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Jeudi
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Thursday 17 April 2025

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 17 avril 2025

The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers.

ESTIMATES

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize the Treasury Board president on a point of order.

Hon. Caroline Mulroney: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I have a message from the Honourable Edith Dumont, the Lieutenant Governor, signed by her own hand.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Please rise.

The Lieutenant Governor transmits estimates of certain sums required for the services of the province for the year ending March 31, 2025, and recommends them to the Legislative Assembly.

You may be seated.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PROTECT ONTARIO THROUGH FREE TRADE WITHIN CANADA ACT, 2025

LOI DE 2025 POUR PROTÉGER L'ONTARIO EN FAVORISANT LE LIBRE-ÉCHANGE AU CANADA

Mr. Fedeli moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 2, An Act to enact the Buy Ontario, Buy Canadian Day Act, 2025 and the Ontario Free Trade and Mobility Act, 2025 and to amend various other Acts / Projet de loi 2, Loi édictant la Loi de 2025 sur le Jour « Achetons ontarien, achetons canadien » et la Loi ontarienne de 2025 sur le libre-échange et la mobilité et modifiant diverses autres lois.

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

Hon. Victor Fedeli: Speaker, I want to begin by letting you know that my time will be split with the Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development and the Minister of Public and Business Service Delivery and Procurement.

Before discussing the details of the bill that was tabled yesterday, let's start with some context of where Ontario finds itself today. For 150 years, Canada has been more than a great neighbour to the United States; we have the largest bilateral trading relationship in the world, a trading

relationship that has been an envy of the globe. We are the number one purchaser of American products, and in return, we support the US with critical goods that they need to succeed, such as oil and gas, potash, auto parts, nickel and uranium.

When I sit in the US trade office or in the office of the Department of Commerce, or with a member of Congress or member of the Senate, I say to them, "Your President continues to say, 'We don't need anything from Canada.' Well, hang on just one second here. Some 80% of all the nickel that the United States buys for their entire aerospace sector comes from Ontario; 56% of all the nickel the United States buys for their defence sector comes from Ontario. How are you going to make an airplane, how are you going to make any kind of critical tool without the nickel?" They only have one nickel mine in the entire United States and it does not put out the same grade of nickel that we do in Ontario. They only have one lithium mine. That's it. We are vital to the United States.

In reverse of that now, Ontario alone is the number one customer to 17 US states and we're the number two customer for 11 more. We buy their goods. We buy more cars from them than China, Japan, South Korea, the UK, France, Italy, all combined. We buy more cars from the States, so it is a mutual relationship. They buy from us; we buy from them. In Ontario, it's \$500 billion a year and it's 50-50.

For the better part of four decades, our trading relationship has been governed by a succession of free trade agreements. Our shared values, our shared proximity, our resilient supply chains have made this the strongest trading relationship in the world. It's acknowledged as that right around the globe. It's a trading relationship that has been mutually beneficial, bringing investment, good-paying jobs and affordable North American-made products to both sides of the border. This has been forever. Unfortunately, now, this relationship has been undermined by the tariffs the US has imposed on Canadian goods.

To date, the US have tariffed our cars, our steel, our aluminum, our softwood lumber and more. On top of that, the administration has been clear that more tariffs are coming, including our pharmaceutical sector. We have already seen part of the economic shock that tariffs have caused. Markets have tanked, shedding trillions of dollars—\$6 trillion, \$7 trillion—in the US, jeopardizing the hard-earned savings and retirement plans of families right here, surrounding us. Consumer and business confidence levels have plunged to levels very similar to the 2008 global financial crisis.

I've got to tell you, we are in an economic war, and we need wartime urgency on everything that we do. Businesses can't plan, businesses can't make investment decisions because of the chaos and uncertainty that President Trump has created. So make no mistake: Our government is going to continue our advocacy in getting the US to lift all of their tariffs off all of the Canadian goods.

We recently returned from Washington, where we had productive meetings with elected representatives, industry organizations and trade officials. Most of January was spent there, with several trips this year, and while we continue to have this US dialogue, we need to do everything at home that we can do to strengthen our own economy and build on the tremendous progress that we have made.

We can't control President Trump's actions, but we know his end goal, because he's been very clear about that: He wants our jobs and he wants our industries. Whether it's our jobs in the auto sector, where we have landed \$46 billion in new investment over the last four years, or our jobs in the life science sector, where we've landed \$6 billion in new investment, the US has been very clear: They want to bring our investments over to their side of the border, period.

