need to respect democracy, respect legislative rights, and respect First Nations—our duty to consult.

Let’s be clear: Trampling on First Nations rights will actually slow—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Stop the clock.

I apologize to the member for Guelph. Please continue.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Trampling on the constitutional duty to consult will actually slow down development. Removing labour standards, environmental protections and consultation with people will actually undermine public confidence and the social licence to build.

Let’s fight Trump not with Trump-style policies but by respecting the will of this Legislature and the rules it makes.

So I want to say to the minister: Will you work with us to build faster while respecting democracy and First Nations rights?

Hon. Victor Fedeli: Speaker, there is a chill on business investment across the world right now. Companies can’t make their investment decisions if they don’t have a clear understanding of what the political, the economic and the regulatory environment is going to be. And that uncertainty comes from the Trump tariffs.

While this presents a very, very serious challenge to Ontario and other jurisdictions around the globe, it also

opens a window of opportunity. That pause of investment decisions is leaving a glut of capital that is building up. Eventually, that glut of capital will need somewhere to land. That's why we're moving forward with actions right now to ensure that Ontario is the destination of choice for that glut of capital.

Join us in supporting the strategic economic zone bill.

TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE

MPP Bill Rosenberg: Madam Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Transportation.

Families and businesses across Ontario are counting on strong roads and highways to stay connected and prosper.

For too long, northern Ontario was left behind by the previous Liberal government. They said no to investing in new roads and bridges. They ignored the needs of our families, workers and job creators.

But under the leadership of Premier, things are changing.

We know that the Ontario population is growing fast. We also know global risks like US tariffs are putting new pressure on our economy.

Building better highways and roads is not a choice; it's a must.

Madam Speaker, can the minister please share what our government is doing to build strong roads, highways and transit across Ontario, especially in the north?

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

Mr. Hardeep Singh Grewal: Thank you to the hard-working member from Algoma–Manitoulin for that great question.

Speaker, the people of Ontario re-elected our government to a third majority because they trust our Premier's leadership and they see real results.

Shovels are in the ground, and we're building the infrastructure Ontario needs. We're delivering on historic investments in highways, roads, bridges and public transit from Timmins to Thunder Bay, from Windsor to Ottawa. Nearly \$100 billion is being invested to keep Ontario moving and to support the next generation of growth.

Whether it's addressing explosive population growth or years of neglect from previous governments, or preparing for the threats of President Donald Trump's reckless tariffs—we know the key to protecting Ontario's economy is building a stronger and more modern transportation network.

While the Liberals and NDP continue to vote against critical transit and highway projects, we're focused in investing in our communities and delivering results for the people of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Question?

MPP Bill Rosenberg: It is clear that our government is getting it done.

For too long, Liberal and NDP governments talked big but never built. Northern Ontario was left waiting for new roads, new highways and better transit.

Families, workers and businesses need strong transportation networks to stay connected and grow.

Under the Premier's leadership, we are finally seeing action. We are seeing real investments made in the north and across Ontario. Whether it's the Ontario Line, Highway 413 or twinned highways in the north, our government is building a strong future.

Speaker, can the minister share more about how these projects will help our communities create good jobs and keep Ontario's economy strong for generations to come?

Mr. Hardeep Singh Grewal: In the last election, the people of Ontario overwhelmingly endorsed our PC government's plan to build Ontario.

After decades of Liberal inaction, the people remembered their record. They built nothing.

But under the bold leadership of this Premier, we're getting it done. We're building the Ontario Line, the Yonge North subway, the Eglinton West extension, twinned highways in northern Ontario, new GO trains, Highway 413, the Bradford Bypass, the Hazel McCallion Line, the 401 tunnel. And, yes, we're bringing back the Northlander. I wish I had more time, because this list is just the beginning.

These historic investments will drive growth, strengthen our economy, and benefit Ontario families for generations to come.

LABOUR DISPUTE

MPP Lisa Gretzky: To the Premier: 206 CUPE Local 2073 workers at Canadian Hearing Services are on strike after their wages have fallen 16% behind inflation over the past decade. These workers provide support to thousands of deaf and hard-of-hearing Ontarians. Many of these workers are deaf or hard-of-hearing themselves. Once 500 workers strong, their numbers have dwindled to just over 200, partly due to wage suppression under the unconstitutional Bill 12, amid an affordability crisis, which forced these workers out of their jobs.

Will the Premier stand up for these workers and ensure they are adequately paid for their essential work?

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

Interjections.

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: I saw Bob Bailey stand up, and I thought maybe he's taking it, but no.

I appreciate the question.

I think what we all acknowledge is that we can't have the relationship with our very reliable US trading partner that we've had in the past. What we thought was an unshakable relationship has caused us to rethink how we're going to move forward with our economy.

That is why this government campaigned on a "protect Ontario" platform—that we would do what it takes to protect people, to protect jobs, to protect businesses in this province. That's why we launched the platform of creating an environment of free trade in Canada. Think about that. People have said that's going to go up to \$250 billion of GDP—economic prosperity in this province.

Those are some of the things that we're doing to protect workers.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Question?

MPP Lisa Gretzky: It goes to show the utter lack of respect and understanding for deaf and hard-of-hearing people in this community. I asked about workers in the deaf and hard-of-hearing community and the fact that under unconstitutional Bill 124 and pay cuts under this government, we have lost workers who support deaf and hard-of-hearing people in this province. And that's the answer that the minister gives? It's absolutely shameful—after laughing at the beginning of the answer.

Deaf culture in Ontario is celebrated this weekend, yet the CUPE workers who provide vital support as interpreters, intervenors, counsellors and audiologists are being underpaid and overworked. These are specialized front-line roles, essential to accessibility and inclusion, yet they have been devalued for years—like they just were—during an affordability crisis.

With staffing cut by more than half, each worker is now doing the job of two, and deaf and hard-of-hearing Ontarians are left with only a fraction of their services.

Will the Premier stop shortchanging these workers and commit to fair pay so that deaf and hard-of-hearing Ontarians aren't denied the vital services that they rely on?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Response? I recognize the member for York South–Weston.

1130

MPP Mohamed Firin: We will do whatever it takes to protect Ontario businesses and workers who are affected by the situation that the member mentioned. We have various programs, including our Skills Development Fund, that we use to train workers, and we'll do our best to protect workers.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Please come to order. Both sides will come to order.

Continue.

MPP Mohamed Firin: Madam Speaker, as I said, as we navigate a shifting economic landscape, including tariffs on Canadian goods, our government remains focused on supporting key sectors, particularly in the high-risk industries like manufacturing, construction, and other industries.

Our priority is keeping businesses open for this province and our people.

As I said, we will continue to do whatever it takes to protect Ontario workers.

SCHOOL BOARDS

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Education.

Minister, your government recently began investigating the TDSB, citing financial concerns. While I agree that fiscal responsibility matters, we also can't ignore the real challenges facing the students across the TDSB and in my riding of Don Valley North due to chronic underfunding. In fact, since 2019, per-student funding has dropped by

nearly \$1,500, leading to larger class sizes and less support for students.

My question to the minister: Will this ministry's investigation include a full review of these urgent needs, and will your government commit to properly funding the solutions?

Hon. Paul Calandra: I appreciate the question from the member opposite.

Let's put this into perspective. The Toronto District School Board has been running multi-year deficits. What they're being asked to do is find savings of less than 2% in an over \$3-billion budget.

They did exactly what I expected them to do. Last night, they attacked students, parents and teachers, as opposed to finding savings by reducing, let's say, the number of superintendents they have or by going after the \$35 million of paid leave that they have. What did they do? They attacked students. They attacked teachers. That is what that school board does—and that is why I'm sending an investigator into that school to put it back on the right track.

Let me be very clear to the member opposite and to the members of the Toronto District School Board, the trustees: Do the right things for students. Do the right things for teachers. If you don't, I'll take you over and I'll put the board back on track.

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

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: Minister, the fact is that when funding goes down, students feel it—and so does the quality of their education.

Parents and teachers in my riding are deeply—deeply—concerned about the impact of the inaction of this government over the past seven years, especially on special education, IT programs, and opportunities in music, drama, sports and the arts. On top of that, aging infrastructure only adds to these pressures.

If your government will not fill the \$1,500 per-student shortfall, will your ministry's investigation, at the very least, show how the TDSB is expected to pay for these essential programs and maintenance?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Yes, absolutely. That's exactly what we're going to do—because, as I said, colleagues, the Toronto District School Board did exactly what I expected last night. What did they say? “Oh, we're going to close all our pools. We're going to fire our music teachers.”

What they didn't say is, “We're going to look at the record number of superintendents who are littered all over the sunshine list”—they went from 3,000 to 8,000 people on the sunshine list. “We're not looking at that at the TDSB.” Why? Because the TDSB and the trustees are all about protecting themselves at the expense of students, at the expense of teachers. And that is what the Liberal record is, Madam Speaker—every one of those trustees is either a former Liberal or NDP caucus member or candidate.

Do you know what I'm going to do? I'm going to put the board back on track. The investigator will find a way

to put it back on track. And if they don't do it, I'll take it over and I'll do it for them.

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Tyler Allsopp: My question is for the Minister of Finance.

US tariffs are creating real risk for Ontario's workers and job creators, as many of them are uncertain as to what the future may hold. In my riding of Bay of Quinte, residents, workers, businesses and investors are concerned. And across our province, people are worried about how this could affect their jobs, their families and their ability to put food on the table. They are looking to our government to lead and support them through these uncertain times.

We know that our government will always put the needs and livelihoods of the people of Ontario first. That's why we are taking strong, clear steps to protect Ontario's economy and support those who are feeling the pressure.

Speaker, can the minister please elaborate for this House on what actions our government has taken to reduce these economic pressures and help protect jobs and growth across Ontario?

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Many thanks to the member for that excellent question—

Interjections.

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: And thank you for that great round of applause there.

Madam Speaker, it's time the government is good to do—whatever it needs to do to protect Ontario. We were very clear about that.

Just last month, we announced \$11 billion in support for businesses right across the province. But we know more needs to be done.

We need a plan that will help us to build more, to build faster—a plan that achieves free trade across this great land, under the leadership of this Premier.

Madam Speaker, I'm pleased to share that on May 15, I will unveil that plan through our government's 2025 budget—our plan to protect Ontarians and deliver the economy this province deserves—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Question.

Mr. Tyler Allsopp: Thank you to the minister for the response. We cannot wait to deliver that budget.

Right now, the threat of US tariffs creates real uncertainty for Ontario workers and businesses. When businesses face uncertainty, they hold off on hiring, they stop investing, and they delay growth. They cannot make decisions for the next 10, 15 or 20 years when they don't know what's in store for the next 12 months. They need stability. That's why it's more important than ever that our government continue showing leadership and taking action.

Ontario businesses need support now. They need to know we're preparing for the future too. They want a government that continues to stand up for them, protects their jobs and keeps our economy strong.

Can the minister please explain how we are helping Ontario businesses through these tough times and what we're doing to build an economy that is ready to compete on the global stage and win in the years to come?

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Thank you again for that question.

Our plan is to make Ontario and Canada the most competitive economy in the G7. Since we took power, we created the conditions to create over one million new jobs, and we're just getting started.

Our plan, which we'll unveil on May 15—join me on that day. We'll have more to say on how we're going to boost the most competitive province not just in Canada—not just in North America, but right across the developed world. We have all the resources, the natural resources. We have the talent. We have the people. We have the communities. Ontario is going to be unstoppable. Stay tuned, on May 15.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

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

Mr. Steve Clark: Speaker, thank you very much. Point of order, under standing order number 59: I'd like to inform the House of our schedule for the week of May 5 to May 8.

On Monday, May 5, during afternoon routine proceedings, a government bill will be introduced, followed in the afternoon by opposition day number 2. Then, in the afternoon, we'll have second reading of Bill 5, the Protect Ontario by Unleashing our Economy Act.

On Tuesday, May 6, there will be second reading on a government bill to be introduced; in the afternoon, there will be second reading on Bill 6, the Safer Municipalities Act.

On Wednesday, May 7, in the morning, we'll have second reading on Bill 6, the Safer Municipalities Act. During afternoon routine proceedings, a government bill will be introduced, and in the afternoon, there will be second reading on a government bill to be introduced.

On Thursday, May 8, in the morning, second reading on a government bill; during afternoon routine proceedings, another government bill will be introduced, and in the afternoon, there will be second reading of a government bill.

That's my report under standing order 59, Speaker.

LEGISLATIVE PAGES

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Well, folks, this has got to be the worst part of my job. It's a very, very tough part of my job. I have to ask the pages to assemble.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I know.

Members, it is now time to say a word of thanks to our legislative pages. Our pages are smart, trustworthy and very hard-working. They're indispensable to the effective

functioning of this chamber. And we indeed are fortunate to have each and every one of them here with us.

To our pages: You depart having made many new friends, with a greater understanding of parliamentary democracy and memories that will last a lifetime. Each of you will go home and continue your studies, and no doubt will contribute to your communities, your province and your country. We expect great things from each and every one of you. And who knows? If you look at some of them here—you may be back here one day, sitting in these seats. We want to see you here.

So thank you to each and every one of you. We wish you well.

I now ask the members to join me in thanking and saying goodbye.

Applause.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): This House stands in recess until 1 p.m.

The House recessed from 1142 to 1300.

INTRODUCTION OF GOVERNMENT BILLS

MUNICIPAL ACCOUNTABILITY ACT, 2025

LOI DE 2025 SUR LA RESPONSABILITÉ AU NIVEAU MUNICIPAL

Mr. Flack moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 9, An Act to amend the City of Toronto Act, 2006 and the Municipal Act, 2001 in relation to codes of conduct / Projet de loi 9, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2006 sur la cité de Toronto et la Loi de 2001 sur les municipalités en ce qui concerne les codes de déontologie.

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

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Would the member briefly explain the bill?

Hon. Rob Flack: The proposed legislation, the Municipal Accountability Act, if passed, will strengthen accountability at the municipal level by improving how codes of conduct are applied across Ontario. The legislation allows the province to set consistent codes of conduct for all municipalities. We are proposing to give the Integrity Commissioner of Ontario new tools to support and oversee local integrity commissioners. These changes will help ensure local governments operate with greater transparency, fairness and public trust.

PROTECT ONTARIO THROUGH SAFER STREETS AND STRONGER COMMUNITIES ACT, 2025

LOI DE 2025 POUR PROTÉGER L'ONTARIO EN RENDANT LES RUES PLUS SÛRES ET LES COLLECTIVITÉS PLUS FORTES

Mr. Downey moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 10, An Act to enact the Measures Respecting Premises with Illegal Drug Activity Act, 2025 and to amend various Acts with respect to public safety and the justice system / Projet de loi 10, Loi édictant la Loi de 2025 sur les mesures visant les lieux où se déroulent des activités illégales liées à la drogue et modifiant diverses lois en ce qui concerne la sécurité publique et le système judiciaire.

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

First reading agreed to.

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

Hon. Doug Downey: With my strong MAG team up in the gallery, the proposed legislation, the Protect Ontario Through Safer Streets and Stronger Communities Act, will help improve the evaluation and appointment process for judges of the Ontario Court of Justice.

We're proposing changes to support enforcement measures on bail compliance to hold accused persons accountable, and to enable law enforcement to search and seize electronic devices used to commit auto theft. We seek to increase access to family law restraining orders for people in need of protection.

The proposed actions will ensure Ontario's justice system has tools and resources in place to enforce the law and uphold public safety.

PETITIONS

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

MPP Jamie West: I'm sure my colleagues are happy that the MPP for Nickel Belt has shared some petitions with me.

This petition is entitled "Invest in Mental Health Services." This is an important petition. One in five adults experience mental health every year, and the services just aren't where they need to be.

I think that we're all aware that campaigns such as Bell Let's Talk have had more people talk openly about mental health. So the need for services becomes more and more apparent as people are looking out for those services and are more comfortable speaking about mental health.

Unfortunately, the wait-lists for free services are very long and the funding is not sufficient right now. And so, what the petitioners have asked for from the Legislative Assembly is that the assembly prioritizes mental health as a core part of health care by investing into much-needed

services and professionals to ensure accessibility and timely care for all Ontarians.

I support this petition, and I'll affix my signature and provide it to the Clerk.

UNIVERSITY FUNDING

Mr. Ted Hsu: I have a petition from my constituents of Kingston and the Islands, many of whom are from Queen's University. They want to draw attention to the dire financial situation in Ontario's universities which reduce the quantity and quality of educational opportunities for Ontario's young people. It stifles research productivity and innovation, causes direct and indirect job losses, and downgrades Ontario's competitiveness and reputation on the world stage, which is what we really need right now.

I'm very happy to sign this petition and present it today on behalf of my constituents.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: I have a petition here to raise the social assistance rates in Ontario because we know that people are living below the poverty line and they're relying on their government officials to help them out with doubling OW—Ontario Works—and ODSP—Ontario Disability Support Program.

I'm happy to sign my name to this and submit this with page Kylian on his last day in the chamber as a page—but maybe not as an MPP.

NORTHERN HEALTH TRAVEL GRANT

MPP Jamie West: This petition is called "Let's Fix the Northern Health Travel Grant." This is a petition that resonates a lot in northern Ontario in terms of accessing health care. People in the north don't have all the services that are in the north and need to travel. The Northern Health Travel Grant covers that fee, although those fees have been frozen for some time.

I know the minister has worked on this and moved things that are for it, but there are some barriers for this for people who are sick, particularly people who don't have access to a credit card, because the system as it is now requires people to pay in advance and then be reimbursed. People who are living near the poverty line, below the poverty line, or those without credit cards have a difficult time booking hotel rooms or finding a way to prolong those costs or do without that money for a limited amount of time.

The people who have signed this petition have petitioned the assembly to establish a committee with a mandate to fix and improve the Northern Health Travel Grant, which is very reasonable. Put some smart people together in a room and they'll come up with brilliant ideas—probably better than what we would be able to come up with in our room here—with experts in the field.

I support this petition 100%. I'll affix my signature, and I'll provide it to Lauren to give to the table.

LABOUR LEGISLATION

MPP Jamie West: Now I know how my colleague feels.

This petition is entitled the "Enact Anti-Scab Labour Law." Basically, what it talks about is that 97% of collective agreements are settled without any kind of labour disruption at all, lockout or strike.

Since 1978 in Quebec and 1993 in British Columbia, there has been anti-scab legislation preventing people from crossing picket lines to perform any work outside of ensuring safety and urgent work. Those two provinces have done an excellent job. We actually had anti-scab legislation in Ontario until Mike Harris removed it.

I myself have lived through a strike where scabs have crossed picket lines. It prolonged it, Speaker. I'm not talking about the damage that it did to the workforce. I know people who crossed the picket line and how difficult it was for them as well.

This is legislation that protects workers. It shortens the length of labour disruptions, but it also ensures that people who are struggling with poverty aren't put in positions where neighbours are turning against neighbours and causing conflict. It really damages the community in the area.

I have tabled a bill in the past on this. I will table one in the future. And so, the people who have signed this petition are urging the government, in anticipation of us tabling the bill again, to pass the anti-scab labour bill that would ban the use of replacement workers during a strike or lockout.

I support this petition, and I urge my colleagues to support the bill when it comes out. I'll affix my signature and provide it to Gabe for the table.

1310

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PROTECT ONTARIO BY UNLEASHING OUR ECONOMY ACT, 2025

LOI DE 2025 POUR PROTÉGER L'ONTARIO EN LIBÉRANT SON ÉCONOMIE

Resuming the debate adjourned on May 1, 2025, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 5, An Act to enact the Special Economic Zones Act, 2025, to amend the Endangered Species Act, 2007 and to replace it with the Species Conservation Act, 2025, and to amend various Acts and revoke various regulations in relation to development and to procurement / *Projet de loi 5, Loi édictant la Loi de 2025 sur les zones économiques spéciales, modifiant la Loi de 2007 sur les espèces en voie de disparition et la remplaçant par la Loi de 2025 sur la conservation des espèces, puis modifiant diverses lois et abrogeant divers règlements en ce qui concerne le développement et l'approvisionnement.*

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

Mr. Ted Hsu: Before I resume my speech, let me just repeat what I said this morning, that I'll be sharing my time with my colleague the marvellous member for Beaches–East York.

The big problem is that Bill 5 hands out too much unchecked discretionary power to ministers. It indemnifies government officials from legal actions, thereby reinforcing the unchecked nature of these new discretionary powers. It does this to fulfill the throne speech's plan to speed up development projects as a response to Donald Trump's tariff war.

Le vrai problème, c'est que le projet de loi 5 accorde un pouvoir discrétionnaire beaucoup trop large aux ministres, sans réel encadrement. Il protège en plus les agents de l'État contre d'éventuelles poursuites judiciaires, ce qui renforce encore cette absence de contrôle. Tout cela s'inscrit dans la volonté exprimée dans le discours du trône d'accélérer les projets de développement en réponse à la guerre tarifaire lancée par Donald Trump.

First of all, the economic damage from Trump's tariffs is happening now and the risk of a recession is in this year. Development projects, even those which might only take a couple of years, won't deal with the much more immediate damage from tariffs. More importantly, the idea behind this bill assumes that ministers will act like benevolent dictators and do a better job than a rules-based system. I think we've learned over many centuries that it's a mistake to rely on benevolent dictators. That's why countries, ruled with good laws, have won out over and over again over the course of human history.

Here's what can go wrong. Lack of accountability: Even well-intentioned governments, if they throw away rules, have no coherent or inherent mechanism to ensure that they remain benevolent or accountable. Without guardrails provided by rules, they can easily abuse power or become detached from public needs.

Arbitrary decision-making: Unchecked discretionary power may be subject to personal whims rather than consistent principles or laws. The resulting unpredictability and instability, like we're seeing down south with Donald Trump, discourages investment. It's a bad business environment and hampers economic growth.

Inability to correct mistakes: Decisions made with unchecked power, good or bad, are difficult to challenge or correct. In a society governed by law, judicial processes and democratic institutions provide avenues for correcting errors and abuses. The rules themselves are honed by applying them to real cases and making improvements whenever needed.

Encouraging corruption and favouritism: Unchecked power often breeds corruption and favouritism. As this government has illustrated in their greenbelt scandal, where discretionary ministerial zoning orders and legislation were used to hand out billion-dollar windfalls, there were no robust legal or institutional barriers against rewarding donors and friends. Cronyism also leads to economic distortions and throws away the benefits of a well-regulated market economy.

It looks like what this government is really doing is using Trump's tariff war as a cover to set up future Conservative fundraisers. The more unchecked discretionary power ministers have, the more incentive there is to pay for access to them.

On a l'impression que ce gouvernement se sert surtout de la guerre tarifaire lancée par Trump comme prétexte pour préparer ses prochaines collectes de fonds. Plus les ministres disposent d'un pouvoir discrétionnaire sans véritables contrepoids, plus il devient tentant de payer pour avoir accès à eux.

In this respect, the Conservative government has a blind spot. That was clear in the greenbelt giveaway scandal, which is still playing out. They said they wouldn't touch it, and then they did, with promises made behind closed doors, triggering investigations by the Integrity Commissioner, the Auditor General and the RCMP. The lobbying from friends and donors who stood to gain billions from rezoning was just too much for them to withstand.

This same blind spot was glaringly obvious on Tuesday, April 29, during question period. I raised concerns about the potential for political fundraising based on providing special access to ministers, ministers who now hold significant new discretionary powers without adequate checks or oversights—well, when the bill is passed. Not one member on the government benches stood to offer a meaningful response, not during question period and not during the adjournment debate. It almost seemed as if the government had never considered the most obvious question of all: What risk of corruption arises when ministers are given new, unchecked powers? That's precisely the blind spot this government continues to have.

The government might counter that since we're in a trade war, aggressive and proactive measures must be undertaken. I don't want to just criticize this government without proposing a solution. Ontario Liberals have proposed a way to fight the war while preserving a sense of transparency and accountability which is dear to our democratic society. It is the multi-party task force. In December 2024, Ontario Liberal leader Bonnie Crombie wrote an open letter to the Premier proposing a multi-party task force to address Donald Trump's threatened trade war. Bonnie Crombie's initiative aimed to foster a unified, transparent and accountable approach by bringing together representatives from all political parties who collaboratively develop strategies to protect Ontario's economy and workers.

The Premier acknowledged the tariff threat but dismissed her proposal. He emphasized his government's readiness to take decisive action on its own. Considering that Bill 5 would hand unchecked power to ministers to grant certain proponents exemptions to rules and regulations, the Premier's decision is disappointing. Including opposition MPPs in decisions to grant special exemptions would significantly enhance transparency and accountability. It would ensure that decisions undergo scrutiny from multiple perspectives, reducing the risk of errors or misuse of authority. A multi-party task force would demonstrate to Ontarians that crucial decisions are being

made in the broader public interest rather than being driven by partisan agendas or favouritism. By building trust in this manner, we build legitimacy. We can foster stronger public support and co-operation even when facing difficult policy choices.

Let's go over the bill schedule by schedule. I will skip schedules 2, 4, 8 and 10, which concern environmental assessments and this government's treatment of endangered species. They will be expertly addressed by my colleague the member from Beaches–East York and the environment critic for our caucus.

Schedules 1 and 6 allow the government to use country or geographic region as a criterion to restrict the procurement of goods and services related to electricity or natural gas, as well as electricity and natural gas themselves. It also indemnifies the crown, although during the technical briefing, the effect of those parts of the bill if a WTO action were brought against Canada was not clear. It's also not clear how these schedules might impede interprovincial trade liberalization prospects. So, this allows Ontario to restrict the participation of foreign companies in Ontario projects, which could be useful, but also other provinces.

Ontario exports and imports electricity to and from Quebec, Manitoba, New York and Minnesota. Ontario also imports most of its natural gas from the United States, through Michigan to southwestern Ontario. The gas comes from shale formations in Pennsylvania, Ohio and West Virginia. So these are the geographic regions which might be affected by schedules 1 and 6, and if energy becomes weaponized in a trade war, but I also understand that provisions in schedules 1 and 6 are tools in Donald Trump's trade war.

1320

The main danger here is that these provisions invite lobbying by foreign actors, especially in this world of global supply chains and multinational corporations where it's not always clear how the country of origin of a good or service should be designated. Can this government withstand the lobbying? I would feel more comfortable if the federal and provincial governments were jointly responsible for decisions respecting limits on the activities of foreign countries in our energy sector.

Schedule 3, the Dresden waste site: Schedule 3 exempts the York1 Environmental Waste Solutions landfill proposal from an environmental assessment. This site is only a kilometre away from Dresden in Chatham-Kent, and I've visited the site. The government says that they are trying to move away from sending waste to the United States. It cites uncertainties and tariffs at the border as a reason to exempt this Dresden landfill site from an environmental assessment. I hope they know that garbage is not subject to tariffs.

This bill's environmental assessment exemption for the York1 landfill goes against what the community wants—the people who live around the landfill, who own property around the landfill—and it goes against what this government itself has said on the issue. The community has organized and protested loudly and clearly about the

environmental risks and the risks to property values. Unfortunately for them, the previous promise by this government of an environmental assessment was used to take the issue of the landfill off the table and to win votes during the recent general election.

The government had promised a full environmental assessment of the property in a ruling—well, you can see it; it's posted to the Environmental Registry of Ontario—on June 28, 2024. Before the Lambton–Kent–Middlesex by-election in May 2024, the Premier even said, as quoted in the Chatham Voice, “If the people like something, we do it. If they don't, we don't do it. It's about as simple as that.”

Now, yesterday, in question period, I heard my NDP colleagues say that they wish we could've heard from the MPP for Lambton–Kent–Middlesex, and I thank them for mentioning that on this issue. Well, those on the government side may not know that the member has said something. On April 20, only three days after Bill 5 was tabled, the member released a statement, and his office said, “I understand that our community is upset and am myself disappointed in this decision.” I would suggest to the government that they check now and then with their own members about how legislative changes could impact their ridings, because it's clear to me that even some on the government benches are unhappy.

The more troubling thing about this issue, however, is the connection between the owners of the site and the Premier. The purported sale of this property from York1 Environmental Solutions to Whitestone Fields Ltd. is potentially troubling. Executives of both companies have donated to the PC Party, including, according to QP Briefing in July 2021, apparently arranging over \$50,000 in donations to a Conservative fundraiser dubbed “an intimate and candid discussion” with the Premier.

However, the Premier said in March 2024 that he had never heard of this project. You have to wonder, in the wake of this Premier's greenbelt scandal, what people in the Premier's office knew about the landfill and when they knew it. This highlights one of the big thematic issues with Bill 5, the ability for big donors to grab a minister's—or even the Premier's—ear to develop a project that's not necessarily in the interest of Ontarians.

Now we get to schedule 5, the Mining Act. Schedule 5 of the bill addresses the Mining Act. It aims to fast-track mining projects, particularly those involving critical minerals, by streamlining permitting and granting the government more direct control over claims and leases in the name of economic and strategic interest. This could lead to quicker development but also raises significant concerns about environmental protection, Indigenous rights and the traditional free-entry system for mining claims.

I agree that it would be an excellent goal to reduce by a factor of two the time it takes the Ontario government to complete its own permitting and authorization processes for major infrastructure and mining projects, and it would be good to coordinate different ministries and to allow for binding service standards. I've heard the same thing when

it comes to speeding up the approvals process for municipal projects: Often, you have lots of different departments and external departments that get in each other's way, and they're waiting for each other to finish, and it can increase the time. So it's a good thing to try to coordinate the ministries and appoint somebody who has that responsibility.

However, the government scored a symbolic own goal at the beginning of schedule 5, when it amended the Mining Act. It replaced this phrase, "development of mineral resources, in a manner consistent with the recognition and affirmation of existing Aboriginal and treaty rights," with "development of mineral resources to a degree that is consistent with the protection of Ontario's economy and in a manner consistent with the recognition and affirmation of existing Aboriginal and treaty rights...."

This replacement inserts consideration for the economy ahead of Aboriginal and treaty rights in the text of that sentence. What an unnecessary symbolic insult, which could have been avoided if the government had consulted with Indigenous communities before finalizing this bill. I asked at the technical briefing whether a conversation had occurred, and the answer was no, the government did not consult Indigenous communities before composing Bill 5.

Also, right at the start of this schedule, schedule 5, is something which seems innocuous, but is important and well illustrates the government's looser approach to regulation, its bigger plan for looser regulation. Everywhere in the Mining Act, this bill would replace "employee of the ministry" by "employee in the ministry." It seems innocuous, but what this does is it includes consultants or contractors. These are third-party consultants and contractors who temporarily work for the minister, as opposed to permanently staffing the ministry. These are the people to whom the minister or deputy minister may delegate powers under the Mining Act.

On peut vérifier quand on regarde aussi la version française du projet de loi. Je cite : remplacement de chaque occurrence de « ou employé du ministère » par « ou une personne employée au ministère ». Une « personne employée au ministère » inclut des personnes non-permanentes, contractuelles ou en détachement.

This is a significant downloading of liability from people who work permanently for the government, to people who work temporarily for the government and may otherwise need to earn a living by being hired to work for stakeholders in the mining sector.

This continues to be a trend found in this government, and you can find the start of it—well, maybe it goes back further than before I was elected. If you look back at the last mining bill, which was Bill 71, it's called the Building More Mines Act, 2023. What that bill does—amongst other things, some of which are fine—is it reduces expertise permanently housed in the ministry. The government has not provided the resources to make sure that we have the best people working in the ministry, so there's less expertise permanently housed in the ministry and more reliance on third-party experts, whose performance

is regulated by professional standards, but who also rely on contracts with private stakeholders to make a living.

I have another municipal analogy here. I know that in many municipalities, approvals for new building and housing in particular, which is important for our towns and cities—there are valid complaints that the approvals process takes too long. More recently, in the last few years, there has been a shortage of experienced planners. And what happens when you have junior planners in cities approving projects is—they're junior; they don't have that much experience. They want to do a good job, so they're careful and they take time. If you don't have enough experienced planners, you kind of look at everything and you're not as efficient as you would be if you were experienced and you knew what you really had to spend your time on and what you did not have to spend your time on.

1330

In my view, this is the sort of thing that's happening in this government's strategy for regulating mines. They're not investing in having an in-house team of really good, experienced regulators with experience in whatever—geology and mining engineering and biochemistry and biology—and they're relying on contracts with third parties, who also have to get contracts with stakeholders in various parts of the mining sector to make their living.

Here's another thing that bothers me: the Building More Mines Act, 2023, in the last Parliament. This act changed powers a little bit. It took the powers of the director of exploration in the mining ministry and the director of mine rehabilitation, and it gave those powers to the minister. So more power was put in the hands of the minister. And now, with Bill 5, these powers can be delegated to a contractor, by this simple change in wording of "people who work for the ministry" or "people who work in the ministry." These powers may now be delegated to a contractor, so I'm worried about that. And as I said before, the alternative is to hire talented and experienced experts in the ministry, so that the government reviews go faster in mining, which is a critical sector of Ontario's economy. All of this happens—things speed up or go smoothly—while retaining the people's confidence that reviewers are acting only in the public interest. That's really important in our society.

If I may pause, Speaker, I don't think my time is up. I had almost an hour, so I don't think I've used an hour yet, but the clock—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Logan Kanapathi): Member will proceed, please.

Mr. Ted Hsu: Where was I? Hopefully the clock will be reset.

Let me get to sections 3, 4 and 6 of schedule 5. Sections 3, 4 and 6 allow the government to restrict usage of the mineral lands administration system by foreign or bad actors, and to prohibit them from having a licence to prospect or to have a lease of land for mining. While exercising the powers in these sections, the minister is allowed by Bill 5 to bypass the Statutory Powers Proced-

ure Act. That's a law that sets out minimum procedural requirements for tribunals and other decision-making bodies.

Section 9 of this schedule allows the minister to revoke claims or terminate mining leases for any reason. That's section 9, subsection (2): "3. Any prescribed factors" is what is in that line. This is too open. No discussion of compensation is payable and there's no guidance for courts in case there is a dispute. Although this act also indemnifies the ministry, which, as I mentioned earlier, underlines how these new powers that Bill 5 gives ministers are unchecked. All of these new powers, which get around the Statutory Powers Procedure Act, inject uncertainty, remove transparency and increase the potential for abusive power.

I hope these points get across the idea to the listener that ministers are getting new, unchecked, discretionary powers to make economically significant decisions. We have to be very careful about the potential for abuse. This could be remedied, to a large extent—again, this schedule as well as other schedules—if the support of an all-party task force, which I discussed earlier, were applied to such important discretionary ministerial decisions. I urge the Premier and this government to avail themselves of this option which Ontario Liberal leader, Bonnie Crombie, has presciently offered.

I'll get to schedule 7, the Ontario Heritage Act. In schedule 7, the cabinet will be granted the authority to exempt properties from complying with archaeological assessment requirements under the Ontario Heritage Act, part VI, if the property is being used to advance provincial priorities such as transit, housing, health and long-term care, other infrastructure or, in fact, anything else the cabinet wants. Yes, these priorities are explicitly listed in the bill.

The cabinet will also be authorized to exempt properties from archaeological assessment requirements set out in any other legislation, with some exceptions. An example of where a property might not be granted an exemption is former Indian residential school sites. Regulations will be drafted upon the passage of the legislation that will set the criteria for a property to be eligible for an exemption, and we're going to have to look closely at these regulations.

The fact that long-term-care projects have been explicitly included in this list in the legislation itself as provincial priorities is a sign that this section of the legislation too might be used to advance the governing party's own agenda. The connection between Conservative insiders and the for-profit long-term-care sector is well known. In the past, the government used the ministerial zoning order as a tool to expedite for-profit long-term-care construction projects. There is a potential for abuse here, and we need to look carefully at the accompanying regulations.

Then finally, we have schedule 9, special economic zones. In this section, the government will designate "special economic zones" to advance projects of provincial importance," and that's quoting from the bill. Inside these zones, they will be able to choose and exempt

"trusted proponents" and "vetted projects" from the requirement—they'll be able to exempt them from the requirement of undergoing permitting and approval processes. These proponents and projects may also be exempted from other provincial laws and/or regulations, as well as municipal bylaws, if necessary.

This is a very problematic part of Bill 5. This is the part that brings up a lot of the issues that I mentioned at the beginning of my speech. Ministers choosing certain areas as special economic zones and choosing certain proponents and choosing certain projects for special treatment—that has the potential to become the MZO scandal 2.0, where favours are traded.

What should worry everybody is this government's documented record on the greenbelt. They publicly said they wouldn't touch it, and then they did, with contradictory promises made by the Premier behind closed doors but recorded on video. Various pieces of evidence triggered investigations by the Integrity Commissioner, the Auditor General and the RCMP. The lobbying from friends and donors who stood to gain billions from rezoning was just too much for the government to withstand.

So how can anyone take this government seriously if they were to claim that after receiving the powers from schedule 9, they'll wield their new discretionary power properly when their record shows the opposite?

We should also be worried about special economic zones being used for Highway 413 and the Premier's tunnel under the 401. We don't even know if the Premier's tunnel under Highway 401 is feasible. I'm sure the government isn't preparing to fast-track a project we know almost nothing about, except that by the time it gets built—not our lifetime, so our kids will get the bill—the tunnel is likely to be ridiculously expensive and still ineffective at relieving traffic jams.

Will special economic zones be used with Highway 413 to pave over the redbird habitats? I will leave the details to my colleague from Beaches–East York, but maybe I should buy some tickets for the redbird dace to attend the Premier's next fundraiser. They can come in an aquarium and swim around and jump out of the water like they do to eat insects but eat little hors d'oeuvres and to whisper in the Premier's ear. Is that what you have to do if your species is at risk of getting wiped out?

1340

It's questionable as to what qualifies or what should qualify or what's allowed to qualify as a special economic zone. The ministry told us in the briefing that it could be a geographic area as small or as large as required. That means multiple projects or one project in a specific area. So with no specifics given as to what requirements you need to determine a special economic zone, the government seems to be giving itself just a wand to wave to do whatever it wants.

I see I'm running out of time, Speaker. I must cede my remaining time and the floor to my colleague from Beaches–East York. But before I do so, I want to say that this is a big, substantive bill. There are so many things to discuss in it. And I challenge the government side of the

House, if the appropriate people are listening, to avoid using time allocation to cut off debate on this bill. Since June of 2024, this week is only the ninth sitting week for the Ontario Legislature. That's nine sitting weeks in 10 months. Think about that. This Premier has only been willing to face the Ontario Legislature for nine weeks out of the last 10 months. What I want to say is I want to call on the government to not use time allocation on this substantive bill. Let more representatives elected to the Ontario Legislature get on the record for their constituents. Don't use time allocation on Bill 5.

Thank you. I now cede the remaining time and the floor to my colleague from Beaches–East York.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Brian Saunderson): The member from Beaches–East York.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Interjections.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Applause already? I'm just getting ready.

One fish, two fish, red fish, blue fish: This is the level of scientific understanding this government had when creating this bill—Dr. Seuss version.

Bill 5 is an omnibus bill that interferes with the purpose and, in some cases, completely negates the existence of legislation. The bill, entitled “unleashing Ontario’s economic potential act,” ignores Indigenous expertise, pulverizes environmental protections, slashes regulatory oversight, terminates the rights of citizens to have a say in what happens to their communities and promotes unfettered mining industrial development, all at ministerial discretion. Did you hear that? The minister gets to decide.

This bill fundamentally places money and power at the centre of all decisions that its invasive arms can reach. The Premier’s government leverages Trump’s tariffs as an excuse to rewrite the rules of democracy, science and public accountability and in a definitively hypocritical move becomes the beast he is fighting. While actively resisting the overreaching, intrusive and unconstitutional actions of Trump’s tariffs and threats of annexation, the government has adopted some of its ways. The government is following the United States’s lead when it comes to slashing environmental protections, tunnel-vision building and autocratic decisions with a bill that imbues ministers with the power to overrule the scientific committee’s submissions of species at risk and in need of protection, and appoint special economic zones that are granted access to bypass all permits and assessments that would give environmental and community consideration.

We are certainly in an affordability crisis where people are unhoused; young people cannot and may never be able to afford a home; there is a painful choice between groceries and medication; and families are leaving our beautiful province, seeking a life elsewhere that they can afford. The Premier could have used this moment as an opportunity to sustainably protect Ontario’s economy by building resilient supply chains, investing in clean technology and strengthening local industry. But instead, he’s treating Ontario’s ecosystems, communities and

democratic institutions like obstacles to be cleared. We are all red tape.

But who do we do this all for if not future generations? There are checks and balances for a reason. These established processes ensure that communities are consulted to invest in changes that they support and therefore will be protected and prosper long after their architects are gone; that experts who have excelled in years of rigorous study and bring well-researched insight to the table can guide us in an informed direction; that Indigenous peoples who have stewarded and known these lands and waters long before we were on them, and will continue long after, can provide their singular knowledge; that species at risk for extinction and ecosystems that are experiencing imbalance and disruption can be saved; and that environment—which frankly, our life as we know it is dependent on—will remain healthy and capable of sustaining life for generations to come.

The false notion that environmental protections and community consultation and economic growth are dichotomous goals is exactly that: false. Leading centres for innovation and experts in the field are working on developing a clear path forward, facilitating a complementary relationship between economic growth and environmental protections. But it requires a change, of course, now, one which I would enthusiastically commit to collaborating on with the government. I am hoping that my passionate critiques to follow are used as a starting point for this goal.

Under schedule 2 and 10 of Bill 5, the Endangered Species Act, once regarded as the gold standard for species protection in North America, will cease to exist and be replaced with a watered-down version, the Species Conservation Act. While the Endangered Species Act is centred around protection of species, recovery and stewardship of species at risk, its lesser replacement takes a completely different approach: protection and conservation to the extent that economic and social considerations permit.

These considerations are vague—and you will find vagueness to be a motif that continues throughout this bill. However, what is not vague is that the Premier’s government will use its discretion to determine what species stay and what species go. They will make this decision over that of those who specialize in the field, read and write the latest research and must live with the consequences.

The act also provides a new, narrow and naive definition of “habitat.” Whereas habitat was defined as “an area on which the species depends, directly or indirectly, to carry on its life processes, including life processes such as reproduction, rearing, hibernation, migration or feeding,” it will now be defined as a “dwelling place”—or the area immediately around it—“such as a den, nest or other similar place, that is occupied or habitually occupied by one or more members of a species for the purposes of breeding, rearing, staging, wintering or hibernating.”

This restrictive definition neglects areas used for finding food and routes for travelling. This is extremely problematic for many species—for example, the

Blanding's turtle, a threatened species. The Blanding's turtle lays eggs kilometres away from its nest. To get there, it may travel through fields, across streams, and its offspring, once hatched, must then journey back to the nest. The proposed legislation does not consider any of this. Under this legislation, a new highway may stand between us and the last generation of Blanding's turtles.

Now, imagine if we applied this policy to the Premier. We will let the Premier keep his bedroom, but we're going to remove the stairs. We're going to remove the living room and the kitchen. We're going to keep his local hospital for him and his wife to birth their babies. But how is the Premier and his wife going to get to the hospital to birth those babies? We're not protecting that commute. Are they going to bungee jump, zipline or use Harry Potter floo powder?

This is what happens when ministers are given *carte blanche* decision-making power without requirement to consult more knowledgeable parties.

1350

Now, take this same Blanding's turtle. What happens if the Committee on the Status of Species at Risk in Ontario, COSSARO, submits the turtle as a species at risk in their next report, but the minister, after consulting the highest bidder, determines that protecting this species would delay a building project? The minister may exclude the turtle from regulation and, thus, developments are not legally bound to protect this turtle. It is this scenario repeated over and over that may lead to the reckless and avoidable extinction of an integral species.

Yet the bill does not stop there. Oh, no, there's more. The proposed act removes the onus on the government to develop a recovery strategy, a management plan, a response statement and review of the progress for species determined to be at risk. As a result, only species recognized as at risk federally will benefit from a recovery strategy available in Ontario. While provincial at-risk-species laws were once meant to complement federal legislation, the federal legislation now may be the only thing safeguarding our biodiversity. How pathetic is that? Where are you, Ontario?

This comes at just over a year after Canada and Ontario announced their collaboration on the expansion of protected areas in the province through federal investment to support Canada's goal for conserving 30% of the land and water by 2030, in accordance with the Global Biodiversity Framework, which happened in Montreal. I know the Minister of the Environment at the time from this government was there. This government cannot keep its commitments.

To add insult to injury, migratory birds and aquatic species listed as endangered or threatened under federal legislation are entirely excluded from the provincially proposed Species Conservation Act. While the government's theoretical justification is to reduce duplication and encourage cost and time efficiency—things I agree with—the practical consequence is that under this proposed legislation, nearly two whole classes of animals are denied protection. Can you believe that? Two whole classes of

animals are denied protection. I absolutely need to speak to the Premier's public school science teacher.

The bill will usher in an era of shotgun permits. Currently, developers must apply for permits when a project poses a threat to species at risk or their habitat. The permits are reviewed by eco experts and returned with direction for how to mitigate harm to the species. The proposed legislation would replace this process with an online registration form—whoop-de-woo—that, once submitted, grants developers the green light to begin building, regardless of the environmental impact.

Schedule 7: Now, this proposed iteration of the Ontario Heritage Act should be renamed the "ridding Ontario of heritage act" because that is the single thing it does well. Under the act, a potential development site can bypass a heritage assessment if the claim can be made that the development aligns with provincial priorities like housing, health care, long-term care and other infrastructure—aka spa. Provincial priorities here are broad and vague, and, as it stands, could be justified for any project. This schedule would legislate a major overriding of municipal powers and overlooking of Indigenous voices.

While Ontarians are certainly familiar with the Premier playing mayor, this is getting a bit stale—the municipal meddling—and the courts think so too. In a time when we are all trying to stand firm in our national identity and stand up against the United States, we must remember our roots. When legislation permits the destruction of heritage sites in favour of development and neglects to consult the original peoples on the land, the government risks not only forgetting our shared history but repeating avoidable and shameful parts of our history. The act not only fails to protect heritage but creates an opportunity to erase it, conflating heritage as a barrier not meant to be merely skirted around but quite literally bulldozed through.

Schedule 8: Let's bring it back to Therme; we haven't had enough of that topic these days. The act's schedule 8 nullifies the Environmental Bill of Rights provision, which mandates minimum standards of public participation in government decision-making regarding environmental concerns. It is interesting timing that the week that it is revealed that Therme may have misrepresented its identity and its funds to secure an almost century-long lease in Ontario Place the government also proposes to legislate termination on public input on the project. This bill sets a dangerous precedent of legislatively shutting down public questions that the government does not like. These schedules combined legislate silencing constituent voices that contradict the government's plan and destruction of the natural world in our history, disguised as the necessary prerequisites for economic growth.

As the member from Kiiwetinoong stated so eloquently, this bill uses "the tariff war to access the resources in the north while ... trampling on the rights of the people that live there," and it is a loud reminder that colonialism and oppression persist in Canada.

The government employs rhetorical shifts to frame economic gain as a justification for bypassing the calls to action in the national truth and reconciliation report. While

the report clearly calls for free, informed and prior consent from Indigenous communities before proceeding with projects of economic development, all this government hears is “economic development.” The actions that follow are solely to achieve that end. It is a good thing that this government is flexible—flexible in their words and their morals, permitting the mental gymnastics necessary to contrive such a bill and still claim to be the government for the people.

Schedule 3: I’m going to repeat a little bit of my neighbour’s talk. Speaking of dangerous precedents, we see them in action in the proposal of the Dresden landfill site—back-to-back examples of refusal to listen to public wants and needs. In 2024, York1 Environmental Waste Solutions pushed to use the site in Dresden as a dump. In light of residents and political representatives’ explicit opposition to the dump, the proposed area was directed to undergo a stringent environmental assessment process, but in a familiar bait and switch, the government reneged on this decision and has used this bill to propose a fast-tracked assessment period to carry out landfill operations on this site, jeopardizing the community’s water and natural heritage. This comes after the Premier’s infamous words regarding the waste centre, seemingly supporting the public pleas to abandon the project: “If the people like something, we do it. If they don’t, we don’t do it. It’s about as simple as that.” When it comes to community and environmental consultation, nothing with this government is simple. Their legislation and promises are always accompanied by double-talk, whispers and, above all, the pursuit of and reward for money and power.

“Betrayal,” “shock,” “destruction,” “dismay,” “failure,” “dangerous”: These are a few of the words that constituents from ridings, especially beautiful Beaches–East York, have chosen to describe their feelings and thoughts around Bill 5.

The Premier claimed that this government, during the 44th Parliament, would be a government for the people. Well, these are the people—the people who will ultimately have to live with the consequences of this government’s decision to dismantle Ontario’s environmental protections and diminish its communities’ voices, and they are not happy about this bill.

Basically, this government’s modus operandi is to release a bill on a Friday of a long weekend, create a crisis, give everyone heart attacks, cause massive public outcry, retract, withdraw, backtrack, flip-flop—repeat, repeat, repeat. We have seen this dance many times before. We have all been to this brutal ball.

So, it is my hope that when the government hears again from the good residents of Ontario how up in arms they are about this destructive bill, they will come to their senses and retract it.

1400

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Brian Saunderson): Questions?

Ms. Lee Fairclough: Thank you to my caucus colleagues for your remarks. I think that you’ve highlighted

some pretty significant concerns in the bill that we’re debating today.

One of the key questions that I have got is this gutting of the Endangered Species Act, really replacing recovery strategies with voluntary codes, giving politicians the final say on which species are protected instead of scientists. I think that you’ve been highlighting this today. Again, I just wondered if you could comment on that a little bit further and, where possible, describe to us some of the species that you also continue to be worried about. I’ll direct my question to the MPP for Beaches–East York.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Thank you very much for that question. I highlighted the Blanding’s turtle and how that application of the new rules under the species conservation act would affect the Premier, if applied, because it’s so illogical. The problem is that there’s the committee—COSSARO, the Committee on the Status of Species at Risk in Ontario. It is comprised of experts in the field. We have scientists, we have conservationists, we have people experienced in life science. They have been studying species at risk forever, and they usually would make a recommendation to the list. Now the government gets to decide. I don’t know who’s a scientist over there; put up your hands. Okay, and much experience with endangered species? Maybe, maybe not. So you would agree that this is an absolutely insane application of protections. I talked about the Blanding’s turtle, but there’s also the redbreasted dace. And there are many more, but—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Brian Saunderson): Question?

Mr. Will Bouma: To either member: I’m just a bit curious. What we’re doing is taking some of the good ideas that have led to significant improvements in the way that these projects can move forward from other provinces such as Saskatchewan, Alberta and British Columbia. And the member seemed to be intimating that if we make the same changes that these provinces have made in order to cut the timeline for opening a mine, say, in half, we must be destroying the environment. Are they accusing those provinces of destroying the environment?

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: There was no accusation about any other province in this beautiful country made by me or my colleague. Ontario has been a global leader in climate action—used to be, before 2018—in protection of native species, ecosystems, wetlands. I just feel that this government—it’s the Wild West. You’re not Clint Eastwood. There are rules and regulations and legislation for a reason. I don’t think you understand biodiversity and the way it works, and I would encourage you to meet with COSSARO members or go back to science class in high school.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Brian Saunderson): Question?

MPP Wayne Gates: After listening to your presentation, I think you’ll agree with me, this particular legislation is a bag of shit, quite frankly—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Brian Saunderson): I'll ask the member to withdraw that and to comply with parliamentary protocol, please.

MPP Wayne Gates: I withdraw.

Given that the Ford government's track record of weakening the environmental protections and failing to deliver on job-creation promises in key sectors like manufacturing and clean energy, how does Bill 5 actually ensure the creation of good-paying, long-term jobs without sacrificing Ontario environmental standards for our kids and our grandkids?

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Well, at least your reference was biodegradable. I just have to do a yoga breath for this bill.

You know, there are jobs to be had. I feel this government doesn't understand how the economy and ecology can work hand in hand, and other cities and countries in the world get it: the green economy.

We're woefully behind in reskilling and transitioning our workers: for example, a gas fitter to learn how to put in a heat pump. We're not saying people will lose their jobs. It's saying we transition. It's a new world out there. We're in a climate emergency. So let's get on board and not be left behind. This government is allergic to the words "climate change." You've never heard them in either one of their throne speeches.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Brian Saunderson): Question?

Mr. Adil Shamji: I understand that this legislation purports to accelerate the permitting of new mines and to accelerate infrastructure. While that is a noble aspiration, we've seen how under this government, oftentimes these efforts to accelerate things without doing homework properly lead to rather catastrophic consequences.

We've seen a scathing report from the Auditor General about ministerial zoning orders. We certainly saw what happened with the greenbelt scandal, and now there's an RCMP criminal investigation. Now we're talking about special economic zones. Could I ask you to comment a little bit on the folly of trying to accelerate things without doing your homework properly?

Mr. Ted Hsu: You know, it doesn't need to be this way, where you think that every barrier is going to slow things down. One thing that I've learned, because I live in the city, is when it comes to projects in the cities, if you have good experts, experienced regulators in the municipal government, things can go faster. We had a problem in Kingston. It was just taking a long time to get approvals. One of the reasons was because we didn't have enough experienced planners to know where to spend their time and where not to spend their time.

The other reason—which, I will be fair, Bill 5 does try to address—is that you had all sorts of different parts of the city, so you had traffic and noise and shadowing, and you had to go to do environmental assessments and archaeological assessments. The point is that sometimes some of the assessments had to wait for other ones, and if you coordinate everybody, things will go faster. That's an example of how you can still have good regulations—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Brian Saunderson): Question?

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: My question to the member opposite, whoever would like to respond: I want to talk a little bit about the "one project, one process" approach that is contained in this bill, because right now, it should not be taking 15 years to open a mine in this province.

We've all talked about how we're going to create more economic prosperity in this province and not be dependent on other entities, especially those entities south of the border. And I know we just went through an election where, if I recall correctly, I heard from the opposition that they wanted to support economic productivity here in this province and across this country.

That being the case, why is the opposition right now—the way you're talking, you seem to be continuing to hinder Ontario's growth. We are trying to safeguard our province's economic future. Please tell me why.

Mr. Ted Hsu: Mr. Speaker, sometimes in wartime, you have to put together a war cabinet. And why is that? Because you might have to make some really tough, difficult decisions, but you still want the trust of the people that you're acting on their behalf.

And so, that's the idea behind the all-party task force. You have PCs and Liberals and NDPs and Greens—and independents, perhaps—getting together, making a decision that's in the public good, where you look at the problem from different angles. If you have approval from different parties, people have the confidence and the trust in government, and you get that social cohesion.

People are willing to work together as a team if they trust the government, and that's what we need right now, when we're fighting this economic war—it's a global economic war—unleashed by Donald Trump. So this is what we're trying to do in our arguments, is to push the government to avail themselves of this option of an all-party—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Brian Saunderson): Further debate?

1410

Mr. Will Bouma: I appreciate the opportunity to be able to get up.

Before I go further, I do have to mention that I will be splitting my time with my colleagues the member from Richmond Hill, as well as the member from Scarborough Centre.

And so, honourable members, colleagues—oh, I quickly had a chance to look up Clint Eastwood's environmental record, and actually it's quite startling, and so I appreciate the comparison from the member from Beaches–East York that we are protecting the environment like Clint Eastwood. Thank you very much for that compliment.

I rise today to speak on Bill 5, Protect Ontario by Unleashing our Economy Act, a robust piece of legislation that will unlock the province's resource development potential. As elected officials in this House, every single one of us has an obligation, regardless of our political

stripes, to represent our communities, this province and, quite frankly, this nation. I say this because we are currently at a crossroads. We are facing a generational challenge, one that the current US administration started, a threat that is directly impacting families, businesses and industries alike, from coast to coast to coast. This threat, quite simply, is tariffs, and they are directly aimed at Ontario's economy.

The reality is the global economic landscape continues to shift drastically, and we all have a duty to step up and act decisively to secure our future—not just our future, but the future of our children, the future of our grandchildren, and Speaker, Bill 5 is a step forward in the right direction.

You see, Ontario has the ability to be a global energy superpower. Whether that's our clean energy technology or our abundance of critical minerals, we have not only what the US needs, but, frankly, we have here in Ontario what the world needs. Ontario is one of the most mineral-rich jurisdictions on the planet, with key resources like nickel, titanium, cobalt and lithium, critical for our cellphones, computers, medical devices, energy and electric vehicles.

The demand for resources is increasing. Just look down south. Last week, President Trump signed an executive order to expedite offshore and deep-water mining. But the US is not the only one who is fast-tracking their ability to open mines. Other countries can open mines within three to six years. Corporations and jurisdictions are calling on our government to find faster ways. The reality is, when you compare Ontario to other jurisdictions, we are behind because of bureaucratic red tape and government delays. So that is why what this bill does is simple.

The Protect Ontario by Unleashing our Economy Act, if passed, will cut down government approval time to open mines by at least 50%. I want to stress this, Speaker: We are cutting government approval time. This will be done through our new "one project, one process" framework. We're going to start setting benchmarks and turnaround times on government for mining applications. We're going to designate a mining authorization and permitting delivery team that will specifically be a point of contact to support organizations during their application. And we are going to streamline the approval process by creating integrated permitting plans in a sensible way that allows projects to move forward faster, because when you look at the old state of affairs, there were no deadlines on government to have mining applications turned around once submitted. Oftentimes, applications were duplicated and completed in silos. With this new process, we will no longer allow outdated procedures to hold back our province's economic potential. We will take control of our resources, and we will develop with efficiency.

But speeding up development does not mean that we have to compromise our other commitments, whether that be environmental or the government's duty-to-consult obligations. As the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Indigenous Affairs and First Nations Economic Reconciliation and the minister responsible for Ring of Fire economic and community partnerships, I cannot

emphasize enough the importance of working in partnership with First Nations leaders and their communities. Our government is wholeheartedly committed to upholding the duty to consult and our constitutional obligations, and this bill does not in any way replace or get in the way of this commitment.

When it comes to developing in the north, we are building partnerships with First Nations that revolve around fairness and respect, and Bill 5 helps with this by unlocking new pathways to economic reconciliation. Whether it's through creation of good-paying jobs, new infrastructure projects or ending the reliance on diesel for remote communities, we recognize that we have the opportunity to work alongside First Nations to improve economic resilience, community health and social outcomes, because together with these communities, we have a shared vision. From the outset, we have focused on finding common ground in relation to resource projects and legacy infrastructure.

Speaker, when we look at how things were done in the past, each ministry was obligated to fulfill their duty to consult on their respective part of a mining application, which often duplicated and confused the process for everyone involved. That often meant communities had to respond to multiple contacts in multiple ministries, all on the same project. Under this new procedure, we intend to integrate duty to consult throughout the entire process rather than piecemeal it through its various stages to provide the whole scope of work being considered.

Earlier this week, at the First Nations Major Projects Coalition conference, Premier Ford emphasized the importance of leaders and their communities working directly with our government on resource projects, because when we work together, we can focus our efforts and break down the barriers that stand in the way of lasting prosperity.

Look at earlier this year, for example. An agreement that dragged on for more than two and a half years by the public service was made within 15 minutes between Aroland First Nations Chief Sonny Gagnon and Premier Ford. This happened because of our government's commitment to First Nations-led development.

Now we bear the fruit of this agreement as Premier Ford and Minister Rickford join Aroland's Chief Gagnon to sign a shared prosperity agreement that will drive economic growth as well as build and upgrade critical community infrastructure in the Greenstone region. This agreement includes support for improvements to Anaconda and Painter Lake Roads, which are important connections to the Ring of Fire, as well as major new investments in infrastructure and energy transmission in the region.

The Ring of Fire, one of the world's largest untapped deposits of critical minerals, has the ability to be one of the most significant economic growth drivers in the north for generations. It will create thousands of good-paying jobs, add billions to our gross domestic product and play a central role in positioning Ontario as a global leader in sustainably resourced critical materials.

Our model is clear: With when you put partnerships first, prosperity follows. We look forward to seeing our shared priorities take shape as a result. Because the reality is, today's progress is tomorrow's success. It's why I urge everyone in this chamber to recognize the significance of this moment and support this vital legislation so that we can make a difference and be strong partners for First Nations communities in the north, across Ontario, across Canada and indeed around the world.

The world is watching what's happening in Ontario right now. They are seeing the difference that we're making in this.

I can tell you, having just been in London with Minister Rickford for another Indigenous-led-projects conference that was happening there, the capital that stands available to be invested into these projects in the north and around Ontario, if we can get out of our own way, is just waiting there to happen. The growth potential for our province, the growth potential for resource revenue sharing and for long-term stable financial resources to remote First Nations communities in the north—I've never seen anything like it.

Again, just this week, when we were at the Sheraton Centre to see Indigenous people there, as we saw last summer in Greenstone, when we were there at the Greenstone gold mining operation—Speaker, the opportunities that we have there to partner with First Nations, to see them getting so excited about the projects that we have planned, to see wealth pouring into their communities, to change the way that the north has been treated. We can recall when the north was considered—by the previous government—a no man's land, but that time is changing. That time is now, for Ontario and for Canada.

1420

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Brian Saunderson): The member from Richmond Hill.

Mrs. Daisy Wai: Thank you to the member from Brantford—Brant.

It is my honour to rise today to speak in support of Bill 5, the Protect Ontario by Unleashing our Economy Act. This bill is a decisive step in securing Ontario's economic future, fostering a more competitive, resilient and self-reliant province.

As MPP for Richmond Hill, I understand how crucial it is for our community to grow and thrive in today's changing global landscape. Richmond Hill has always been a place where innovation and opportunity meet, where local businesses expand and families prosper. But to continue that growth we must take proactive measures to protect what we have and ensure a strong, independent future for Ontario.

Speaker, Ontario is facing an increasingly unpredictable global environment. Tariffs, protectionist policies and shifting trade dynamics have shown us that we can no longer rely on others to safeguard our economic future. In this rapidly changing world, Ontario must protect its interests, and it must do so decisively. This is the core of the Protect Ontario by Unleashing our Economy Act.

This legislation provides us with the tools to safeguard Ontario's critical infrastructure—whether it is our mineral resources, our energy grid or our technology sectors—from foreign antagonists who seek to undermine our growth. We need to ensure Ontario's prosperity remains firmly in our hands and not in those of foreign actors who do not have Ontario's best interests at heart. My constituents in Richmond Hill are relieved when they see that our government, under the leadership of our Premier, Premier Ford—we're not just dealing with the tariffs that are so unpredictable, but rather we're taking the actions in our hands to be self-reliant.

This bill equips us to restrict the transfer of mining claims to foreign entities that threaten Ontario's sovereignty and enable us to safeguard our critical energy infrastructure from external threats. It's about ensuring that as we build Ontario's future, we control our resources, our energy and our destiny. Protecting Ontario means taking control of our future, ensuring that we remain masters of our own resources and assets, free from external interference.

Speaker, these are the most important steps to protect Ontario from external risk, but we must also recognize that we cannot protect our future without building it. That's why the Protect Ontario by Unleashing our Economy Act is just as much about creating opportunities as it is about protection. One of the best ways to build our future is by supporting local businesses and investing in Ontario's innovation.

In Richmond Hill, we are already seeing the kind of impact that smart investments can have. I'm proud to highlight the recent \$3.2 million investment in MIS Electronics Inc., a local manufacturing company. This investment will allow MIS Electronics to upgrade its outdated machinery with state-of-the-art technology, tripling its production capacity and creating 11 new, good-paying jobs right here in our community. This investment is not just about upgrading equipment; it is about ensuring that companies like MIS Electronics can compete on the global stage. By improving their productivity, MIS Electronics will be able to maintain existing contracts and capture new manufacturing opportunities that have previously been outsourced overseas.

I support this bill. Let's continue to work on and build Ontario through this.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Brian Saunderson): The member from Scarborough Centre.

Mr. David Smith: I would like to first thank my colleagues from Brantford—Brant and Richmond Hill for their remarks on this bill. It's a pleasure to rise today to deliver debate remarks for the first time as parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Energy and Mines. The discussion today as it relates to Bill 5, the Protect Ontario by Unleashing our Economy Act, has a direct impact on each and every one of us because the decisions we make today impact where we are tomorrow. Trump's tariffs have weakened our economy, but this bill allows us to take back control of our market. It allows us to be self-reliant.

It enables us to position our province as a global powerhouse.

Mr. Speaker, increasing the province's economic prosperity should be a priority for every single member in this House. We cannot rely on other countries, and the reality is, we do not need to. We have what the US needs. We have what the world needs. But what we need is this bill. This bill is the key to unlocking our potential because, when we look at where Ontario is when it comes to mining, we are far behind comparable jurisdictions.

Frankly, we can do better, and this bill does just that. It will cut government permitting approval time by at least 50%. It will create a coordinated process, breaking down years of Liberal barriers that caused delays and impeded our prosperity because, at a time of uncertainty, the world is demanding alternatives to non-democratic regimes like China, which trample on labour rights and ignore environmental standards. Ontario is not only that alternative; it can be the leader the world needs.

According to the Mining Association of Canada, 83% of Canadians say they would like to see more mining projects in Canada, and 80% say we need a stronger mining sector for Canada's economy to be healthy in the long term. A stronger and more robust mining sector starts with this bill.

The "one project, one process" framework will no longer allow outdated processes to hold back our province's economic potential. We are adding benchmarks. We are adding deadlines. And we are making sure we hold government to account.

Our objective here is not incremental improvements; it is to create the substantive change necessary to provide predictability and accelerated timelines that mining companies and their investors need to make multi-billion-dollar investment decisions with confidence. And we are going to do this while ensuring we are maintaining the duties we have to the environment and to First Nations communities.

In every sense, the proposed legislation is a clear signal, not only to the industry but to the world, that Ontario is serious about protecting the interests of our people while transforming and unleashing our economic potential.

1430

It is why I urge every member in this House to vote in support of this legislation so we can truly embrace our ability to be a global powerhouse.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Brian Saunderson): Questions?

MPP Wayne Gates: Given that previous legislation such as Bill 66 faced criticism for undermining environmental protections, can the government clarify how Bill 5 ensures the protection of Ontario's natural resources and prevents a weakening of environmental regulations?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Brian Saunderson): Response? The member for Brantford—Brant.

Mr. Will Bouma: Oh yes. Thank you, Speaker, and I appreciate the question.

I'll answer it this way: This isn't part of this legislation, but last summer I got to go to the north, and a new mine

meant that a lake had to be moved and I got to attend a water ceremony. So, before they moved the lake, the First Nations people there took a water sample from that lake, which they kept carefully over the time that the old lake was drained and a new lake was formed. Then we all got together to celebrate the birth of this new lake in the north, and they ceremonially took the water that they had taken from that lake originally and put that into the lake so that there would be an essence of the original lake in the new lake. This is the commitment we have to environmental protection.

We're making that even better in this to move things forward, because the reality is that First Nations people in the north need access to that resource revenue, and we need to act quickly.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Brian Saunderson): Questions?

MPP Stephanie Smyth: For the member from Brantford—Brant—I'm just getting over the Blanding's turtle and all that process. That's pretty disturbing when it comes to environmental protections.

But let's move on to Indigenous leaders: You mentioned that you're no longer going to allow outdated procedures to slow down development and you know how important it is to work with the Indigenous leaders.

What I want to ask is why did you not consult with Indigenous leaders with the development of this bill, as heard in the technical briefing by the member from Kingston and the Islands?

Mr. Will Bouma: That's a great question. The reality is we consult with Indigenous people all the time as we're putting this together. It's interesting that the people who are most concerned with making these projects happen faster are actually First Nations communities in the north, because they know what unlocking critical minerals and new supplies of lumber and other resources in the north will do for their communities.

It's interesting that when we signed our agreement with Chief Sonny Gagnon—I was there with the Premier and with the ministers as we did that—the people who were most concerned with tariffs in that room were actually the Indigenous leadership we met with, because they know the negative impacts that these tariffs will have in their communities. That's why they're asking us to move these things along as quickly as possible too.

In reality, we're not taking that away. Indigenous communities often have capacity issues with staff, so to have a one-window shop to be able to do a consultation on everything, instead of different ministries coming back and doing another consultation, makes it that much easier for the Indigenous—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Brian Saunderson): Question?

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: I want to thank the three members for their debate here today. The member from Brantford—Brant mentioned that the world is watching Ontario, and I agree with him 100%. From our SMR technology, the world wants it; from our mining, they want our minerals;

from our automotive that we've been able to attract \$46 billion of automotive to Ontario, they're watching us.

Can the member explain how this bill will help the Indigenous community and our First Nations?

Mr. Will Bouma: I really appreciate that question, because Indigenous leaders I speak to see the value of being able to make these projects move forward faster. We've been able to do the Oneida Energy Storage project in my riding, which means that there are resources coming into Six Nations through an energy storage project. It's even just moving forward and seeing these nation-to-nation partnerships in order to make these things happen.

When I first went to the north and saw four First Nations communities more excited about a new gold mine than the Premier was, if such a thing is possible, you know that we're on to something, where we can build the infrastructure to see vast amounts of wealth going into the north and into those communities, that they have long-term, stable income.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Brian Saunderson): Question?

MPP Alexa Gilmour: To the member from Brantford—Brant, you spoke about the importance of providing a future for our children and our grandchildren. You spoke about nation-to-nation partnerships with our Indigenous siblings here. And yet, the government has a troubling history of scandals—from greenbelt to Therme to Wilmot land grab—and has failed to be compassionate in its care for Indigenous children. Just ask the children of Grassy Narrows. Just ask the children in the north as young as 10 years old, who my colleagues spoke about, who are dying of suicide.

So my question is, why should the Indigenous children of today, who will bear those grandchildren you spoke of tomorrow, trust a government who has yet to fulfill its commitment to protect the waters and the care for the people of Grassy Narrows?

Mr. Will Bouma: That's a great question, thank you. People ask me, "What's the biggest thing you've done?" And I could talk about the four grade schools; I could talk about the new high school; I could talk about the new emergency department; I could talk about the new children's treatment centre coming to my community. But probably the biggest single achievement we've been able to accomplish in my riding was when Minister Jill Dunlop, the minister for women's and children's issues, was visiting Six Nations and we heard the stories about birth alerts, how young Indigenous mothers would have their children automatically taken away because they'd had experience in the system. I remember the minister leaving that meeting in tears saying, "I don't care what I have to do, I don't care what it takes; I'm going to eliminate those," and a few months later, we were able to accomplish that in the province of Ontario.

So if you're asking me if Indigenous children can trust this government, I give you a resounding yes. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Brian Saunderson): Question?

Ms. Lee Fairclough: Thank you, Speaker, for the opportunity to ask questions. As I've been listening today, I've been reflecting a lot on my colleague's comment earlier too about unchecked powers that this bill is going to allow. I certainly want to be sure that we're being very responsive to the tariffs, but I'm not sure why the attempt here is to really just exclude the involvement of government, have third parties have the ability to manage these processes. Why not take on that responsibility to make sure that it happens faster?

I think that my question really then is, why does this bill bar lawsuits from the public while giving the government unchecked direction?

Mr. Will Bouma: Thank you. I appreciate the question. You know, it's interesting. Our government is taking action. We're realizing that we're at war right now, with the tariffs. What I've heard from the member from Kingston and the Islands earlier today was that his response to that would be to start a committee to talk about what we should do. We're not satisfied with that. We will take action.

The world is watching Ontario right now. That's the reality, because there is so much capital that is fleeing from the United States right now, and the holders of that capital want to reinvest that in a place that's safe, that can create prosperity for them, for the community and for Indigenous people. And so we need to take action quickly and make these decisions so that we can take advantage of this opportunity that we have before us right now, at this time, which is why we're moving quickly on this, and I ask you for your support on this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Brian Saunderson): Quick question?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: When it takes 15 years to open a mine, that means First Nations have to wait 15 years for revenue-resource sharing. That means they lose out on millions and millions of dollars. But if we open a mine, they receive millions of dollars. Can the member from Brantford—Brant explain how First Nations and the government can work together to make sure that First Nations get a piece of the great economic pie of Ontario?

1440

Mr. Will Bouma: I think the question answers itself. A good friend of mine—we just had Earth Day and a tree plant. My good friend Chuck Beach, who I served with on the Brant Waterways Foundation for years, I saw him on Saturday, and we did a little video. You could look it up on social media. I asked Chuck, "Chuck, when is the best time to plant a tree," because Chuck taught me this. He said, "Twenty-five years ago." Then I asked Chuck, "Chuck, what's the second-best time to plant a tree?" And he said, "Today."

So, the best time to have done this work with Indigenous people was a very, very long time ago. But we are re-knitting together wampum belts today, so the second-best time is right now.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Brian Saunderson): Further debate?

Mr. John Vanthof: It's always an honour to be able to stand up in the House and speak on behalf of King Charles's loyal opposition, and on behalf of the residents of Timiskaming–Cochrane, and today on Bill 5—I've got to say, I always love the titles—Protect Ontario by Unleashing our Economy Act, 2025.

Some of the press reports and some of the parts of the bill, honestly, I'm really encouraged by. I come from a mining community. My riding and much of northern Ontario is mining, forestry, and my riding has got a lot of agriculture.

Mining is very important. The idea that the government has basically one portal to help mining companies through the hoops, and that part—because let's make it really clear: When mining companies talk to me, it's not the regulations that are the problem; it's the time it takes to go up the ladder, because regulations not only protect the people, they protect the companies, as well. In a place like mine, where we are surrounded by mines, we trust mining companies to do the right thing. But they, years ago, didn't—because we have lots of legacy mining problems because in my riding too, lots of them, and we're still paying for them. So, regulations also protect the company.

But the first part, where you say you're going to help companies get their approvals quicker, we are in favour of that, 100% in favour of having a solid ladder where they can climb up, because if anyone knows anything about mining, mining is very capital-intensive. You need to attract billions of dollars to start a project. To do that, you need to be able to show those investors that there is a solid timeline. So that's a good idea. I'm encouraged by that idea; I really am.

The endangered species part: We have a lot of experience with that in northern Ontario too, and I am concerned about changing the regulations, but we have to be most concerned about actually not the regulations but actually the species themselves, because in forestry, we have the Crown Forest Sustainability Act, which supersedes the Endangered Species Act—or supersedes, lives along with—and it actually looks at the environment in which the species live. Sometimes we have to—we do—as a Legislature make exceptions in the Endangered Species Act.

Northerners are willing to look at meaningful changes to the Endangered Species Act so long as they actually do protect the species. So we're looking at that and we're thinking, “Okay, so, those parts of the bill”—as a northerner, as a representative of the official opposition, I would say that those parts of the bill—maybe. But then you go a little bit farther, about the part with the special economic zones, and that tells you what this bill is really about. When you read that part, then you have to start thinking about choices.

I like to tell stories. I don't know if you've ever heard, Speaker—it's not really a parable. Anyway, it's a story about choices. You always have two choices, wherever you are in life. Your first choice—and some of them aren't your own choice—you're healthy or you're not. If you're healthy, you've got nothing to worry about; off you go. If

you're not healthy, there's two ways to go: You're either going to get less healthy or better. If you get better, once again, you're golden. If you don't get better, your choices become worse. You're either going to live or you're going to die. And if you live, once again, you're golden. If you die, once again, for those of us in the Christian faith, you have two paths: You've got heaven or hell. If you've got heaven, once again, you're golden. But you had these series of choices and if you've made a few of the wrong choices, once again, you're in hell and you've got two choices, and that's well-done or crispy.

This bill, when you go to the special economic zones, is where the government has made the choice—the wrong choice. Helping companies navigate the system, making sure there are strong regulations: That's a good choice. It really is. But when you say you're going to have special economic zones where the rules don't apply, that's a bad—that's a totally different vision.

I heard the Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade this morning say in question period that what we need is certainty and predictability. Well, making special economic zones that could be done for political purposes is not creating certainty or predictability at all—not at all—because you take away the certainty of regulation. And you know what else happens when that happens? If something does go wrong, the government of the day is going to wipe its hands of the problem and say, “Well, it was the trusted partner who made that mistake.” We all know how that works.

In the same bill, you're doing something very well, truly. Does it have a few things we would do differently? Yes, we could talk about that. But actually helping people, helping companies to navigate the regulations, very strong regulations? That's a good thing.

In this province—I'll back up a second. In this country, there are provinces and territories that do a much better job of regulating mining than we do. We always say we're number one; we're not. An example: A big mining company in my riding, Agnico Eagle, has a mine in Nunavut. And I believe—I should have looked this up—but from discovery to production, I think it's seven years. They have stronger regulations than we do, environmentally, and a much better system—I heard people talking about how great a system we have of working with Indigenous people. They have a much better system in Nunavut than we have. And yet they can go twice as fast.

It's because of the predictability. But with special economic zones, you're taking away the predictability. You have a special economic zone for X—what makes this bill, quite frankly, a joke, is that you have a special economic zone for Ontario Place. That makes this bill farcical, truly, because Ontario Place has nothing at all to do with our huge concerns with what the American administration is doing. I'm not downplaying that at all. We need to work together to deal with our neighbour who was formerly our best friend and is now not friendly at all, but Ontario Place has nothing to do with that. So, that is a huge problem. It's a huge problem, and it shows the true colours of this bill.

1450

The mining part, maybe the endangered species part—you know, it would be a fight. I'm not saying it wouldn't, but those two you could talk about. But as soon as you talk about special economic development zones that the government of the day decides what the rules are—completely decides, has the power to make the rules different in one part of the province and then the other part of the province. What about companies who don't happen to be in a special economic development zone, and they have to have a different set of regulations than someone doing the same thing in a special economic development zone? That's a joke. How about we make the rules solid and make sure that everyone has a decent shot at doing the best job they can throughout the province? That's what a government should be doing.

I often heard Conservatives of old saying, "Well, the government shouldn't be in the business of picking winners and losers." Well, here, the new Conservatives, that's all they seem to be about with special economic zones. But the biggest problem is—you know who the biggest losers are going to be? The people. Some of the companies who are dealing with the government in these special economic zones, because there are many companies, big and small, who quite frankly have a much better reputation to protect than this government does, environmentally, fiscally—much better; much better. And they're going to end up wearing the reputation of this government.

You really need to rethink this. What you need to do is take the good idea that you had, not just with mining companies but with our regulatory system altogether, and make sure that companies can navigate our system, that we do everything we can to take the red tape out—and there is red tape—but keep the regulations that protect people, protect the environment and protect the investors who invest in those companies, because investors, once they figure out that those special economic development zones are actually the "Wild, Wild West" and that the companies are responsible for any problems that develop there—because the government has wiped its hands clean: "Oh, they're a protected stakeholder. We didn't know that was going to happen." Right?

Those investors, one of the things you check when you're investing is that the company has a solid record. One of the things, when a company looks, is that the government has—no one likes regulations, but regulations have a reason. If the companies start to figure out that what the government—the first thing the government is going to do if something goes wrong is back away.

This morning, the minister said that what Ontario needs is certainty and predictability. Well, Bill 5 is the exact, exact opposite of that; couldn't be farther from it, couldn't be farther. I really don't understand—well, I do understand. You are advertising the part that actually makes sense and trying to keep people's attention from the parts that don't make sense, that actually aren't good for Ontarians. They might be good for some Ontarians but certainly are not good for the long-term future of this

province. And yes, we are in a generational fight. I wouldn't say it's a war, because you're discrediting people who have actually fought and died for the right to stand in this chamber. We are in a fight, and it's a generational fight. It's a very strong political fight. It's a fight of differing viewpoints. But I would suggest that the special economic zone part shows more the ideology of the people we're fighting against than the people we're fighting for.

This province needs to make sure that all the rules make sense, but that everyone is treated the same under the rules. Now, if companies can't survive under those rules, then we have to look at the rules and see what we can change or what we can make better. But to say that this part of the province needs to be regulated, but this part doesn't, is against everything we believe in. That this part of the province actually has to have fair labour laws, but this is a special economic zone and they don't count here—that's totally wrong. And for the government, any government, to say that mining and forestry—mining, particularly, has brought economic prosperity to this province. It has, unbelievably so, and will continue to do so. When people tell me that mining is way behind the rest of the world, that's also farcical. We have one of the most modern, progressive mining sectors in the world.

But to say that everyone in this province benefits equally? That's not true. That's not true. I challenge you to drive to some of the places in northern Ontario where the miners actually live and work. The standard of living is different than here. Access to health care is much different than here. My riding has some of the biggest mining resources, has a fairly high income, but has one of the lowest life expectancies in the province. Why? We don't have access to services. You have mental health problems in Timiskaming–Cochrane? A year for a psychiatrist or more, in a rich mining area. Now we're being told, "Oh, you just wait. The Ring of Fire is going to change it all." It's not going to change it all. We know that.

So, how about we be truthful and actually work on ways that we all benefit from this? Let's be truthful. Let's split the bill and pass the first part, because we have to oppose what you're proposing. You're proposing two-tier for this province. That's just completely wrong.

And in my last couple minutes, I am going to give a shout-out to the pages, Gabe and his friends, because you know how difficult it is here to listen to speeches. I know when I was your age, there's no way I could have done this. When I got elected 14 years ago, it took me about a month to find the right door to the building, and no one ever predicted that I could do this today. You, the pages, already know more about our political system than 99% of the people in this province, and I encourage you to take what you've learned here and use it, because you truly will be the leaders of tomorrow. Believe me, we're going to need you.

This is a great province. People come from all over the world to come to this province. My parents came from Holland. My wife comes from Holland. There are people from all different places of the world here, because

Ontario has been a beacon, Canada has been a beacon. And it will always be a beacon, as long as we treat it as such. But you're going down a dangerous path when you're saying the government is going to have different rules for one area than the other area. That's a dangerous, dangerous path to go down. It really is. And something else you have to remember is that when the government goes down that path, you might think it's a great idea for now, but you're not going to be there forever. When the Premier mused about electing judges or appointing more politically minded judges—that might sound great until the government changes, and then you're stuck with the things that you've created.

1500

Let's all work together to make sure we protect the ideals on which this province and this country were built, the ideal that someone like me, a little kid from a farm, can stand on this podium and people actually listen. I thank you for that opportunity, and have a great speech.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Brian Saunderson): Questions?

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: I think the sentiment I'm hearing a lot in the House for the government is that if you're rewriting the rules to remove protections for wildlife, just say it. Let's call a spade a spade here. Let's not pretend it's about balancing economic growth.

My question for my honourable colleague here is, what are his thoughts on removing habitat protections and sidelining experts in Ontario? What are the consequences here?

Mr. John Vanthof: I'd like to thank my colleague and congratulate him for being in this House. I'd like to thank my colleague for that question.

My answer might not be typical, but when I listen to talking about protecting species in here, a lot of people need to come to where I live and actually see how it works because sometimes people who don't live there don't see how it actually works and why people get so frustrated. When a project gets stopped for the Blanding's turtle, but there hasn't been a Blanding's turtle there for 50 years, but there might be at some point in the future, that's what's so frustrating, right? We need to look at that. We need to be honest, but we all have to decide that we're going to protect the Blanding's turtle, not protect what we think the Blanding's turtle is.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Brian Saunderson): Questions?

Mr. Joseph Racinsky: Thank you for the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane for his speech. I wanted to keep going on this endangered species topic, and I thank him for his support for elements of this bill. Something that really stands out to me in Bill 5 is the enhanced enforcement framework, which includes hefty fines, potential jail time and new investigative powers for officers. This stronger enforcement regime is crucial for safeguarding our species.

I just want to ask if he, the member, and the official opposition are in favour of this enforcement framework.

Mr. John Vanthof: Thank you very much, and congratulations on your election as well. I don't think I said that I'm in favour of the framework. I think that this House and the people should actually look at how we're going to protect the species.

One way or the other, sometimes what actually happens in the ground isn't what is going to protect a species. You can make the fines as high as you want, but if there are not enough people out there to actually inspect it—and we go through this with the Ministry of the Environment all the time. There are all kinds of fines out there and nobody there to enforce them. Again, what we do here has to be reflective of what actually happens on the ground, and that's not always the case. Hopefully, we all learn that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Brian Saunderson): Question?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Oftentimes we're in this place and we don't think people are paying attention, but there are people paying attention out there. I can tell you I got an email coming from one of my constituents. She says:

“Hi Teresa,

“I live in London, Ontario. I'm a woman nearing 40 years of age. I have stayed silent for far too long out of fear or apathy or just not being sure enough on how to do” the right thing.

“I would like to become more involved in my local politics and I'm just looking for some advice on the best way to start to do that.

“I am very serious about getting involved as I can no longer sit by and let someone else do it for me.

“What has initially made me want to reach out for the first time ever to my local MPP is a newly proposed Bill 5 by Premier Doug Ford which is very dangerous to the environment and I am upset that it is being framed as a way to protect against Trump's tariffs as I'm sure you are already aware.

“I would really like to elevate my voice as I feel it is absolutely necessary to do so now more than ever and any direction you can offer me to help stop this bill from passing would be greatly appreciated.”

So I'd like to ask the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane: In your humble opinion, do you think my constituent will have an opportunity to go to committee? Will this bill go to committee for public input, so I can give her that tool to elevate her voice against this bill?

Mr. John Vanthof: Thank you very much to my colleague for that question. I certainly hope that this bill goes to committee.

Actually, what would be really beneficial for this bill is if this bill actually went to committee to places where this bill is going to have a huge impact. So, 14 years ago, I was at the Ring of Fire—14 years ago—and it's not developed now. It was supposed to take 15 years. What a lot of people don't understand is, there are huge economic issues. If the price of nickel is down, you're not going to develop the Ring of Fire. If the price of chromite is down, you're not going to develop the Ring of Fire.

I was there. It's going to cost an awful lot of money to build the Ring of Fire. But you want to make the Ring of Fire a special development zone? How about you take the committee and go talk to the First Nations? And not just the three who maybe agreed, but how about all five or all 10? That would be consultation.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Brian Saunderson): Question?

Ms. Lee Fairclough: Thank you, Speaker, for the opportunity to ask a question, and thank you to the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane for your comments. I really appreciated a few things that you said. The first was the fact that the inclusion of Ontario Place sort of gave a hint of what this was actually really about, and the second is the fact that this has really created an open season to do what's needed, but actually with very little accountability by the government. I had one of my constituents, as well, email me and say this is just about a power grab.

We do need to move forward, but I just wondered if you could speak a little more to how we can strengthen that sense of accountability and ensure that government feels some ownership. If this were to pass and we had special economic zones, how do we make sure that there's some level of accountability around their use?

Mr. John Vanthof: Thank you very much for that question. That's a tough one. The Progressive Conservatives won a mandate. It's our job to hold them to account, which we are doing.

On this one, the risk that the government faces is—the Greenbelt Act was rescinded. That doesn't happen here. Bill 124, the Men in Black act: To them, it never officially happened. That's because this government—“Oh, wait a second. It's illegal? RCMP? Oh, unconstitutional?” That didn't happen before. The government of the day—and I'm not a big supporter of the Liberal government—actually took the time to make sure that this was actually going to work, and that's not what these people do.

It's true: They rescinded an act to the day before it was enacted, the Men in Black act. That's what this Legislature is for, not for that to happen. You have the right to put forward your agenda, but this Legislature and the—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Brian Saunderson): Question?

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: Thank you to my colleague from the other side for Timiskaming–Cochrane. Thank you for your passion, your experience and your knowledge, and for sharing the experience with the members in this House.

I know we are living in a different world. We are not living in a simple time. The red tape and bureaucracy is playing a large role not to dig the mining in Ontario. My son talks about it all the time. He's an electrical—an automotive engineer, not electrical. He just graduated, and he wanted to get into the automotive industry. He said critical minerals are a very critical, vital part of the EV battery manufacturing.

1510

So you understand the dynamic. You are passionate to talk about these things. Why are you opposing or resisting

this bill that empowers the next generation of Ontarians, our Ontarian people, including Indigenous people?

Mr. John Vanthof: That's a very good question. I appreciate the question, and I think I was pretty clear: There are parts of this bill I am very supportive of. If those parts were actually extended to the rest of the economy, to the rest of the province, I think it would make a difference. But there were parts of this bill that are actually going to hurt the future of Ontarians and hurt the future of the pages. They are. And we need to recognize that.

Laws and regulations should be applied universally. There shouldn't be a different—I have a fellow dairy farmer here: There shouldn't be a difference for milk quality in Bruce, Oxford or Timiskaming, because Timiskaming happens to be an economic development zone. But this government could declare that. That is farcical, and you need to recognize that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Brian Saunderson): Further debate?

Mr. John Fraser: Good afternoon. I want to say a couple of things before I get started. I always like debating here on Thursday afternoon because it's kind of like church. It's so quiet; people are kind of sleeping in the pews a little bit, and then to come in and have my—and I have to say, I don't have favourites, but the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane is one of my favourites because he's so eloquent and great on his feet.

Mr. John Vanthof: And for everyone: I did read the bill.

Mr. John Fraser: He did read the bill. I won't do a point of privilege. There we go. Sorry.

Having said that, look: We have to be able to develop our resources quicker than we are. There's no question about that. We used to have a problem with hospitals. It used to take 17 years to build a hospital from the time you had an idea to the time you got it done. And we managed to do that. It's not 17 years now, it's more like 10 or 12, and it's understandable because of all the work that has to go into it, just like the complexities around mineral resources and markets, and just the availability of capital to actually develop the things that we want to develop.

I'm going to say something too about what the member for Timiskaming–Cochrane said with regards to travelling the bill. This bill should be travelled. There's no question about it. It should go to the places that are going to be most affected.

There are three things that I want to focus on in this bill. There are some things that I agree with, but these three things I don't agree with. And they are the idea of a “trusted” partner—get that? Trusted partner, special economic zones and literally unfettered, unaccountable ministerial power. This is a recipe—actually, it's not a new recipe, it's a recipe that we've seen play out.

Let's talk about the greenbelt. For the greenbelt, we had the same sense of urgency that we are hearing from the government on this bill: “We've got to do it, we've got to do it right now, we've got to do it for our developer, we're in a war, we've got to do it—we've got to do it so fast. We've got to build houses. We need to get them built so

we're going to have to carve up the greenbelt. I know I said I wasn't going to do it but we're going to do it."

And what happened? We didn't build any houses, but we really helped the land speculators, right? We really helped the land speculators. That's what happened, and that's what it was all about. It wasn't about building houses; it was about the value of people's land, and we were tricked by the urgency of building homes into actually allowing something to happen in this province that was wrong: an \$8.3-billion backroom deal. That's what it was. And there are all sorts of players, and basically in that situation all roads led to the Premier's office, and continue to lead to the Premier's office.

And, as the member for Timiskaming–Cochrane said, what happened with that legislation? Backwards. Was it the—

Mr. John Vanthof: The Men in Black bill.

Mr. John Fraser: The Men in Black bill—you can fix me up right now, okay? Thank you. I've forgotten it all.

Hon. Mike Harris: Don't get him too distracted; look what happens.

Mr. John Fraser: No, no. It's just—what I don't believe is the government codifying a practice that is rife with risk for things to be corrupted, for things to be used in a way that are not for the public good, like happened with the greenbelt. And the Premier admitted that—after a while. You know, when your hand is in the cookie jar and somebody catches you, you've got to do something.

So the idea of a special economic zone or a trusted partner, who gets to decide that? Were they land speculators? Well, they were the "trusted partners." It was the minister's office, at the time, making decisions about MZOs that really looked more about land speculation. In the case of Ottawa, it was a property on a karst, they expanded the urban boundary—Watters Road. Totally inappropriate for development, not connected to services—not even close—geologically complex and hard to serve, and then, bam, all of a sudden five donors get an expansion to the urban boundary. Did that build any houses? Was it going to build any houses? No. But you know what it did? It doubled or tripled the value of that land overnight.

There's risk in this bill to doing this. The government is not actually putting any parameters or oversight over that risk, right? Ministerial power, trusted partner, special economic zone. As a matter of fact, special economic zones—actually, they put it right in this bill, which is kind of amazing when you think this is a recipe for the kind of scandals that have gone on: Ontario Place is a special economic zone. I think it's better like a special scandal zone.

Interjections.

Mr. John Fraser: What's that? It's a spa. Okay. Ministers will not have to travel far to get hands-on experience. Sorry, I digress.

MPP Wayne Gates: That's not nice.

Mr. John Fraser: I'm sorry. Stop interrupting me, guys.

MPP Wayne Gates: You're thinking of the game tonight too much, buddy.

Mr. John Fraser: No, I'm just really tired; I didn't get any sleep last night. Speaker, I'm struggling here, but I'll get through it.

Ontario Place and this idea of a special economic zone is actually in the bill. What do we have at Ontario Place? If we all remember Ontario Place, what is Ontario Place? Some \$2.2 billion of taxpayers' money, and that's about \$400 a person in this province—thanks to the NDP; they did the math; I want to thank you very much for making that out—and a 95-year lease. And what was it for? It was for a luxury spa to a company that literally had no money—a little more than a million bucks. And they wanted the whole island. And then they weren't who they said they were. They didn't actually have a spa—well, they had a little spa; they didn't have spas all over. They tried to pretend they were another company that they weren't, and somehow they got this deal. It wasn't a deal, actually; it was a prize. Do you want to know why it was a prize? Because they were a "trusted partner." And the government wants to codify this in legislation, to say, "It's okay for us to do what we just did: have a trusted partner behind closed doors," that people really can't look at, that they can't look at the process, that they can't know that it was fair.

Then the Auditor General said, "It wasn't fair or transparent, the way that process went for the participants." Then the government actually has the gall to say, "Well, we're going to make it legislatively okay to do this." That's what you're saying. It doesn't pass the sniff test. I know it only took the Premier 24 hours to double-and triple-check; I'm amazed at how proficient and thorough he is that he can do it that quickly.

How can you build trust with people if you're passing legislation that says, "All that stuff we did, that was okay. It was okay. It's going to be okay because we're going to make it legislatively okay to have a trusted partner, a special economic zone—and we'll pick where that is"? And to the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane's point, you've got to be careful about picking and choosing winners and losers, because we're all in this thing together, and his analogy with the quality of milk and dairy farms—right on. That could happen.

1520

So that's the problem with this bill. The problem with this bill is, the government really hasn't built trust because of things like the Therme spa, the greenbelt, urban boundaries, ministerial zoning orders, Staples—anybody can chime in if I missed anything. There's no trust. And then we see this thing where they're saying, "We've got to do it. We've got to do it. We've got to do it. We've got to go so fast. We've got to go so fast. And you know what? You're going to stand in front of it." Well, in retrospect, maybe some of us should have stood in front of the bulldozers at Ontario Place or stood in front of what was happening at the greenbelt, because the greenbelt got reversed, and I've got to tell you, Ontario Place, when this is all said and done, it ain't going to be pretty for the

government. I can feel it in my bones. It's just too easy to see, because you can't give money to a foreign company—\$2.2 billion worth of money and a 95-year lease to a company that doesn't have enough equity to build it while they're lobbying you and who doesn't actually represent themselves in a straightforward way. They're not who they say they are. That's the risk in this bill.

The government probably answered—well, didn't answer; probably responded to maybe, I don't know, 20 questions this week, 25 questions this week: "It's not a problem. It's all good. We didn't do anything wrong." Maybe the answer is going to be, "Well, no, no, it's all good. They were a trusted partner. We trusted them. They were a trusted partner." You know what? Ontario Place is just a special place. The government treated this like a realty decision: "Here's a piece of land." It's more than just a piece of land. It's a piece of land on the lakeshore of Lake Ontario, on the shores of Lake Ontario. It's a crown jewel.

The city of Toronto and Ontario—if you take a look at what happened in Chicago and how Chicago redeveloped their waterfront and how they did that by a process in which they included the public, in which they brought them in, in which they looked for designs, where they had an open process—it should have been at least transparent and fair and open and more than just a land transaction. But that seems to be what this government does best. That just does not benefit Ontario families.

As I said before, Therme spa, \$400 a person—thank you very much for doing all the calculations; it saved me doing the math. It's a lot of money.

So, there are things in this bill that we need to do. There's a way forward in this bill, and the way forward in this bill is to actually take a hard look at what kind of oversight you are going to put on the exceptional powers that you're going to give ministers, because you know what? Anybody in this place could be a minister any day—not now, but at any time, at some point. I know you guys don't believe that. It does happen, trust me—been there, done that.

Interjection.

Mr. John Fraser: Well, it's actually about all of us, right? It is about all of us. It's about how do we make sure that there's a check and balance. I know that sometimes the stuff we say—I think most people try not to make it personal, and sometimes we get a little worked up. But the reality is, our job is to ask questions—ask questions that people don't necessarily want to hear all the time. But you know what? That's your job too.

So when I talked about the Therme spa, I said, "What happened in your cabinet?" You have the biggest cabinet in the history of Ontario. I wasn't a cabinet minister, but I got in there every once in a while—I was a PA and I was a Chair of a parliamentary committee—and I don't know how you get all those people in there, to be honest with you. If any ministers want to look at me and nod, it's a pretty tight fit if there's 37 of you, unless some of you get kicked out to the anteroom while something else is going on.

My question is, on the Therme spa, on the greenbelt, did anybody ask any questions? You want to pass legislation and maybe—this legislation looks like—well, you could look at it two ways, actually. You look at it as, like, well, maybe it's going to make you ask more questions or need to ask more questions because there's this kind of wide-open thing where there's no check and balance, and as ministers, you feel this responsibility for the public purse and you want to make sure you ask the right questions. Or it could be just like, "Oh, Bill 5, trusted partner, that's okay. I don't have to question. Give me the pen. Just gimme the pen." Like, what happened with Therme? Did they herd you all in and just go stamp, done? Greenbelt, stamp, done? That's the problem with this bill.

Then, what's going to happen is the same thing that happened in the greenbelt. It's too wide open, it will get messed up, and then we'll have a Men in Black bill 3.0, right? So why not take a more thoughtful approach and put some oversight around the kinds of things—some of which you shouldn't be creating. There has to be a check and balance to ministerial power other than us asking questions over here. It has to be over there, too. You don't want carte blanche. You just don't want it, and that's what this bill does.

I'm going to wrap it up because I know you're all getting tired of me talking, and I'm really tired. I have to admit it. I don't know; I've got four minutes. I don't know if I can do it. I'll try—

Interjection.

Mr. John Fraser: There you go. Okay. Maybe we should do some audience participation stuff. That's okay. I think we did that already today there. If it looks like a duck, it walks like a duck—

Hon. Mike Harris: It must be a Liberal.

Mr. John Fraser: If it walks like a rat, squeaks like a rat, smells like a rat, it's probably a—

MPP Wayne Gates: Conservative.

Mr. John Fraser: There we go. Now we're even, guys. Don't worry about it.

This is good. I like participation, and I like the fact that you're listening. That is really important. I'm not saying that you agree with me or that maybe, to you, everything I'm saying makes sense, but if you remember anything, remember those three things: trusted partner, special economic zones, unfettered ministerial power. It is a recipe for disaster, I guarantee you. Too much, too fast and without a check and balance will always lead to something that's not good. Thank you, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Brian Saunderson): Questions?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: I appreciated the speech from the leader of the Liberal Party. I think he's the de facto leader of the Liberal Party. Some people have told me there's another leader of the Liberal Party, some shadow leader out there somewhere. I don't believe it. This guy's the real leader right here because he's doing all the work, and I hope he's getting paid as much as the other one.

I wanted to ask him about special economic zones. From his speech, am I to conclude that he does not want a special economic zone in his riding?

Mr. John Fraser: Do you know what I want in my riding? For the one out of six people who don't have a family doctor to have a family doctor. What do I want? I want some more family health teams. I want some more long-term-care beds. What do I want? I want schools that aren't crumbling. I want kids to get enough help in school. That's what I want.

Look, Ontario, right now, is a special economic zone, all of it. That's what's most important.

1530

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Brian Saunderson): Question?

MPP Jamie West: Thank you to the member from Ottawa South. It was entertaining and informative.

This is going to sound like a poke in the eye, but I don't mean it that way. The Ring of Fire was discovered while the Liberal government, provincially, was in power. There was a lot of work and negotiations towards bringing that forward. I know you were with the government during that time. Are there any lessons that were learned from that that could be passed on to our colleagues in the government now?

Mr. John Fraser: I think if we take anything from that—and it's to what the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane said—it's that there's a challenge, especially around commodity prices. If it's not worth much, no one is going to put a hole in the ground and you're not going to be able to build a road. Most importantly, I think we tried to do this, and we have to find a way to follow through on the duty to consult in a way that's meaningful, but also that both sides recognize, in the case that it be better to get things done in a way that is faster. I think that's important.

But every time I hear “Ring of Fire,” I think of the Johnny Cash song. I just can't get it out of my head.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Brian Saunderson): Question?

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: I want to thank the member from Ottawa South for his excellent debate and comments this afternoon about Bill 5.

I've heard from a lot of constituents in Don Valley West about this bill. They kind of see it as greenbelt 2.0. They can spot a power grab when they see it. We see every day how this government is operating. It's like they're being guided by the question, “How can we give ourselves more power while being less accountable?” Whether it was opening the greenbelt under false pretenses or threatening to use the “notwithstanding” clause on a number of files, this government seems to be determined to get its way at the expense of the people of Ontario.

Through you, Speaker, to the member from Ottawa South: Can we trust this government with this kind of power?

Mr. John Fraser: No.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Brian Saunderson): Question?

Mr. Matthew Rae: Thank you to my colleague from Ottawa South for his remarks and his sermon this afternoon, if he's using that analogy, but it was a sermon of putting up more obstacles in the way of economic development. I know we're not surprised on this side of the House when a member of that party—he was a member of the governing party at the time that called the north no man's land. They gave up on the north, which is a shame.

I return again to the original question from my colleague from Essex. Can the member from Ottawa South please—yes or no: Does he want a special economic zone in his riding of Ottawa South?

Mr. John Fraser: Not if somebody has to pay you to get it. Ontario is a special economic zone.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Brian Saunderson): Question?

MPP Jamie West: The member from Ottawa South has talked a lot about Ontario Place and that kind of sketchy-sounding Therme deal. We're in an economic crisis with a threat from southern Ontario. People are worried about keeping a roof over their head and food on the table. We know people across Ontario are under threat of being laid off or have been laid off already.

How excited do you think the people of Ontario will be to find out that each household in Ontario will pay \$400 towards a luxury spa in downtown Toronto on Ontario Place, on public land, and there's going to be a 95-year lease for this area? How many people who are being laid off or under threat of being laid off do you think will be using a private luxury spa in downtown Toronto?

Mr. John Fraser: Look, I think \$400 a person to a company that basically had no money, no real experience—in a sense, they tried to pretend they were somebody that they weren't. I don't think they warrant it. I think that the process was done behind closed doors, and, like the Auditor General said, I don't think it was very transparent. How do you award that much money and that much valuable land, not just from the value of the land, but of what the land means to Ontario and to Toronto and to the people who live here? The government is focused on the wrong things. They didn't include the people of Ontario in this. It's just that the Premier decided, “This is what I want on Ontario Place. I want a luxury spa and some waterslides. I don't know, maybe we'll get a Ferris wheel too.” And they gave it to a company with literally no money and no experience. How the heck does that happen?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Brian Saunderson): Question?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: Back on the topic of special economic zones—which, by the way, could be really, really good: If you're looking for a special economic zone in your riding, you probably want to get one, and if you don't want one, you're probably pretty convinced you don't want one.

Now, I thought I had heard a speech from the member from Ottawa South saying that he thought economic zones were a bad idea. That's what I thought I heard, and if he

thinks they're a bad idea, then he probably doesn't want one in his riding, right? If you think something is bad, you don't want it in your riding.

So does he want to make a commitment today to rule out any special economic zone for the riding of Ottawa South? Does he want to make that commitment today or does he want to think about it, maybe?

Mr. John Fraser: With all due respect, this line of argument you're following is ridiculous. All of Ontario is a special economic zone.

The greenbelt was a special economic zone. It was real special for those land speculators. They did really well. They didn't get a house, man. Nobody got a house, but a lot of people got rich. A lot of people got rich off of MZO's.

So yes, I wouldn't want a special economic zone if somebody has to actually buy it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Brian Saunderson): Question?

Mr. Chris Glover: I want to thank the member for your comments today.

One of the things that this government did was they passed Bill 154, the Rebuilding Ontario Place Act, and that bill exempted the project from all municipal and provincial laws. It also retroactively exonerated any government minister or agent who had committed breach of trust, breach of contract or acts of malfeasance, which means abuse of government power.

Now the government is using this template to build special economic zones across the province. Considering the scandal at Ontario Place, that they gave a \$2.2-billion tax subsidy and a 95-year lease on public parkland to a company that misled them, that lied about their credentials, and that had only a million euros in the bank—not enough to qualify to do this project—do you have concerns that Bill 5 is just the expansion of creating these Ontario Place-type scandals across the province?

Mr. John Fraser: I think I coined them “special scandal zones,” right? I think the challenge that I have with this is that there's just no accountability, and what it says to any minister who happens to have some powers under this is that you can do whatever you like.

It's no wonder that the Premier attacked the judiciary today—or yesterday. He continued to attack them today by not answering. He said under the justice's letter that he wouldn't take it. There is a necessity for ministers and Premiers and governments to be accountable, and that's not happening in this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Brian Saunderson): Further debate?

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I come here today with my hands empty, in a pleading mode. I am troubled by this bill. What motivates me to be here today and every day is building a life that's livable for future generations. We always have to make sure—just like social workers, we say, “The first thing you should do is do no harm.” I know we're always, in government, trying to weigh harm against benefit, but I do think we can have both. We can go ahead and create infrastructure, we can create investments, we can create healthy economies, while also being careful and sensitive

about the harm that is possible to future generations and our planet.

Our species relies on water. Water migrates north. We know that, in Canada, one of our most important resources is clean water. We are one of the countries in the whole world that has the most fresh water, and in the future that will be the most valuable commodity—not gold, not dollars, not fossil gas, not minerals but clean water. I hope that when we are doing this work, we will do what we can to protect our water resources and air and nature.

1540

So 89% of Canadians identify with the amount of nature we have in Canada, and 65% believe that we need to make investments to protect nature. That's why it troubles me to see the equations of cutting of red tape because we know red tape in some cases is protection against pollution of our waterways, respect for the community members that they can benefit from this and be seen as equal partners and, of course, making data-driven decisions. We see that powers given to ministers unquestioned, unchecked—committees can appoint members to the committee that have no expertise. So we will be appointing people without expertise to make decisions on things that require that expertise.

It also begs the question of the dependence on foreign investments. We see right now the predicament we are in, where we are very dependent on the United States, and that's caused havoc for our economy. A lot of the mining interests right now are not necessarily benefiting Canadians. We see this especially with our nuclear. We see how our nuclear projects, our partnerships with American companies can create dependence for decades to come on the very fuel and nuclear needs coming from the United States, and that's our only viable option.

And of course, our climate: We are in a climate crisis. We are looking at an unlivable future for ourselves and for future generations. We see climate disasters on a regular basis, whether it's ice storms in Orillia, flooding in Toronto—these are very costly climate disasters that we are causing.

Did you know that the peat bogs that cover up these minerals are the second-largest in the entire world? They actually store as much carbon as 10 years of Canada's emissions total. So when we disrupt these ecosystems and we emit this carbon and we release these gases that have accumulated over millennia, that will just be one of the major tipping points heading us over into disaster. This is our Amazon forest. Look at what's happened in the Amazon. They clear-cut in order to make grazing for cattle. We have the same need to ensure that we can boost our economy without decimating nature and the ecosystems that exist there now.

So 73% of our biodiversity has been lost since 1970—73% of our biodiversity. These animals and plants don't exist in isolation, so when we ruin their habitat and limit what we define as habitat, we create a chain reaction that will inevitably negatively impact ourselves, our ability to drink clean water, our ability to breathe clean air and our ability to feed ourselves.

We can look to solutions. It is possible to have it all. I do believe in a green economy, but I think we can do this by measuring twice and cutting once. I think we've seen the costs and delays that have been caused by issues like the greenbelt, where we kind of created a blanket opening based on private interests and not a whole lot of due process. I think when we think of this Ring of Fire, these peat lands, we need to consider the delicate ecosystem that exists and how we can move forward with economic interests without causing massive harm and we need to include the voices of experts.

Too often, I hear the government relying on political statements and somewhat greenwashing. It does erode trust from the public so let's go forward with facts. The same goes for landfills. The same goes for the greenbelt and putting through Highway 413. We need to come up with solutions that are rooted in evidence, and we have to look at our own behaviours. We are greedy little consumers who grasp and grasp and grasp, and try to have more and more and more, whether that's big, electric vehicles that have massive batteries or all the things we put into plastic. We have to look at our behaviours because reducing is the first step towards efficiencies, so let's look at our own behaviours as well, when it comes to landfills especially.

I think Ontario is one of the worst in creating garbage in the entire world, so let's look at the solutions from the experts whether it's creating processes to mine, whether it's looking at the waste that we produce as Ontarians or looking at the green spaces that have enormous value that we don't give a dollar figure to. We have to give a business plan for that value.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Brian Saunderson): Questions?

Hon. Mike Harris: Right off the bat, the member for Kitchener Centre, my colleague and neighbour, spoke about making sure that we leave places better than when we found them and making sure that we have opportunities for young people. This bill will create those types of opportunities. I, myself, left northern Ontario almost 13 years ago now, because there weren't opportunities there anymore for my generation. Being able to have good jobs in mining, good jobs in forestry, good jobs in the resource sector are what drives northern Ontario forward.

So I would sort of, I guess, maybe ask the member why she would want to stand in the way of creating good jobs in the north.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: And I think that's a false premise. I think we can have good jobs in a clean economy. We can have good jobs where we consult with First Nations peoples. We can have good jobs where we listen to experts on how to navigate these boglands because that landscape is huge. We have to be responsible with taxpayer dollars. And if you think of a lot of the fisheries—and I just talked to Ducks Unlimited—there are a lot of ecosystems and tourism and industries that rely on birds and fish, and that's missing from here. I think we risk causing a lot of harm and ruining parts of our economy by going whole hog forward without due process, and I do think it will

cause slower time frames, because these things will get challenged. There will be people putting themselves in the way when consultation and good expert input is not considered.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Brian Saunderson): Question?

Ms. Jessica Bell: I'm just going to quote Ecojustice here. It's a provincial law firm that focuses on environmental issues, and it talks about the special economic zones in Bill 5: "This act would provide Henry VIII style dictatorial powers to the provincial cabinet, allowing them to create law-free zones where provincial and municipal laws do not apply. The same law-free status could be provided to any project or proponent. These virtually unlimited powers are without any checks or balances."

Given this government's attitude towards environmental and human rights and workplace standards, do you think it would be okay to give them carte blanche to start up special economic zones?

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: What I think we need to do is be consulting with experts. I'm not an expert, nor are most of the people—or all of us—in this building in terms of this kind of biodiversity loss we're talking about. So it troubles me when we put all our eggs in that one basket and hope for the best.

When we think about the economy, we have to also look at climate change, because while we might create jobs, we can lose a lot. I just read a stat: 50% corn crop loss as a result of climate change in the coming decades. We will see a 50% shrink in our economic productivity in the next 50 years because of climate change. So if we don't do anything we run other risks. What I ask of the government is not to give yourself all the power. That is incredibly intimidating, to have all the pressure on you to make the right decision and not do any harm. I think having experts has always been valuable to me—having a committee of experts—and those checks and balances make sure I colour inside the lines and I'm getting good advice so that I don't do harm.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Brian Saunderson): Question?

MPP Stephanie Smyth: You're talking about do no harm, and just listening to all the conversation today about the environment and harm and all the things that could happen and hearing the member for Timiskaming, I believe, northern Ontario, and the other member who used to be from northern Ontario—when I head up north, often, because we have a connection to northern Ontario—I can tell you right now in the Kirkland Lake area, there's not even recycling. We have to bring our recycling home. I'm talking about plastics. Harm is already being done. Nobody is addressing it, really, when you think about it, if that's going on right this moment in time.

How much harm do you anticipate is going to get worse, or what is the look of that? What does harm look like? You're talking about air, water that we drink.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: That's why we have to create a business plan where we measure all the scenarios. We're not creating a business plan for protecting the peatlands,

for example. We need to value that. It's, again, 10 years of Canadian emissions in one location. We have to put a value on that, just like stormwater.

I was just listening to a podcast that stated a small community invested in stormwater management and it saved them from flooding—like, \$4 billion in Toronto in three hours. We have to put a price on climate disasters and start adapting and mitigating that impact, but we also need to put a value on our natural assets. They're there for free, and we can navigate them and still have economic prosperity. It's not an either/or. It requires some expertise and delicate dancing, but if we listen and we come with an open mind, we can find those answers.

1550

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Brian Saunderson): Further debate?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I appreciate the opportunity to talk to this bill. I want to quickly summarize my comments and then I will go into greater depth. There's a lot wrong with this bill. I'll start with one item, and that's the broken promise to the people of Lambton–Kent–Middlesex, who, in a by-election last year, were told there would be an environmental assessment for a proposed landfill in Dresden. That was a critical part of the Conservatives winning that election. That promise is buried in this bill today. That promise is broken, set aside. Promise made; promise broken. That is not a really auspicious way to open up a piece of legislation.

Second concern: Trump-like powers with this proposal for special economic zones. Effectively, within those special economic zones, proponents will be exempt from many or almost all provincial legislation. Labour laws, health and safety standards, environmental assessments—gone. Read the act. Municipal bylaws, municipal zoning—gone. That's an extraordinary piece of legislation, to actually say, "Ontario laws are not going to apply in this area." In fact, it's up to the cabinet to say, "Well, this will apply or that won't apply." I don't think anyone in this province has confidence that this government will in fact replicate, within those special economic zones, the kind of protections that have been put in place over decades in Ontario.

The other major item I want to talk to today is the extermination of the species at risk act. What we get, and I'll use—people know Monty Python. You may remember the dead parrot sketch.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: It isn't dead.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: It was dead, in fact, but I know the shopkeeper said it was alive.

What we have is an act today that is being replaced with a dead act. We had a live parrot replaced with a dead parrot. That is the reality of this legislation. I don't usually compare legislation to Monty Python sketches, because the sketches are such gems that they shouldn't be degraded, but in this case, I have to.

This bill is using the cover of Donald Trump's attack on our society to push through changes that people in Ontario would not accept in normal circumstances. They just wouldn't. They wouldn't accept that attack on en-

vironmental standards. They wouldn't accept the kind of promise breaking, they wouldn't accept the exemption from the rule of law. That is what is being used today. The Trump attack is being used to give cover.

My colleague from Sudbury was present when the Premier and others came to talk about how this act would expedite the development of new mines in northern Ontario. Let's face it, we need minerals in order to fight climate change. We need the minerals to develop the technologies, to make sure that we can build the windmills, the solar panels, the electrical grid that will help us move away from fossil fuels. So setting up a system—one window, teams to efficiently assess what comes forward and move things along, as long as they meet the law—makes sense. As long as there's environmental protection, that makes sense, but that's not what we're getting.

What we've had is a bait and switch. We're getting what looks like a wonderful, beautiful law, and over here, what we've got is a very ratty-looking critter—two different things. I think that people in this House have to understand that the bill, as written, needs to be profoundly amended if it's actually going to be useful. So those are some of my opening comments.

Let's look at the Dresden landfill. This bill exempts the controversial Dresden landfill project from the Environmental Assessment Act and repeals the regulation designating the project for full environmental assessment.

I have to say, I've been getting emails from people who live in that area telling me, "Hey, this is a really important agricultural area, and we think that, at a minimum, you should be doing an environmental assessment to ensure that what you're putting forward doesn't endanger a source of food for people in this province."

And not just a source of food—let's face it, dealing with Trump's America, we have to be very sure that we can provide ourselves with the food we're going to need on a daily basis. Who knows what weird stuff is going to come out of that administration?

So do you want to protect the economic activity in southwestern Ontario? Do you want to protect our food supply? I think most people would say yes. Well then, you would want to do an assessment of any project that might in any way, shape or form threaten that. That has been thrown out. That's an extraordinary piece to put in here. How does that actually advance the fight against Trump's agenda? Seriously, how does that actually help us? How does it help anybody?

I know the Premier has said, "Well, Trump might close the border to Canadian waste going to the United States." Okay, let's accept that as a potential risk. Two responses: The first response is, where is the accelerated focus on recycling and waste diversion, on reuse? Because if you're really concerned, we should be seeing that legislation coming forward. We should be hearing about how we can reduce the amount of waste we're generating so we don't have to worry about whether or not that border is open.

The other thing is, has anyone done an inventory of the waste sites in Ontario to see how much room we have?

Because this may not be the only landfill site in Ontario that we have to think about. That's an extraordinary piece in this bill. I can't see, for the life of me, how this fits in a bill that's protecting Ontario from Donald Trump and helping us grow our economy.

The bill also cancels a 2011 agreement in which the mining company Noront agreed to conduct a full environmental assessment under the EA Act for the proposed Eagle's Nest mine and revokes the ministry's 2015 approval of the proposed terms of reference for the environmental assessment. The project is now owned by another mining company, Wyloo.

The government claims the scope of the project has changed and thus you have to change the EA. Well, I have to say, the company Wyloo bought this claim, bought this potential project, knowing there's an environment assessment in place. They could have gone ahead a while ago making this environmental assessment go forward if they haven't already. How on earth does this actually make things better for people in Ontario, to take away an environmental assessment of a mine in an extraordinarily sensitive part of Ontario's nature? It doesn't make any sense.

One other piece is the Rebuilding Ontario Place Act. Now, the Rebuilding Ontario Place Act is not a gem. It is not a shining light in the sky to which we are all wandering. It wasn't a particularly pretty piece of legislation, but this piece of legislation we've got before us exempts proposals under the act from the public notice and consultation requirements of the Environmental Bill of Rights. So, in fact, as much as the initial act was really bad—well, someone has decided that it just wasn't bad enough and that it needs to be made worse.

This change in this bill would now exempt subsequent proposals for regulations or instruments under the Rebuilding Ontario Place Act. I know this may be a news flash to some, and maybe I don't understand everything involved, but I don't believe that Therme is building a manufacturing facility. Maybe, hidden deep underground, there are a bunch of people working for minimum wage making something related to soap and spas, but I don't think so. I think the export of Austrian spa vibes to the United States is not endangered by Donald. And critical minerals—definitely lacking in that location, because if they were there, let me tell you, there would be a mine in operation today. So can anyone on the other side of the House tell me how this is unleashing Ontario's economy? What export opportunity is going to be foregone if we don't pass this?

1600

My sense, Speaker, is that when the Premier was putting this bill together—or his minions—Therme said, “Hey, you're gutting a whole bunch of legislation? We want in. Give us some part of this action. We want to be exempt from any regulation we can be exempt from.”

Those are two, in the scheme of things, relatively small items—nasty items, indefensible items, but let's go to the more substantial things: the special economic zones and

the wiping out of the Endangered Species Act and its replacement with, as I said, a stuffed dead parrot.

Laughter.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I'll start with the special economic zones—I appreciate that some people understand the consequence of that exchange.

The cabinet, the Lieutenant Governor in Council, can designate an area, by regulation, a special economic zone. The act creates a category of “trusted proponents.” I wonder if trusted proponents are particularly generous donors to a particular party in Ontario? I don't know. Maybe that's the case. It could be; we will see.

Anyway, those trusted proponents can be designated by regulation and the specific criteria for designating one isn't set out in the legislation. It's going to come up in regulations later. Well, do they look like they're a generous donor? Do they show up regularly at dinners? Have they sent canvassers out in tough by-elections? Maybe that's the criteria. But we don't know. And frankly, to have a category where a trusted proponent is put in charge of an area where there's a large-scale exemption from the laws of Ontario, man, that should be watched and calculated and assessed publicly very, very closely. If the criteria are met, then the cabinet, the Lieutenant Governor in Council, may make a regulation exempting a trusted proponent or a designated project from the application of any act within the special economic zone, subject to conditions and requirements specified in the regulation. These exemptions may include bylaws enacted by municipal councils or local boards, and the executive council can alter a local bylaw or legislation as they pertain to a designated project or special economic zone. That's pretty amazing. That is pretty amazing.

Earlier, there was reference to Henry VIII legislation. When I came here—I'm not a lawyer. I was talking to legislative counsel about getting some private members' bills through, and they were talking about some approaches. They said, “Well, you know, there's Henry VIII legislation.” I knew Henry VIII as the guy who had a lot of wives and had a weight problem—sort of like Donald Trump. I didn't know there was real significance to using that name. But when you look at Henry VIII legislation, you're talking Donald Trump legislation. You're talking about sweeping away the public—very arbitrary rules, a dramatic concentration of power. We should not ever, ever be enacting Henry VIII- or Donald Trump-style legislation in this Legislature. It undermines us as a society. It takes us backwards. It is the wrong, wrong direction.

Our staff met with ministry staff in a briefing on this legislation. They said that, in fact, any law or statute can be suspended in a special economic zone. So our staff said, “What about labour laws?” They were told, “Yes, in fact, you can suspend labour laws.” I thought, “Wow, that's astounding.” But maybe the proponent decides they need to drive something through really fast; they need to have 50-hour work weeks, and they don't like the idea of paying time-and-a-half for overtime. Get rid of overtime; make sure that this project is economic. That is not a legitimate

way to actually build Ontario's economy. That is a way to deliver something to a proponent that you like, but it is not something that will actually allow us, as a society, to grow and prosper.

Now, the ministry staff made clear that their target for the first special economic zone regulations was in the Ring of Fire. I think others have spoken to this. I think there are real concerns about that because of the concerns about First Nations and the duty to consult, concerns about the environmental sensitivity of the area and its importance to us in Ontario.

But I want to say something else about this. I will set aside the Ring of Fire for a moment. This isn't just for mining. There are no municipal bylaws in the Ring of Fire. I'm telling you now: Rest assured, that is not covered by the city of Toronto municipal code, as much as the city of Toronto occasionally may think it does extend that far. It is not.

What it does say to me—with the exemption from municipal bylaws and zoning—is that yes, this may be the selling point right now, the minerals in the Ring of Fire, but the chances are extraordinarily high that this will be used in southern Ontario. It will be used for dealing with urban farmland boundaries, which is a very substantial issue. This is something that will be used in projects like Ontario Place. This is something that would be covering the highway tunnel under the 401, which is one of the loopy projects I have come across. People who are stuck in traffic on the 401 deserve a transportation solution that gets them home at night. Building a tunnel on the 401 will take, let's say, a minimum of a decade, maybe two decades, cost tens of or a hundred billion dollars and will not solve their problem. But this law would allow a loopy so-called solution to go forward. That is not a good law. That is the definition of a bad law.

John Michael McGrath, who writes columns for TVOntario, described these special economic zones as a "cheat code." He says that this is an area where one can create special rules and processes for selected areas, selected projects, selected proponents, rather than change the rules and processes to work better everywhere for everyone. When the government can arbitrarily create different sets of rules and processes for different people, it enables opportunities for corruption and preferential treatment, as we saw with the Ford government's abuse of minister's zoning orders.

Special economic zones will be scandal-making machines. The potential for abuse of power is so huge that if it isn't this government that creates the scandal with it, it will be another. It is a scandal-making machine. Do not get confused about what's before us.

Can you trust the current Conservative government with a cheat code? I don't think so. Let's take a few examples. The greenbelt grab—Ford government changed land designations for four sites in or near the greenbelt to allow residential development after donations from those that made the requests. Frankly, with the special economic zones, it would be so much easier for this Premier—or another. Don't forget Dalton McGuinty has his gas plant

scandal. Scandals do happen. Do you want to facilitate them? I don't think so.

Ministerial zoning orders: Auditor General felt that there were worries about preferential treatment in Ontario zoning orders. In a report done by the Auditor General, the report found that political staff within the Ford government imposed tight timelines on civil servants with no rationale given for them to urgently prepare assessments of various zoning order requests. The Auditor General said that in at least four cases, their office found documentation showing that senior political staffer directed civil servants to prioritize projects which they had been directly lobbied on.

You don't think that's not going to happen with a special economic zone? You don't think someone is going to look at the ability to extract hundreds of millions or a billion dollars out of Ontario's economy and not spend large volumes of money to shape the political process to give the permissions and the powers that they want? Rest assured, if it isn't this government—and I think they're a real contender—it will be another government that will yield to those temptations and get engaged in a scandal that will damage the people of Ontario.

1610

Speaker, I can see my time is running short. I'll just say very quickly about the endangered species legislation: What we have is imperfect; it very much relies on the government of the day. What it's being replaced with is simply a placeholder. It's a name so that if someone says, "Do you protect endangered species," our Premier can say, "Yeah, got an act right over here." That will be the full function of that legislation.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Brian Saunderson): Question? Question? The member from Essex.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: I'm hard to see over here, Mr. Speaker. I'm hard to see even on a good day.

I thank the member from Toronto–Danforth for his presentation. I always appreciate what he says. I want to ask him about a similar government initiative in British Columbia. It is a bill to fast-track major projects. It was introduced by infrastructure minister Bowinn Ma and it's specifically designed to fast-track major projects, and Premier David Eby had previously promised to speed up such projects. I think that although it bears a different name, it is indeed a special economic zone bill. The British Columbia government, under Premier David Eby, has also introduced a bill similar to the one we're speaking about today.

Will the NDP endorse this bill?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I don't endorse these powers. It's as simple as that. I don't.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Brian Saunderson): Question?

Ms. Lee Fairclough: Thanks to the member from Toronto–Danforth for your comments and for the comic relief around Monty Python. I'm a bit of a fan myself.

But this is a pretty serious issue too that we're talking about today, though. I would say the themes that we've heard throughout the day echo what you brought forward

today around trust: of the use of this trusted partner, special economic zones and unfettered powers that are being provided.

My question to you is, do you think that this bill just goes too far in giving out those powers?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I tried to make that point. I think that if the bill was substantially amended so that it facilitated a process for approval of projects that took account of the environment; respected and, in fact, acted on duty to consult and consent; and, in fact, provided teams that would help expedite things, I would be fine with that.

We need the minerals necessary to build a renewable energy infrastructure. We have them in Ontario. I think we should facilitate that. Throwing in other things that undermine the rule of law and put the environment—nature—in Ontario at risk makes no sense to me.

Again, as I said earlier, I think that Trump is giving cover for things the government wants to do that actually don't help us as an economy and society.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Brian Saunderson): Question?

Mr. Chris Glover: I want to thank the member from Toronto–Danforth for his comments today.

There's a section in Bill 5 where they're talking about Ontario Place, and they're basically plugging any final, last-gasp loophole that they may not have covered already to make this project exempt from all provincial and municipal laws. The pretext for this Bill 5 is that it's going to unleash Ontario's economy in the wake of these tariff threats from the United States, but you said that, so far as you know, there are no critical minerals at Ontario Place and there's no manufacturing happening there—unless Therme is going to be making some soap there.

What do you think is the purpose of this bill if it's not to unleash our economic opportunities? What is the purpose of this bill?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: We have a very legitimate and problematic situation on our hands. We've got a President of the United States who is acting to break Canada. There's no question—I think everyone in this room agrees on that. He wants to take large parts of our economy; he may want to take large parts of the natural resources, for the use of his country, for his close associates. Responding to that is critical and where the government actually brings things forward that will respond to that makes sense to me. But when you use it as cover to do things that you can't defend otherwise, that's wrong. And this bill, in my opinion, is being used as cover to put through approaches that are not defensible.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Brian Saunderson): Questions?

Mr. Aris Babikian: In 2012, the former NDP member for Kenora–Rainy River said this in the House: “The Endangered Species Act is a deeply flawed piece of legislation, no matter which way you look at it. It fails to accomplish its goals of protecting endangered species and their habitat, and the public have lost faith in it, if they ever had faith in it to begin with.” She went on to say, “The

Endangered Species Act, as it currently stands, is hurting endangered species....”

Speaker, those are the very strong words that the NDP member said at that time. What changed? Why are you standing up to defend this flawed legislation?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I appreciate the question. I have a lot of respect for the member.

The endangered species legislation in Ontario has profound flaws. But you don't correct it by making the situation even worse. I mean, if someone comes to you and they have appendicitis and you decide to amputate their leg, you haven't dealt with the appendicitis—you've made the situation worse. That's what we've got today: We've got the legs on the table, but not the actual surgery necessary to give us legislation that makes sense.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Brian Saunderson): Question?

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Over my time at Queen's Park, which is now just a little under three years, I think that this government has been plagued with a number of scandals. From the greenbelt grab to the Therme scandal and the Wilmot land grab—and I could list a few more, but I'll run out of time. This particular bill is now asking to remove the guardrails that ensures public accountability and transparency when it comes to making rules for how land use planning is carried out.

Has the government earned the trust of Ontarians for us to hand over the reins and just let them do what they want as this bill is proposing—the removal of those safety guardrails?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: The short answer is no. I would say from the examples we've seen—Wilmot township, the greenbelt—it's pretty clear that this government, unrestrained, is going to do some pretty destructive stuff. The Auditor General has pointed that out. There's currently an RCMP investigation into what happened with the greenbelt. When you're in a situation where you have made a major decision and it is so wrong that you have a police investigation going on in your government, I would say that trust in that government is going to be relatively low. And it is earned that you have lost that trust; you've earned that suspicion of your activities, and they have earned it in spades.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Brian Saunderson): Question?

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: I want to thank the member for his speech today.

Today, the BC infrastructure minister, Bowinn Ma, said that they want to fast-track mining in British Columbia. For your relatives in British Columbia, do you agree with what they're doing in British Columbia?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I would actually like to see exactly what the legislation is, but I will say this: If, in fact, you were to put in place a system that made it easier to proceed with permitting a mine, and in that procedure you protected the environment, you respected First Nations rights and making sure that democratic rights generally were respected, then I don't see a problem with having a one-process system with a team allocated to make sure that

the steps are followed. I talked to a friend of mine who was talking to a civil servant about why a mining project was being slowed down. The problem they found was that there was so much turnover in the government that they were constantly getting new people who were actually dealing with processing permits.

1620

Have a dedicated civil service that's experienced, that has continuity and can actually process things quickly. That's probably more the problem that we have. I don't know what's happening in BC, but I know, with this, you're not talking about simply expediting permitting for mining. You're talking about exempting projects and areas of Ontario from Ontario legislation, and that is extraordinarily risky and is a scandal machine in the making.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Brian Saunderson): Further debate?

Mr. Adil Shamji: It's always a privilege and an honour to rise in this very special chamber on behalf of my constituents in Don Valley East and, more broadly, people across Ontario, who are facing some of the greatest challenges that we can recall in recent memory.

I rise today to discuss Bill 5, the so-called Protect Ontario by Unleashing our Economy Act. I'll begin by reflecting on the fact that I always find it amusing any time I discover the government talks about protecting Ontario, because, if anything, this government's record is one of neglecting Ontario:

- neglecting health care, where we face the worst health care system performance in our province's history;
- neglecting housing, because we have the lowest housing starts in the entire country;
- neglecting our labour market, because we have the highest unemployment in our country;
- neglecting the environment;
- neglecting Indigenous rights;
- neglecting Ontario Place; and
- certainly, neglecting my constituents in Don Valley East.

But today, we're going to focus on a very specific potential area of neglect under this government, and that is its purported legislation that seeks to accelerate, by about 50%, the opening of mining projects and has a few other things that are smattered within it.

Over the course of my time, I'm going to touch on the purported context within which this legislation is being introduced, ask whether the underlying philosophy of this legislation actually makes sense and aligns with this government's track record. We're going to look at that track record a little bit, discuss whether this government is worthy of our trust in the face of its proposed sweeping deregulation and centralization of power, and then finally, I will address a few key shortcomings and threats introduced by this legislation.

Ostensibly, the context for introducing this legislation is we face an unprecedented threat from down south. Without a doubt, it's not just a threat from down south; we face global conflict, economic strife, threats from authoritarian leaders to our south, and all of these things

certainly underscore the critical importance of maximizing our independence and self-sufficiency. No one can disagree with that. No one can also disagree with the fact that our mining and forestry sectors present tremendous opportunity. The chance to tap into that and harness that is a chance we must seize. I absolutely agree that it shouldn't take 15 years to open a mine, and I don't think that it's okay for us to turn to unreliable partners or countries in other hemispheres that don't share our values in order to protect our economy or our self-sufficiency.

For example, I firmly believe that we can and should unleash critical minerals. Our Ring of Fire has profound potential, and we can become a safe, reliable and environmentally friendly partner to countries around the world. We can and should fill the vacuum of leadership that has been created by Donald Trump's reckless, self-serving and misguided actions, and our vast natural resources—our timber, our mining sector, our steel industries can be a critical element of that response.

Truthfully, when this legislation was introduced, I looked at it with hope and with enthusiasm, believing perhaps that it could accomplish that goal. Unfortunately, what I discovered is that this legislation continues along a well-trodden path by this government of skipping steps, ignoring protections and streamlining processes, and in doing so—we can all agree that there is a vital need to improve and streamline processes, but this government is doing it with a machete when what is actually needed is a scalpel.

You don't have to think back far to discover a recent example where this government purported to streamline processes to centralize something and then promise that it would be better. This is exactly what this government and the Ministry of Health did with Bill 135 when they proposed to reform our home care system. They said they were going to close down our local health integration networks, our CCACs, our HCCSSs, and instead introduce Ontario Health atHome. They promised it was going to be better. They promised it was going to be cheaper. They promised that no patient was going to get left behind. Instead, what did we find? They didn't do their homework. They didn't plan it out, and I warned them of this. They didn't take the steps they needed to do and so patients were left in disarray.

Patients at home were sent to emergency departments because they couldn't get the home care they had relied upon for years. They struggled because they couldn't get vitally needed medical equipment, medications and supplies at home. There were—and are—patients in Ontario who continue to struggle under this scheme, who are getting procedures performed at home with unsterile gloves and equipment because this government moved too damned fast.

So, the underlying philosophy of this legislation, this government has not proven that they are worthy of. They are saying we're going to speed things up. Well, if there's a lesson that I've learned in my clinical practice and actually as we looked to examples around the world, going fast without preparing only sets you back. You know,

when I work in the emergency department and I get called to the resuscitation room because someone is dying, I'll tell you what I don't do. I don't run into the resuscitation room. I walk briskly, but I don't run. I enter composed, and I reflect on all the things that could be wrong with that patient as I go in. As we work as a team to resuscitate that patient, we move deliberately, precisely and thoughtfully. We don't skip steps, and we don't rush because sometimes when you make a mistake, there's no going back. We don't focus on doing things fast; we focus on doing things right.

Ask any carpenter: Measure twice and cut once. Napoleon Bonaparte, one of the greatest military leaders in modern history, is said to have proclaimed to his valet, "Dress me slowly for I am in a hurry." Elite military special forces train under the maxim, "Slow is smooth and smooth is fast." The same is true for drivers in professional motorsports: Slow is fast. Be smooth, be thoughtful, be deliberate in your steering and your pedal inputs.

Unfortunately, this government has not got the message and is a pattern of pursuing reckless deregulation that this legislation perpetuates. This government doesn't do its homework. It says one thing while doing another. Look no further than the greenbelt. They said they wouldn't touch the greenbelt, and then they did. They told one thing to donors in a private setting and then another thing to the people of Ontario. In the process, both parties lost confidence in the Premier and he now faces an RCMP criminal investigation. How much time has been wasted by forcing these greenbelt changes through, debating them in the House and then being forced to reverse? When this government doesn't do its homework, we get flip-flops.

1630

This government is very good at flip-flops: Bill 124, the reckless and unconstitutional legislation that sought to cut the wages of health care workers and that ultimately was reversed, with the loss and attrition of many health care workers in the process; Bill 28, the unconstitutional legislation that went after CUPE education workers; Bill 23, the legislation where the government said, "We're going to get rid of development charges," and then they came right back and brought the development charges back; the greenbelt, etc., etc.

This is a government that has not proven itself worthy of concentrated power. I mentioned the greenbelt. There has been the reversed urban boundary expansion, the issues with Staples, ministerial zoning orders. Ministerial zoning orders: With the stroke of a pen, the minister assumed a power that could reward his friends and donors. Ministerial zoning orders: The minister could look at any plot of land and sign off on that being developed.

And while we need to adopt measures that can promote development, accelerate mining and accessing our natural resources, it has to be done right. The issue with ministerial zoning orders was implemented so haphazardly, so arbitrarily, so poorly. This is what the Auditor General had to say: "We ... found there was no protocol and no apparent rationale for prioritizing some MZO requests over others. The minister's office often selected which of the MZO

requests to work on, setting ad hoc (and often short) timelines for the ministry to review the request."

It gets worse. This is at the very beginning of the Auditor General report: "Most information packages prepared for the minister's office" about MZOs "did not contain the kind of detailed risk information normally factored into municipal zoning decisions. This includes key information about infrastructure capacity and servicing; natural hazards and the environment; and financial burdens to regions, municipalities and taxpayers."

I'm going to read the next paragraph because it's going to tell you why I chose to read every single word of that: "Some projects on the sites re-zoned with an MZO will not have access to servicing (for example, water and waste water) for years and sometimes decades. They now face foreseeable and significant delays. These delays beg the question why an MZO was used instead of the municipal planning process."

This is a direct parallel to what is being proposed with the special economic zones. With the stroke of a pen by a minister or cabinet, proper planning processes can be eviscerated, resulting in exactly the kind of delays that I just quoted the Auditor General identifying in the government's scheme with ministerial zoning orders. If the government has failed with MZOs, failed in the purpose of MZOs, the implementation, the objectivity of MZOs, to scathing criticism by the Auditor General, why should we trust them with special economic zones? They couldn't do it with the greenbelt.

I want to dive into a few key elements of this legislation that had me deeply concerned. One of the things we're all very worried about is that Indigenous rights, protections and, specifically, consultation will not be observed in this legislation. The member for Brantford-Brant has assured us, even though I don't believe he is Indigenous, that the provisions in this legislation are satisfactory. I propose, instead, to ask what Indigenous people think.

Here's what the Chiefs of Ontario have said in their statement: "The leadership council are calling on the government to undertake a full consultation process with Ontario First Nations prior to proceeding with this legislation and include exemptions for First Nations laws within the act."

I quote again: "These "special economic zones" are vaguely defined and could be used to try and undermine our rights and ignore our sovereignty. You can't 'unleash' our rights or our sacred responsibilities to our lands and waters with the wave of a pen."

Will the government engage in that full consultation process right now—that is, specifically, consultation about this legislation, let alone consultation about everything that happens afterwards?

Let's say that we take at face value that this government has been a true partner with Indigenous people. Well, I sincerely question that through the history and the facts. In January 2024, Indigenous people, the Chiefs of Ontario, asked for a moratorium on mining stakes claims. Here is what they said:

“Over the past year, First Nations in Ontario have experienced an exponential rise in the number of mining claims being staked on their territory—some as high as 30%. These 2023 figures represent the highest annual number of mining claims staked in Ontario over the last six years. Such extreme increases lead to an insurmountable administrative burden for First Nations communities responsible for reviewing and responding to the mining claims.

“A 365-day moratorium is necessary as it will give First Nations communities the time that is required to assess the impacts of the MLAS, the effects of the mine claims currently being staked, as well as develop a process whereby meaningful and fulsome engagement and consultation can be integrated into the MLAS processes.”

The Chiefs of Ontario said in the current scheme for evaluating mining stakes claims that they were not being adequately consulted. They asked for help and a 365-day moratorium. This government, which purports to respect consultation and the wishes of Indigenous people, said no to that. So against that backdrop, now you’re promising that you will continue the same spirit of Indigenous consultation, which is completely unsatisfactory, and, in fact, you’re going to accelerate it some more and make it even harder to meaningfully consult.

I’ve barely had a chance to discuss this bill’s shortcomings in environmental protections and how it will profoundly impact environmental degradation. We know that it will remove key environmental protections. We’ve heard from my colleague from Beaches–East York about the potential implications that it could have for sensitive species such as the redbreasted nuthatch. Yet again, we need not look far in the history of this province to see what has happened when a combination of inadequate Indigenous consultation and environmental protection leads to catastrophic consequences for communities right here. One must look no further than Grassy Narrows.

Against the backdrop of all of this, we have in this legislation yet another one of the favoured strategies of this government, which is to indemnify itself to legal challenges. I have noticed that, with this government, it has no difficulty in taking legislative and legal shortcuts and in introducing legislation that allows it to be protected from being challenged.

We saw that not that long ago when, in the wake of this government’s failure to protect the public during COVID-19—and specifically to adequately protect residents in long-term-care homes—they introduced legislation to protect themselves and the worst performers in the long-term-care sector from being held to account for their own shortcomings and failures. Yet again, this government proposes to do the same thing with this legislation.

I still haven’t had a chance to invoke the challenges that we saw, that we just learnt about: the shortcomings with Therme and how this government, when given the opportunity to wield extraordinary power and skip steps, handed sweetheart contracts to the tune of \$2.2 billion to foreign spa companies through inadequate processes; to move the vaunted Ontario Science Centre from its proper

place on Don Mills Road, move it into a temporary location that is a shadow of its former self, and then promise that maybe in 2029—honestly, probably not, because we’ve already seen the Premier backtracking on that—not be able to deliver on the science education that people and children deserve.

1640

This government has shown that when it has the option to choose between the people of Ontario or its friends and donors, it always chooses its friends and donors. This is why allowing this government to wield and concentrate so much power in the hands of a minister and cabinet through things like special economic zones is so incredibly dangerous, and why I encourage everyone in this House to be very thoughtful in how we amend and move forward with this legislation.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Logan Kanapathi): Questions?

Mr. Joseph Racinsky: Thank you to the member for his speech.

I was really disappointed to hear from the member, in the context of an economic fight that we find ourselves in, existential threats to our sovereignty, nothing but delay, delay, delay in the member’s remarks.

Instead of opening the Ring of Fire, the Liberals made empty promises and chased away billions of dollars of investment that would’ve opened up the Ring of Fire. The Liberals had their chance, and they failed.

With a clear global demand for minerals increasing in Ontario, Ontario is positioned to lead in this regard. Why do the Liberals continue to support delays, red tape, and discourage investment in our mining sector?

Mr. Adil Shamji: Well, as I’ve already articulated, we need to unleash our domestic and local industries: steel, timber and certainly the mining sector as well. I am just advocating for it to be done right.

One thing I would like to point out to the government members is: If we really want to fully unleash our economic potential, if we face profound threats to our steel and timber industries, for example—you know, the threat of tariffs and that kind of thing—there is one thing here in Ontario that requires a lot of steel and timber, and that’s homes. You really want to unleash our economic potential? Why don’t we bring back 1.5 million homes by 2031 on the agenda?

And certainly, let’s work towards unleashing our mining sector, but let’s do it right. Let’s not pretend that we’re going to consult with Indigenous people, even though we literally have not been consulting with Indigenous people for the last year.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Logan Kanapathi): The member from Sudbury.

MPP Jamie West: Thank you to my colleague from Don Valley East.

You spoke in your debate about Therme, the luxury spa that has received \$2.2 billion from the government to build a luxury spa downtown.

This morning, during debate, I talked about a project that MIRARCO has that would allow us to extract critical

minerals from, basically, a waste product from mining called tailings. Now, they're in search of \$34 million. They've got about \$50 million raised. If they don't hit that cap by December, they're going to be pausing and probably the Americans will take over the project.

In your opinion, do you think that \$2.2 billion and a 95-year lease for a luxury spa is more important than developing this technology right here in Ontario?

Mr. Adil Shamji: I thank you for the question.

The honourable member behind me had asked me, "What are we doing to commit to unleashing our domestic, local and provincial potential as it relates to our economy?" This sounds like something that could potentially be a better use of that.

I can think of a lot of better uses for \$2.2 billion, like solving the primary care crisis, building more homes—there's a variety of things that could be done rather than padding the pockets of international, foreign spa companies.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Logan Kanapathi): Questions?

Mr. John Jordan: I find it somewhat ironic that a Liberal member is complaining about this government moving too fast and using health care as an example. He mentioned long-term care. I can give many examples of the Liberal government, for 15 years, moving too slow. It left us in a crisis state when COVID arose.

A good example is our commitment for 58,000 new and reconditioned long-term-care beds. We're at 25,000. Your government term produced 600. So there's a difference between moving calculated and just not moving.

So, my question to the member is, would the member agree that this economic war requires this government to move fast?

Mr. Adil Shamji: A brief comment on the health care record of this government: 1,300 ER closures last year; 2.5 million people without a family doctor; massive attrition of health care workers, including nurses, PSWs, paramedics; a situation right now in which people cannot get access to vitally needed sterile medical supplies, medications and equipment at home, seven years after you formed government. When you look at the data, the Ontario Health data that comes from you guys, it illustrates a very sharp and precipitous decline in health care system performance the moment this Premier took power.

So, on to the honourable member's question: Do we all need to move fast to harness our economic potential, to unleash it? Absolutely. But more important than just doing it fast is doing it right. I am advocating for both of those things. This government is advocating to just raze everything to the ground.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Logan Kanapathi): Questions?

Ms. Jessica Bell: Thank you to the member for Don Valley East for the presentation that you gave on this bill. When I read the bill, one of my concerns was the establishment of economic zones, which gives the cabinet the right to designate an area of land so that it's exempt from bylaws, potentially provincial laws. I fear that this

will be used in situations not in mining cases but in cases like the Ontario Place controversy or to re-draw municipal boundaries to allow low-density sprawl on our precious farmland.

What concerns do you have with the inclusion of economic zones in this bill?

Mr. Adil Shamji: Well, as I mentioned in my remarks, one must look no further than how this government has wielded ministerial zoning orders to reward friends, to purport to speed things up but in the process actually slow things down, and I quoted the Auditor General report, that in some of the cases where MZOs have been so-called unleashed, they actually set back developments and projects by—and this is the Auditor General's words, not mine—years and in some cases decades.

So now they've got this model that supposedly has worked so well, to the opposite perspective, by the Auditor General, and they're saying we're going to essentially adopt a parallel process in unleashing these so-called—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Logan Kanapathi): Question?

The member from Etobicoke–Lakeshore.

Ms. Lee Fairclough: Thank you, Speaker, for the opportunity.

To our member from Don Valley East, let me start by saying happy Doctors' Day. I really did appreciate the parallels that you brought in describing how you respond to an emergency. You move deliberately; you move smoothly. Nobody is saying slowly, but we're saying move deliberately. And I think, again, you've highlighted so many examples. Thanks for bringing up the home care example, where that has been failed.

In your remarks, you also talked about the level of engagement with Indigenous people and the perspectives of the chiefs. It was a stark contrast to what we heard from the member earlier, describing a situation that that consultation has been robust, and there's a partnership there, and we're moving lakes together.

I guess my question is, what steps should be taken now so that we can actually understand what's the appropriate level of involvement of our Indigenous partners—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Logan Kanapathi): Response?

Mr. Adil Shamji: I thank the member for Etobicoke–Lakeshore for her thoughtful question and your kind remarks on Doctors' Day.

I think the Chiefs of Ontario have told us what they'd like to see. They would like to see that they are consulted on this legislation. What that means is that we need to do public hearings, we need to travel the bill and we need to sit down with the Chiefs of Ontario and hear what they have to say.

1650

We know with previous projects in the Ring of Fire area, with some of the local First Nations communities of Marten Falls, Webequie and some of those other ones, they have not felt as though they've been given any or adequate consultation. In the odd circumstances where

there has been some outreach, it's been too swift and not meaningful, and that needs—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Logan Kanapathi): Thank you. Time for another quick question.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: I know that the Liberals are seeking a multi-party task force with regard to this. My question to the member is this: On this proposed Liberal multi-party task force, would unelected people be eligible to sit on that? Would Bonnie Crombie, an unelected person, be eligible to sit on that multi-party task force?

Mr. Adil Shamji: I thank the member across for his interesting question.

Look, we're happy to discuss. We're happy to come together and have a conversation about how to move forward with this legislation. But let's start by having the Premier actually respond to us in the first place. He has no problem grandstanding on American television saying this or that. When the rubber hits the pavement, he doesn't actually do the work to consult. He says, "Let's form Team Ontario first"—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Logan Kanapathi): Thank you. Further debate?

Hon. Mike Harris: I know I'm a long way down here. It's hard to catch me sometimes, but thank you for allowing me to participate in debate today. This is the first time in the—I believe we're in the 44th Parliament now—where I've had a chance to rise and get to address this House. I'm very grateful to be back here after re-election.

Welcome back to all the members, and new members as well. There are some familiar faces in the room, which is nice to see.

I also wanted to say hello to Kim and the kids. I believe they're actually watching at home, if you can believe it. They're wondering what time Dad is going to be home and if I'm going to make it for dinner. I can promise you, that is not going to happen.

With that, I would like to also mention to you, Speaker, that I will be sharing my time with the amazing member from Mississauga–Lakeshore. He is very amazing.

I wanted to talk a little bit, obviously, about what we have before us here today. I really want to focus on what this is going to do for northern Ontario and what this is going to do for jobs in communities where mining and forestry truly are the lifeblood of these communities.

I want to take a couple of minutes and just talk a little bit about what our ministry, the Ministry of Natural Resources, has to do and how we're interplaying with our ministerial partners. We have several acts that will be reshaped a little bit with this bill. That includes the Public Lands Act, the Crown Forest Sustainability Act, the Aggregate Resources Act, the Lake and Rivers Improvement Act, the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act and the Far North Act, among a few others.

We've got a pretty important role to play when it comes to permitting, obviously, on crown land. We're talking about the Ring of Fire. The vast majority of it is crown land. We have a crucial role to play, and we need to be able to do this expeditiously.

I want to walk you through some of the permitting process when you're looking at, let's say, opening a new mine. It takes roughly 15 years from start to finish to open a new mine here in Ontario. We are one of the only jurisdictions, quite frankly, around the world where it takes that long. If you look at the EU, permitting processes take under three years—just a little bit more than two years, in fact, Mr. Speaker.

If we're going to be attracting investment here to Ontario, if we're going to be attracting business and creating jobs, we need to be able to get out of the way and remove some of this red tape regulation that is involved when you're looking at trying to pull these permits together. You look all of the different ministries that are involved with these permitting processes, and we really want to create what is truly a one-window approach: one permit, one project.

For example, let's say, again, you're looking to open a mine in northern Ontario. You would have to, through multiple stages, come back to our ministry for different parts of this process.

Usually, the first thing you're going to do—you need to create a road. Well, you'd have to do the EA assessments, you'd have to figure out your path, do all your engineering. You'd have to come to us for the permit to be able to do that. Then you'd have to come back to us to be able to remove the trees or make whatever improvements need to be done over a water course. Maybe you need to put in a bridge or culvert; you'd have to come back for another permit. Power lines, same thing: You'd have to return multiple times to multiple different ministries.

What we're looking to do with this bill is streamline that, so that you're able to have your professional engineers design this project in totality and only have to come to us once to get these permits and not have to continually come back, come back, come back. It's going to speed the process up immensely. And when you're looking, like I said, at bringing those investments in—we heard the Premier talk about it. I believe it was the Premier or the Minister of Finance this morning during question period talking about the stability of Ontario and saying, "We truly are open for business. We want to see your investment here."

We have a stable government, obviously, here in Ontario and in Canada. We are great trading partners with multiple jurisdictions around the world, and there are people—not just the US. Let's take the US out of the equation for at least the next five minutes or so. I know it dominates a lot of the airwaves, but there are other countries that are looking for our critical minerals. They're looking for our critical minerals not only for defence and aerospace, but also for advanced manufacturing. When we talk about, say, Germany, for example, they are leaders in robotics, and they bring a lot of that manufacturing here. Wouldn't it be great to be able to sign some bilateral agreements with them? We're able to say, "Hey we have the raw materials. We have the resources. Let's get them to you so that you can make all the things that we need."

So I think, Speaker, it's really important that—there's been a lot of talk about some other things that the opposition wants to conflate in with this bill, but when you're looking at jobs, when you're looking at northern Ontario—and other parts of the province, to be quite honest, down the road; we'll see what happens. But when we're looking at northern Ontario, we have to be able to bolster the mining sector, we have to be able to bolster the forestry sector, and this bill is going to do just that.

It's extremely important that we get this bill moved through expeditiously. I know there's a lot of members on all sides of the House that do support it. Sure, they may have some trepidations with some elements, but I think we can probably resolve that. Everyone here likes to try to talk about working together, so let's do that. Let's work together. Let's find ways that we can make our legislation the best that it can be, because truly, when we're looking at what's happening around Canada, around Ontario right now, and we're trying to break down barriers with interprovincial trade—when we're breaking down barriers, I'm in a unique position, holding the title of the Minister of Red Tape Reduction before being appointed as the Minister of Natural Resources. I saw on a daily basis where government slows down the ability to create jobs, where bureaucracy slows down the ability to create jobs. So it's incumbent on us that we put our best foot forward and that we really lean into this.

We can talk a little bit more about that permitting process. When we look at all of the different pieces that are coming together within this bill, colleagues—I think we've got maybe four, five, six ministries that are really part of this—it's going to be important for us to be able to share information, for us to be able to work together, for us to be able to look at ways that we can reduce that red tape and reduce that regulatory burden, like I said, looking at that one-window approach. It's a lesson I think that we can take from this bill but that truly needs to be applied across all ministries, across all of government, where we can actually have the business, the public, the average citizen—whether it's ServiceOntario, whether it's someone that's looking at building a granny suite in their backyard or building a subdivision, they can come in and they can have a one-window approach, where we can then disseminate all that information out to those ministries so that they don't have to consistently come back, come back, re-report, and then have other ministries in tandem looking at the ways that they have to evaluate things. We'll have a centralized process. It's going to be the best way to move forward, and I'm very excited, should this bill pass, to see it move into legislation.

I think with that, Speaker, I'm going to turn it over to my colleague. Thank you very much for the time this afternoon.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Logan Kanapathi): The member from Mississauga–Lakeshore.

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: I want to thank the Minister of Natural Resources for sharing his time with me this afternoon. As the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Energy and Mines, it's a great pleasure to rise in the

House to speak on the second reading of Bill 5, the Protect Ontario by Unleashing our Economy Act. It has been a great honour to work together with the minister and our entire team on this important bill, and I want to thank the associate minister and the parliamentary assistants from Sault Ste. Marie and Scarborough Centre as well.

1700

The minister and the member from Sault Ste. Marie spoke about schedule 5, which would amend the Mining Act to get shovels in the ground faster, to unlock the incredible potential of Ontario's critical minerals and to protect these key resources from foreign governments and corporations that may not be working in our best interests. But, as the minister said, our commitment to develop and protect Ontario's key natural resources also extends to Ontario's energy infrastructure. So, this afternoon, I want to expand on the minister's remarks about how this bill and schedules 1 and 6 will help us transform Ontario into a global clean energy superpower that's able to export our energy and technology across Canada and around the world.

Together, our critical minerals and nuclear energy are essential for the long-term prosperity for Ontario. Just to take one example: This government has been able to attract \$46 billion in new investment from global automakers like Honda, Stellantis and Volkswagen, because they're confident that Ontario will be able to produce both critical minerals and reliable baseload power.

Speaker, as we announced last year, the Independent Electricity System Operator expects Ontario's demand for electricity to grow by 75% by 2050. As the province invests in electrification, we need to ensure we have the capacity to meet all the new demands that are coming with it. That's why we're leading the largest expansion of nuclear energy in North America, including the largest competitive energy procurement in Ontario's history.

I was proud to speak about this recently in my keynote address at the AGM of the Organization of Canadian Nuclear Industries in Brampton. For the first time in 30 years, we're building a large-scale commercial nuclear generator at Bruce Power that will provide over 4,800 megawatts of clean power—enough to power almost five million homes.

We've begun the process to build new large-scale nuclear generation at Port Hope, Nanticoke and Lambton, to provide up to 16,000 megawatts.

We're refurbishing almost our whole entire nuclear fleet, which will provide 12,000 megawatts.

And last fall, we finished the refurbishment of unit 1 at Darlington on budget and on time, five months ahead of schedule.

This will provide 30 more years of clean, reliable and affordable power to support Ontario's growth and electrification.

And of course, we're building the first grid-scale small modular reactors in the G7, at Darlington, that will provide another 1,200 megawatts. Just last month, the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission issued a construction licence

for the first SMR at this site, and I look forward to sharing more details about this project within the next few weeks.

For now, Speaker, I want to highlight for the House that the minister and our team have successfully negotiated that local Ontario businesses must be used to build SMRs for the world. As a result, this project is expected to create up to 17,000 local jobs during construction, contributing over \$15 billion to our GDP and driving \$500 million into local supply chains.

Looking forward, small modular reactors have incredible potential to support clean growth and decarbonization in Canada and around the world, in smaller and remote communities and across sectors like transportation, mining and heavy manufacturing. So it is exciting to see Ontario taking a lead role in this new technology.

Last fall, I joined Minister Lecce on a trade mission to Europe, and we signed an agreement to help deploy SMRs in Poland, to support energy independence from Russia and to begin replacing some of the 40 coal plants in Poland, including some of the largest in Europe.

I'll remind members that the largest greenhouse gas reduction initiative in the world, up to this point, was announced in my riding 25 years ago by a former Progressive Conservative Minister of the Environment, Elizabeth Witmer. The closure of Ontario's coal plants, equal to taking 7 million cars off the road, was also made possible by Ontario's nuclear sector.

As our current Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks said earlier this week, we reject the idea that some of our friends on the other side put forward that we need to choose between protecting our environment or growing our economy. In fact, because of the work of this minister, Ontario is now well positioned to support Europe in its transition to clean, sustainable energy and to benefit from all the investment and well-paying jobs that this will generate back here in Ontario.

Speaker, last fall I had the opportunity to attend the New England-Canada Business Council's annual energy conference in Boston and to speak on the panel about the critical role of new technologies, including SMRs, and I want to thank John Gulliver for the invitation. I also had the opportunity to speak with MIT nuclear engineering professor Jacopo Buongiorno about Ontario's leadership on SMRs at the Festival of Italian Creativity in Boston, and I want to thank the Consul General Minuti for the invitation as well.

Speaker, from Europe to the US, the world is watching Ontario. States and countries around the world are looking to us as they think about powering a growing economy, the transition to a clean, net-zero future, and energy security and independence. They are looking to learn from our success here in Ontario, both from the experience with our Candu reactors and from our latest groundbreaking work on SMRs.

At the same time, as we look to Europe, we can see a clear pattern of physical and cyber attacks on their critical energy infrastructure. Undersea transmission cables and natural gas pipelines have been targeted, especially since the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Just this week there was

another major power outage in Spain and Portugal which is still under investigation.

As the minister said, we recognize as we build out our energy grid, including hundreds of billions of dollars of investment, that we need to have some important measures in place to protect the progress we're making and to protect the people that we all represent. That is what Bill 5, and in particular schedules 1 and 6, are about.

As the minister said, the current tools we have to address foreign interference, tampering and spying are simply not enough to address the threats that we will face in the coming years from hostile foreign governments and corporations. That's why, if passed, Bill 5 would allow the government to prevent or limit certain foreign companies from participating in our energy sector.

Again, Speaker, as the minister said, our objective here is to protect Ontario's energy sector from the threat that Europe is now dealing with, and to ensure that our energy grid is reliable and safe.

Speaker, in closing, I want to thank the minister and our team again for their work on this bill, and I want to urge all of the members on both sides of the House to see how important this bill is to the people of Ontario and to the people of northern Ontario. Together we will build an Ontario that is better, stronger and not dependent on the US.

I just want to thank you all for listening to me.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Brian Saunderson): Questions?

Mr. Chris Glover: I want to thank the member from Mississauga-Lakeshore for your comments today. You mentioned that the government is building a new generator at the Bruce Power plant. From the mid-1920s to 1995, we had a public utility, Ontario Hydro, that provided electricity at cost, which was, throughout that entire period, about four cents a kilowatt hour. Then the Conservatives started to break it up and they sold off the Bruce nuclear power plant. The Liberals continued to sell it off, and they sold the last chunk of Ontario Hydro for \$9 billion. Now we pay between four and 16 cents a kilowatt hour for electricity, and to keep the rates at that level, we subsidize what used to be Ontario Hydro, a public hydro utility, to the tune of \$6.9 billion taxpayer dollars per year.

1710

I'm interested in the financials for the generator that we, as taxpayers, are building at this privatized Bruce Power plant. How much are we, as taxpayers, investing into this and what is the expected return?

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: I want to thank the member for that question. As you know, we are building the four SMRs at Darlington. We're going to be the number one jurisdiction in the world, and the only jurisdiction in the world, to build the first scale modular reactor, which will create over 300 megawatts of electricity that we will be able to sell to other jurisdictions, and not only that, build in other locations around the world.

Like I said, we were in Poland last year with the minister and we were able to sign Poland on. The world is watching Ontario, and the world will be buying Ontario

projects and buying Ontario technology, which will create well-paying jobs for our Ontario residents, who will be able to support their families moving forward.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Brian Saunderson): Question?

MPP Stephanie Smyth: I want to speak to the minister who had talked earlier about us all working together, and I think that that is a great goal for many of us, and how we all very much care about this province and getting through the turbulent times that we're seeing right now with Donald Trump and the tariffs etc. So it's all very important to all of us.

But I think one thing that's really striking to me is that every element of this bill practically has really deep concerns in all parties, in the opposition parties and others, and so I think that's glaring. That's a problem. You might want to call it theatre or whatever you think, or the opposition being opposition, but there are real concerns here.

In the spirit of working together, Minister, is it a good idea to get that committee together as soon as possible, to go through line by line the grave concerns that there are when it comes to accountability etc.—and not with a machete but with a scalpel, like was said by our Dr. Shamji?

Hon. Mike Harris: It is important to work together, and I think a lot of us do work together very well in this House. Of course, the bill will have to work its way through. We're here debating it on a Thursday afternoon. It was just introduced last week, so there's still some time to go through debate and hear what people have to say.

It is interesting, though, because there are a lot of times when the opposition—and, you know, saying the opposition will oppose; that is your job—but where you won't vote for the things that you've been asking for. And I think as you spend some time here, you will learn that. But we heard it today. The Minister of Finance, again, was highlighting all of the investments that were being called for by opposition members, but they consistently vote against those very bills.

So let's see what happens over the next little while. A commitment to work together, as always, with all members of this House—everyone knows that. I'm always looking for a good idea and appreciate the time.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Brian Saunderson): Question?

Mr. Andrew Dowie: I want to thank both speakers, the Minister of Natural Resources and the member from Mississauga.

I note that in my time as parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade, he spoke very highly of a circular economy in which we could actually be self-contained. We would build a vehicle—we would refine the minerals; we would mine. All the components that come from raw material to production would happen right here in the province of Ontario. So we know that moving forward with shovels in the ground is just one part of the overall puzzle.

I was hoping to ask—maybe the best person is probably the member from Mississauga–Lakeshore—how Ontario is going to support domestic processing in the province and ensure that our economy is strong.

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: I want to thank the member from Windsor–Tecumseh for that great question.

As the member knows, I used to work for the Ford Motor Co. The minister was able to attract \$46 billion of automotive to Ontario. This was never seen ever in the history of Ontario. And not only that, the reason that they're coming here is because they know that we have clean electricity; and not only that, we have the minerals to support the building of electric vehicles. That's what they want: They want our Ontario minerals to build these cars right here in Ontario and export them to the world. That's the advantage Ontario has.

That's why we have to open up our northern area to develop these mines. It can't take 15 years to open up a mine, because in other jurisdictions they can open them up much quicker. So together, we will build a stronger Ontario and grow our economy.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Brian Saunderson): Question?

Mr. Chris Glover: I'll address my question again to the member from Mississauga–Lakeshore. You were talking about developing Ontario technology, and you talked about the small nuclear reactors that are being developed at Darlington. But the small nuclear reactors at Darlington are actually a partnership with GE Hitachi. It's the technology developer responsible for the design and procurement of major components, engineering and supports.

We are in a trade war, as your colleague said this morning. We are in a trade war with the United States. How much are we putting at risk here with this partnership with an American corporation in the midst of a trade war?

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

Deputy government House leader.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: Let the debate continue, please.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Brian Saunderson): I look to the member from Spadina–Fort York. Did you finish your question?

Mr. Chris Glover: I did.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Brian Saunderson): Okay. Response, please?

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: I want to thank the member for that question. Yes, we are using GE Hitachi technology, but 85% of that will be built here in Ontario.

This is what we have: We have something that—Trump understands how important it is to have Ontario at his side here, and to protect our economy. But if it was up to you, you would get rid of the Ford Motor Co., GM and Chrysler, because they're American companies. So you

won't want us to invest in American companies that are here in Canada.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Brian Saunderson): Question?

Mr. Joseph Racinsky: Thank you to the minister and the member from Mississauga–Lakeshore for their comments. It was refreshing to hear them talk about the action our government is hoping to take, as opposed to the delay that we've been hearing from the opposition.

With the ongoing economic challenges posed by President Trump's tariffs, Ontario's ability to compete on the global stage has never been more critical. The government has introduced measures to safeguard Ontario's industries and resources from those external pressures.

How does this new legislation support Ontario's economic sovereignty in the face of Trump's tariffs, and what steps are being taken to ensure that Ontario industries remain competitive despite the challenges posed by international trade disputes?

Hon. Mike Harris: It's a great question, and I think that's exactly the purpose of this bill. It's to be able to unlock areas of Ontario where we have almost every critical mineral that is needed for advanced manufacturing, that is needed for defence systems, that is needed for aerospace technologies; and traded commodities as well—things that you would use to build a house or a school or a hospital.

We've embarked on very ambitious infrastructure projects here in the province. We need to be able to extract those materials. We need to be able to refine those materials. That's going to be another big piece of the puzzle, making sure that we actually have the ability to do that. It's great that we can get them out of the ground, but we've got to be able to extract, refine, and then bring them to southern Ontario, where we have some amazing manufacturing facilities that will be able to make those goods and then be able to sell them right here in Ontario and Canada.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Brian Saunderson): Further debate?

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Joining the debate today at 5:20 on a Thursday, it has been said that it's going to be like people at church in their pews. I don't know; maybe I can do my best to turn it into a rave. What do you think—do my best “woot, woot, woot!” Let's see. I see some doubters.

1720

I want to start by saying the context of this bill is a tariff war. We all know that. Why do we know that? Because we all just came off the campaign trail. We knocked on thousands of doors, all of us, and we heard first-hand the fears and the concerns of our constituents. They're afraid. They're fearful. They're afraid of US-style—not just tariffs, but the aggression and the toxic words that have been directed to Canada.

There is certainly a lot of fear, and as we know, there is a renewed sense of patriotism—rightfully so. Not that we weren't ever fully patriotic, but when we are threatened, when our sovereignty is threatened, when our inherent

right to exist is threatened, people get a little worked up. That is what has happened in this province.

So this bill that you've put forward—coming in the middle of this climate, where people are afraid and where they are stepping forward with patriotism, and are prepared and need leaders that will help them out of this problem, I find this bill really, in many ways, disappointing. I feel that it's taking full advantage of people's goodwill, people's need for answers, people's need to see a government acting on their behalf. But the thing about this bill is that you are using a tariff war to trample on people's rights in this province.

You are using the tariff bill to short-circuit democracy. It's almost as if you are tired of being a government in a Westminster democracy, because you are doing everything you can to undermine that process, and this bill does this. So under the guise of “we are at war,” as Minister Fedeli said, you are using this bill to trample on environmental rights.

I was the former opposition critic for the environment, conservation and parks, and I witnessed, in my time there, cut after cut—death by a thousand cuts. You were undermining, watering down, doing everything that you could to make sure that protecting the environment and protecting endangered species just got out of the way of anything that you wanted to do. It was development at any cost, even if that meant the environment—development on behalf of your connected insider donors and developers. We know that. That's why we have an RCMP investigation.

So yes, using, again, a tariff war to strip away what is left of the environmental species act or any environmental protection in this province is not what people were looking for from this government.

Finally, in the most egregious possible way I can think of, you are using a tariff war to trample on the inherent rights of Indigenous people in this community. It's nothing short of shameful. You as a government have a right to consult and to deal honourably with First Nations people. In a bill like this—there's nothing honourable in this. This is a sleight of hand. This is a bill that says one thing and does another, and it's 230-some-odd pages—

MPP Jamie West: It's 229.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: It's 229 pages of straight-up partisan nonsense in a time when people want us to work together, they want clear answers, and they want transparency and accountability, not tricks from their government.

We had the member from Toronto–Danforth raise Monty Python's Flying Circus, so let me talk about another circus, because I think it's appropriate. That's the Ringling Brothers, and I'm going to quote from that.

Interjections.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Exactly. Send in the clowns—or wait a minute.

PT Barnum said, “You can fool all the people some of the time, and some of the people all the time, but you cannot fool all of the people all the time.” I would say this is what this bill is all about.

You know what? You've run out of passes on trying to fool the people of the province of Ontario. They know what you're up to. They know what you're up to because they see another ringmaster, which is Donald Trump—the Donald Trump who—“There's a sucker born every minute” mantra. They see how he's behaving, and the irony is that this government seems to be, under the guise of fighting Trump, taking on his MO and his techniques.

Honestly, when you think about Ford going down to see—I don't know if he actually saw Trump, but going down to Washington, I can imagine there would be a meeting where we see Donald Trump, who's disappearing American citizens—there's no due process for people in terms of their rights to face an accuser or to be in front of a court—and using every excuse he can to make sure there's no concern for people's environmental rights, for workers' rights. That's Trump. But I can imagine Doug Ford saying to Trump, “Hey, President, hold my beer. Wait until you see this bill that I've got cooking up my sleeve.”

It's funny, but it's not, because, in fact, that's what we have here: a bill that really could have been signed by Donald Trump in the Oval Office with the same kind of disregard for what people care about and the same kind of cynical belief that people will be blind to what you're actually up to.

So really, as has been my experience here, this is a government that has behind them a string of broken promises to communities. Dereliction of duty is not something that they understand. I said earlier that you ran in a democratic province in a democratic country, understanding what it is to be responsible, accountable legislators. Then I thought, this is the first time I've been on my feet since we've been elected. Shame on me, but I thought maybe this time, the third term they've been elected, there's no need for them to behave the way they've been for the last eight years, right? But no, it's like Lucy and Charlie Brown and the football: “Trust us one more time; I promise,” and here we are.

The string of the things that we know, we are probably—I feel sick that we have to keep bringing this up. I don't know if you're tired of hearing about this, but the greenbelt scandal is still a thing, my friends. People remember it; there's an RCMP investigation that's a real investigation. The stench of Ontario Place is not going away. It's not going away.

Then there's the unbelievable promise to the people of Dresden when it came to the dump during a by-election. To win a by-election, the Premier made a promise that I can only imagine he had absolutely no intention to keep. What we have here, unfortunately, is “Plus ça change, plus ça reste le même.” It's French, in case you didn't know.

Let me start by making sure that I cover the fact that we on this side of the House understand the importance of mining in this province. We have miners, actual miners, in our caucus. We have people, MPPs, that represent the north where mining is a significant, important industry. In fact, it's a way of life for people in the north. We've got MPP Guy Bourgouin from Mushkegowuk—James Bay,

MPP John Vanthof from Timiskaming—Cochrane. We have MPP Jamie West, who talked this morning. Thank you so much, because I learned so much about mining this morning from your personal experience.

You shared with us that you were a miner, that your family are miners, that you come from a mining town, and you explained some of the technical details of mining that I have not heard here in this Legislature. Even though this government talks about this mining all the time, I haven't heard anybody come to this place and share the kind of first-hand knowledge, expertise and pride in the mining industry that you did this morning. I want to thank you, MPP Jamie West, for that this morning.

We get it. We also have an MPP, Sol Mamakwa from Kiiwetinoong who, this morning, spoke so eloquently about his community and about the experience of Indigenous peoples in this province, about the failure of the crown from the beginning of Canada and how it is impacting his community. I would say, for anyone that is listening or who has any interest or any sentiment that we should be doing better—as a government, as individual citizens of this great province—please take the time to go and read what Sol said this morning. Read the Hansard. It's illuminating; it was heartfelt. It was a history lesson that we all need to understand and learn from as we go forward, particularly as we have a government that is hell-bent to exploit the riches of the north, the Ring of Fire, but has clearly shown absolutely no interest in understanding the duty of the crown to consult or any understanding about how previous promises have been broken by previous governments: “Trust us. We are going to come and we're going to take the resources from your community, but you will be well compensated.”

1730

It goes right back to when this was Upper Canada, and when we wanted to have the riches and the resources of the north. At that time, it was furs and trapping and a lot to do with those kinds of resources. Those promises were broken. It's no different now. These promises are going to be broken.

I've talked about our support of mining, that the idea of the streamlined process makes sense. But my balance here and my speech is going to be equal to the balance of your nine pages dedicated to talking about mining and the 200—

Interjection.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Oh, pardon me, six pages dedicated to mining and two hundred and—

MPP Jamie West: Twenty-nine.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: —twenty-nine pages dedicated to all the other schedules that all—every single one of them can be described as a broken promise or a dereliction of duty, or a scandal in the making, if I can say that. I just did say it, so I guess I can.

Let's just talk about this notion of special economic zones. Let's just say—when I read “special economic zones,” do you know what comes to mind? The Great Leap Forward—you know, Communist China. Do we all remember that?

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: A failed disaster.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: The failed disaster. I know the government likes to call us communists, but boy, oh boy, learn your history, because this kind of unilateral power—unfettered power of the government—doesn't end well, and history will tell you that. But where have we seen special economic zones before in Ontario? I would just say the greenbelt. That was a special economic zone. It wasn't as formal as this, but informally, if you owned land in the greenbelt, you—

Interjection.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Exactly. Where is that RCMP investigation? Tick-tock, right? Where is it?

If you owned land in the greenbelt, you could actually consider it your own, personal special economic zone, because all you had to do was whisper in the ear of the minister or perhaps a proponent and you got your MZO, you got your land taken out of the greenbelt protection. That was a special economic zone, which I think—despite the fact that the government had to repeal the legislation, despite getting caught with their hand in the cookie jar, they still went, “You know, but it wasn't that bad, was it? Because we almost got away with it. So how about we just codify it? How about we just do what we did, but this time, we'll make it legal.” So that's what I see in this bill.

Honestly, can we talk about Ontario Place? I actually got confused, because they're talking about Ontario Place—schedule 8, I believe—being a special economic zone. It's very special: \$2.2 billion of taxpayer money to a foreign investor that apparently is broke, that apparently lied about their finances. A New York Times investigation puts it all out there; the Auditor General puts it all out there. So that's pretty special, that economic zone—yes, special, for sure.

But do you know what? Honestly, we are talking about mining, and I have to say, if you've driven by Ontario Place lately, it looks like a strip mine. Thank you for putting Ontario Place in a bill about mining, because you've made the place look like an abandoned strip mine. Thank you for that.

Okay. It's Friday—oh, it's not Friday. It's Thursday afternoon. All right, so here we go: schedule 3, Dresden. You made a promise to the people of Dresden about the dump, and you broke that promise. There's no two ways about it. You broke that promise, and you're so bold-faced about it that you put it in a bill, schedule 3. There's no doubt about it. The words that the Premier was saying—you can say, “Did he say that? Did he not say that?” Well, clearly here, you're saying, “Oh, no, we are not going to help the people of that community of Lambton-Kent-Middlesex, who have trusted you, who listen to you.”

The MPP, who was elected in a by-election, was opposed to this. He's recently said he's disappointed. I bet. I'd be disappointed if I had to face my constituents when I was opposed to something, my leader said we weren't going to do it, and then, as soon as I get myself in my seat, the promise gets broken. It's terrible.

I want to say that I know a lot about this, because I was the environment critic, and the people from Dresden came

here because they couldn't get the government to listen to them. They presented petitions. I think we had a petition with over 4,000 signatures asking for the government to make sure that this dump either wasn't opened or received a full environmental assessment. They had a watch party for the debates that we had in this place. We wrote to the minister. We did everything we can, and when we were told, “We're not going to do it,” everyone was relieved, but sure enough, they went ahead and did it.

These citizens have a right to be concerned, because in Hamilton, we have a dump. It's called the Stoney Creek dump. It's the GFL Stoney Creek dump. That thing has been stinking to high heaven for three years. This government allowed that dump to be expanded without an environmental assessment. It's such a huge problem that the MPP from Flamborough-Glanbrook recommended that they don't build the needed school there, because it stinks so bad in the community. The municipalities now are proposing that people who live in that area get tax breaks, that they in fact get area rating relief because it stinks so bad. I've been there. My son-in-law and daughter live there. It's unbelievable. They can't use their backyards. In the community, you could smell it in the house.

I wrote to the minister. The Minister of the Environment at the time said, “Oh, we've issued orders. There was no follow-up on the orders.” So I'm saying to the people of Dresden, I am really sorry that you were lied to. I am really sorry that that was a broken promise. But don't give up, because I know that this is close to the Sydenham River. I know that you're concerned, and you should be rightly concerned, because the richness of that agricultural community is at risk. If you just go to Stoney Creek in Hamilton and see what's happening with the GFL dump there, the failure, the dereliction of duty of this government to protect the citizens is what you will be looking for in your future. So I am sorry to say, I wish I had better news for you, but unfortunately, that is not the case.

I'm going to just end by saying that it is really difficult on this side of the House to listen to so many of the things that happen there that this government ignores or thinks that people aren't paying attention to or thinks aren't a priority. But on a personal level, there's nothing more difficult for me than to sit here and listen to the member from Kiiwetinoong talk about the way this government divides and conquers, talks about the oppression and the colonialism of this government, and sees no action from the government, sees them not talk about it in any of their speeches. I would just say that even though the Premier had his hat saying “Ontario is not for sale,” I know that our member from Kiiwetinoong said that First Nations are not for sale either, so you have been put on notice.

1740

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Brian Saunderson): Questions?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: I appreciate the presentation from the honourable member, and I take it from her ferocious opposition to this bill that she is thoroughly opposed to any kind of special economic zone being imposed on the people of Hamilton West-Ancaster—

Dundas. So I'm asking her if she would like to stand up in the chamber today and confirm that she does not want a special economic zone in her riding.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I would say that the answer to your question was in your question. Nobody wants anything imposed on them, so no, we don't want anything imposed on us, especially if it tramples human rights, environmental rights, labour rights. People want a government to build an economy and to build jobs, but don't do it the lazy way by shortcutting all of the obligations and all the regulations and all of the laws they expect you to abide by.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Brian Saunderson): Question? The member from Sudbury.

MPP Jamie West: Thank you very much, Speaker, and thank you as well to my colleague for her debate.

While she was talking about mining, it reminded me of when I started at Inco. There was a guy who called himself a backpack miner. He had spent time travelling around the world, mining and sort of highballing stuff. He was talking about his time in Russia, and he said while he was in Russia, a sports car pulled up. A guy got out who looked like Magnum, P.I., with a gym bag, an empty gym bag, and came out with it filled with money. He said that's how corrupt it was there.

The special economic zones—I don't see them going that far, but I do see them opening the door towards corruption. We saw in the past where companies went to the government to talk about how many members bought fundraising tickets so they would lend them their ear. Even if it's not outright an invitation for corruption, it does invite corruption as an implication. Would you agree?

Ms. Sandy Shaw: You distracted me with a guy that looks like Magnum, P.I. with a bag full of money, so I got stuck at that point, to be honest with you. I'm old, not dead, you know what I'm saying?

But yes, absolutely. It's so obvious. I mean, the government is under investigation for behaving that way, for giving preferential treatment, for dealing only with their insiders and their donors and their developers. Everything happens out of the Premier's office. So why would it end now? Why, when there's so much more profit to be made, so much more at stake, would this government all of a sudden change their ways? It defies belief.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Brian Saunderson): Question?

Mr. Andrew Dowie: Thank you to the member opposite. First, would Miami Vice not be the more appropriate reference to the 1980s action series?

I wanted to ask—speaking about the Endangered Species Act in 2012, kind of building on a quote that I mentioned earlier, the member from Kenora—Rainy River, back in 2012, said in this House, “What's happening is people are not reporting endangered species. They are terrified because they know if they do, the Ministry of Natural Resources will swoop in and declare their area off limits. Rather than work with the property owner, they will say, ‘You can't touch this place.’”

More than a decade ago, that NDP member realized this legislation was broken. I can give you, certainly, a list of

the many industrial parks, industrial properties where this is happening, where there's heavy industry happening and the businesses can't expand in my riding. But instead of fixing the legislation at the time, they propped up the Liberal government of the day. I'm hoping to understand why.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I'm really not sure how you've led yourself to the point where I can say to you, why aren't you fixing it? Why did you ask me a question about a legislation that needed to be improved? You're the government. You've been the government for seven years. If you're asking me if I think environmental protections are important, the answer is yes; if I think a government of the day should have improved it, the answer is yes. And do I think you, as the government for almost eight years who have done nothing but undermine environmental protections—we have young people that are taking this government to the Supreme Court because of your failure to protect their future and their rights.

So yes, I think as a government, you should fix this environmental protection law, not throw it out and trample on it and make it worse, as you are doing in this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Brian Saunderson): Question?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: I thank the member for her previous clear answer. She clearly enunciated that she doesn't want a special economic zone imposed on her riding, and that's fair of her to say that. She represents her constituents. In the event that her constituents overwhelmingly request one, they want one—you know, let's say Invest in Hamilton requests a special economic zone—would the MPP consult with her riding constituents and change her mind? In the event that they requested one and really wanted one and it was overwhelmingly a popular request, would then she consent?

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Okay, so, it's fairy tale time: Once upon a time, when people are asking for the kind of special economic zones that you are proposing that short-circuit any due process, if that were to happen, certainly. And I'd have to be very—as respectful as I can be, I do not need you in any way to tell me how to be an MPP or how to represent my constituents—

Mr. Anthony Leardi: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I want to point out that an experienced member of this Legislature should speak through the Speaker and not directly refer to a member as “you.”

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Brian Saunderson): I remind the member to direct your comments through the Speaker, please.

Member from Sudbury.

MPP Jamie West: The member opposite has asked several times about what if somebody wants a special economic zone. This would override workers' rights on a variety of different things, or allow that ability.

I know that in Hamilton you've got a strong steelworker Local 1005 there. I was at the day of mourning in Sudbury. My local recognized that in our workplace in the last 100-plus years, 692 workers were killed in mining—692. Now,

don't pretend that happened just 100 years ago; this continues to happen in mining.

We know the Occupational Health and Safety Act is written in blood and that all of those deaths led to protecting workers. Do you think it's fair for the government to open the door for people to buy enough donor tickets so they can get a special economic zone and erode those rights that actually protect workers from dying underground?

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Thank you for the question. It gives me an opportunity to say that I would like to see the member from Essex come and peddle that to local 1005 members. That would be an interesting meeting, particularly when we have just recognized the Workers' Day of Mourning. At that event, we acknowledged and we mourned Nabil El-Ahmed, who was killed—he was a city worker working on the streets, was hit by a car, died on the site, and his co-worker is still hospitalized.

As you said, injured workers—their wives, their families, their children, their adult children, face the financial tragedy, not only just losing their loved ones, but the financial tragedy that unfolds. They end up living in poverty, losing their homes. This is why we have in place legislation to keep people safe. To say that we are going to throw that out, that people don't deserve to be kept safe because of a special economic zone, is nothing short of a disaster—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Brian Saunderson): Questions?

Mr. Chris Glover: I want to thank the member from Hamilton for—

Interjection.

Mr. Chris Glover: Yes, I know there's a lot more names.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Hamilton etc.

Mr. Chris Glover: —Hamilton etc. for their comments. Yes, it's late on a Thursday, but I really do appreciate your comments.

These special economic zones, they are a real danger because basically what they're saying is that the government is creating zones in Ontario where municipal and provincial laws don't apply.

Is the rule of law not a foundational principle of our democracy?

Ms. Sandy Shaw: It was until this government came to town, to be honest with you.

So, yes, special economic zones—the lineage goes back to the Great Leap Forward and Chairman Mao and some of the impacts that that has had in some of those communities.

We need to be clear: Is this government saying to people, “You only get to have economic development resources in your community if we select you and if you agree to exempt the Ford government from any provincial law”? It's unbelievable that that's what this government is putting forward. Really, you are saying you're going to do people a favour? Why aren't you a responsible government that is building economic prosperity all across Ontario without having to exempt yourselves from the laws that you should be obligated to adhere to?

1750

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Brian Saunderson): Further debate?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: I had the pleasure of listening to the very excellent speech given by the Minister of Natural Resources earlier, and I learned a lot from that speech. I had the pleasure of listening to other speeches as well, as well as the disjointed diatribe from the member from Hamilton West–Ancaster–Dundas, and I was just handed this very good piece of information. We often say that our Premier, while he has a political stripe, is willing to reach across the aisle and work with anybody of any political colour and co-operate if it's to the benefit of the province of Ontario. Quite remarkably and by coincidence, today in the province of British Columbia, Premier David Eby, a New Democratic Party Premier—not of our political stripe, not of my political stripe, but a Premier from the New Democratic Party—has introduced legislation which is virtually the same as the legislation that we're debating tonight in this Legislature.

Now, that's quite a different development: A PC government in Ontario and an NDP government in British Columbia introducing similar legislation for the purpose of protecting their workers and their industries, unleashing the great economic potential of their provinces and unleashing the great economic potential of this Confederation for the benefit not only of their province but of everybody who resides in Canada.

I think that's something very notable. I think it's worth noting, and that's why I've noted it. I think it's really good.

Now, here's another interesting fact. I hope I've got my numbers correct, but the members from northern Ontario would know the numbers better than myself. I've looked this up, and northern Ontario consists of approximately 808,707 square kilometres. It is 88% of Ontario. That is something that I think a lot of people in Ontario don't know. The Ring of Fire consists of approximately 5,000 square kilometres, so the Ring of Fire consists of approximately less than 1% of all of northern Ontario—less than 1%—if I rely on these statistics.

Now, that means if you took a giant shovel and you dug up the entire Ring of Fire, all of it, all of the entire Ring of Fire, all 1% of it, that would leave 99% of northern Ontario entirely untouched. Did you realize that? That's a significant fact. Because some people will tell you, “Oh, if we develop the Ring of Fire, horrible environmental things will happen and the entire northern Ontario landscape will be destroyed. It will descend into the ninth level of hell as described by the author Dante.” Remember that guy? Dante? The member from Mississauga–Lakeshore remembers Dante—a great author.

So it's simply not true because, of course, the Ring of Fire only constitutes 1% of that vast, vast area called northern Ontario; 99% of it would remain entirely untouched if we develop to the entire Ring of Fire. That is also a fact, which is notable.

Here's another interesting fact—because I do like interesting facts, and I like to share them with my fellow members of this provincial Legislature. Here's a list of

countries that have something in common. I'll read the list to you, and while I'm reading the list, maybe somebody might be able to figure out what they have in common. Here we go. Here's the list: China, India, United Arab Emirates, Singapore, South Korea, Mexico, Kenya, Nigeria, Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, Vietnam, Panama, Saudi Arabia, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Russia, Egypt, Brazil and Mauritius.

That's a list of 20 countries, and they all have something in common. I haven't heard anybody shout it out yet, but—

Mr. Matthew Rae: Special economic zones.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: Well, there you go. The government whip knows exactly what they have. All of those 20 countries have legislation for special economic zones—all of them. And so, of course, that begs the question: If these 20 countries can have special economic zones, well, then why can't Ontario have special economic zones, right? I mean, do you really think that we should be out-competed by any of these 20 countries? They all have special economic zones. We should have special economic zones too, because it's not as if we're not competing against them. We have to compete against them. That's why we need special economic zones.

If they can do it, certainly, we can do it better. We have the knowledge. We have the skills. We have the training. We have the workforce. We have the organization. We have the leadership of the best Premier that you could have in the province of Ontario. We can do it better than them, and we will do it. We will compete, and we will be successful, because we're going to have special economic zones.

Now, I've listened carefully to all of the speakers in the opposition. As you notice, I do listen carefully to them, because every once in a while, I invite them to consider their words, and sometimes, they consider their words. I even invite them to think about the question before they answer it, and sometimes they do, and maybe they don't.

But anyway, this is what I'm getting at: The reason I mentioned that was because if it takes 15 years to open a mine, then it's going to be 15 years that other people's special economic zones are in operation when ours are not. They're going to have special economic zones, and they're going to have critical minerals, and they're going to have the development of their resources. They're going to have the development of their military capabilities and they're going to have the development of their economies much faster than ours. We don't want that to happen either. We want to be competitive in the world market.

But I have listened carefully to all of the objections from the Liberal members of this House and the NDP members of this House, and it is absolutely clear that they have spelled it out very, very clearly: They view special

economic zones with trepidation, concern, fear. Some of them have used language that I would not use in this Legislature. They've used language like "tending toward corruption" and other things that I would not like to use in this Legislature.

So I want to tell you, Speaker, right here, right now; you're going to hear it from the member for Essex: I promise every single member of the NDP caucus and every single member of the Liberal caucus that I will not nominate any of their ridings for a special economic zone. That is a promise they can take to the bank. I will not nominate their ridings. I will not inflict a special economic zone on their taxpayers. I will definitely want one for my taxpayers. I definitely want a special economic zone in the county of Essex, because I know what special economic zones will do for job creation, investment. We could probably get rid of property tax—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Brian Saunderson): It's very encouraging to see the House get so animated at three minutes to 6:00 on a Thursday. I just want the taxpayers to know they're getting full value here.

Let's get done. I'm going to hand it back to the MPP from Essex.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: Thank you, Speaker.

But if one of them changes their mind and decides that a special economic zone might actually be good for their riding, I want to warn them right now: I'm going to hold them to what they said today. I am going to hold them to all of the negative words that they said about special economic zones, and I am going to tell them, "But you said that you didn't want a special economic zone. You said special economic zones were bad." That's what I'm going to tell them. I'm going to remind them of their words. I'm going to remind them that they didn't want special economic zones, that they didn't want the job creation, that they didn't want the economic development, that they didn't want the investments in their ridings, that they didn't want to unleash the great economic potential that we can have in the province of Ontario, that they didn't want that for their taxpayers or for their constituents. I am going to remind them. Where that lands, I don't know, but I will be here to remind them.

With that, Speaker, I would like to thank all of my caucus colleagues for the very wise words that they spoke today, and I will be supporting any requests that they make for a special economic zone for their taxpayers because that will be great for the province of Ontario.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Brian Saunderson): With that, this House stands adjourned until Monday, May 5, 2025, at 10:15 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1800.

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Firin, Mohamed (PC)	York South—Weston / York-Sud— Weston	
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Gates, Wayne (NDP)	Niagara Falls	
Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	
Gilmour, Alexa (NDP)	Parkdale—High Park	
Glover, Chris (NDP)	Spadina—Fort York	
Gretzky, Lisa (NDP)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	
Grewal, Hardeep Singh (PC)	Brampton East / Brampton-Est	
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Lumsden, Hon. / L'hon. Neil (PC)	Hamilton East—Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est—Stoney Creek	Minister of Sport / Ministre du Sport
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McMahon, Mary-Margaret (LIB)	Beaches—East York	
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Oosterhoff, Hon. / L'hon. Sam (PC)	Niagara West / Niagara-Ouest	Minister of Francophone Affairs / Ministre des Affaires francophones Associate Minister of Energy-Intensive Industries / Ministre associé des Industries à forte consommation d'énergie
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Pinsonneault, Steve (PC)	Lambton—Kent—Middlesex	
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Rae, Matthew (PC)	Perth—Wellington	
Rakocevic, Tom (NDP)	Humber River—Black Creek	
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Rosenberg, Bill (PC)	Algoma—Manitoulin	
Sabawy, Sheref (PC)	Mississauga—Erin Mills	
Sandhu, Amarjot (PC)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Sarkaria, Hon. / L'hon. Prabmeet Singh (PC)	Brampton South / Brampton-Sud	Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports
Sarrazin, Stéphane (PC)	Glengarry—Prescott—Russell	
Sattler, Peggy (NDP)	London West / London-Ouest	
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Schreiner, Mike (GRN)	Guelph	
Scott, Chris (PC)	Sault Ste. Marie	
Scott, Laurie (PC)	Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock	
Shamji, Adil (LIB)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	
Shaw, Sandy (NDP)	Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas / Hamilton-Ouest—Ancaster—Dundas	
Skelly, Hon. / L'hon. Donna (PC)	Flamborough—Glanbrook	Speaker / Présidente de l'Assemblée législative
Smith, Dave (PC)	Peterborough—Kawartha	
Smith, David (PC)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	
Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Graydon (PC)	Parry Sound—Muskoka	Associate Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / Ministre associé des Affaires municipales et du Logement
Smith, Laura (PC)	Thornhill	
Smyth, Stephanie (LIB)	Toronto—St. Paul's	
Stevens, Jennifer (Jennie) (NDP)	St. Catharines	
Stiles, Marit (NDP)	Davenport	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau Parti démocratique de l'Ontario
Surma, Hon. / L'hon. Kinga (PC)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	Minister of Infrastructure / Ministre de l'Infrastructure
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto—Danforth	
Tangri, Hon. / L'hon. Nina (PC)	Mississauga—Streetsville	Associate Minister of Small Business / Ministre associée des Petites Entreprises

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