That's why it has never been more important for Canada to do everything we can to strengthen our domestic economy, to allow us to reduce our dependency on the United States. We must cut unnecessary red tape and tear down interprovincial trade barriers that have stood up for too long. The challenges we face today will not be solved with incremental policy. We must be bold, we must be ambitious, and we must do everything in our power to ensure our province and our country can continue to prosper.

We need to ensure that Canada is the beacon of free trade, and that starts with true free trade between our provinces and our territories. That is why our government is proud to have put forward what would be, if passed, the most ambitious provincial action on interprovincial trade in Canadian history. That's how significant this bill that we are presenting is.

0910

Now, we have heard about the costs of interprovincial trade barriers for far too long. Report after report, study after study, they all come to the same conclusion: Interprovincial trade barriers drive up costs, restrict competition and ultimately limit our country's economic growth. Think about this for a second: Interprovincial trade, it adds about 14.5% to the cost of goods and services that everybody here and down the street spends in stores; 14.5% of the cost of those goods is attributed to free trade being blocked between provinces. Those unnecessary costs are costs that Canadians cannot afford, especially as we face these extra costs from these tariffs from the US. So removing these barriers will see Canada boost its national growth between 4% and 8% annually. It's going to be a few numbers coming up here. It's a lot of numbers, in fact, but it's really critical that we absorb these numbers and what they really mean: Adding 4% to 8% of our national growth just by taking barriers away—it's a spectacular number. In fact, the total would be \$200 billion in

growth just by taking the barriers away. I'll give you some examples of what we're talking about here and you'll see—"My gosh. We do that? That's what's adding the cost?" It's ridiculous.

Here in Ontario, because we already have a lot of free trade and we're such a large province, of that \$200 billion, actually about \$23 billion would be added to our growth in Ontario. The cost and benefits could not be clearer. Ontario is right now the largest player in interprovincial trade. We really are free traders: \$326 billion a year we have right now of free trade. Compare that—we do about \$500 billion a year between Ontario and the US. It was \$400 billion when we were elected. Through really great work and developing those lifelong relationships, we grew that to \$500 billion. To put it in comparison, all the business we do in the US, we do three fifths of that already just in free trade amongst our provinces. That's about 28.5% of everything we do in Ontario is across the provinces. Interprovincial trade also is up \$75 billion since we took office. We've been hustling. We've been hustling out there, convincing the provinces to do more business with us and with each other. But it can grow even more, and that's why we're leading the nation with our ambitious plan to tear down interprovincial trade barriers and spur more free trade and growth within Canada.

So here are some of the things that we're doing. The first is called party-specific exemptions. Now, the plan starts years ago, when the Canadian Free Trade Agreement was written. The purpose of the CFTA is to promote more economic growth in our country through free trade. Under that agreement, provinces, territories and the federal government can have a carve-out, a party-specific exemption. Now, those exceptions allow parties to maintain or adopt measures that are inconsistent with the rules of what everybody agreed to. It was a big-picture rule, but everybody had these exceptions, these carve-outs. Ultimately, the exceptions are protectionist. They are protectionist policies. They restrict Canadian competition. It undermines free trade across our province. They limit market access for Canadian businesses who want to operate and expand in our own country freely. Every province maintains a different number of exceptions. Here in Ontario, we have 23—we're kind of the third worst. Quebec has 36. BC has 15. It varies.

During the campaign, Premier Ford committed that a re-elected PC government would tear down internal trade barriers, starting with the removal of all our party-specific exceptions. And that is exactly what we are proposing.

Ontario is the first jurisdiction in Canada to remove all party-specific exceptions under the Canadian Free Trade Agreement. As the largest player in interprovincial trade, Ontario is leading the nation with pure ambition. This takes us from 23 to the only province in the country with no exceptions. You want to do business? Come here and do business. That's why this is our first order of business.

Yesterday, we saw Premier Houston's legislation on internal trade, and he was rightly praised for his ambition. They've already passed their legislation. Theirs is a little different than ours. We're going a step further than Nova Scotia. We saw what they did—very admirable what they

did. We loved what they did. But under Nova Scotia's bill, they committed to not applying any party-specific exceptions with respect to a reciprocating territory. So they'll say, "If you do it, we'll do it with you." Us, it's, "Come on in. We're doing it. They're gone." They're gone forever, those exceptions. You can't bring them back. If a province removes their exception, Nova Scotia will do the same. With us, we're open.

We are acting unilaterally and removing every single one of our exceptions. We chose this path to underscore the urgency of the situation we find ourselves in. We are in a wartime emergency. I'll say that over and over. We hope that by leading the way, other provinces and territories will follow suit and remove all their exceptions. These are big opportunities for the country, not just for Ontario. The removal of these PSEs will significantly increase market access for businesses across Canada, and that's why we've chose to lead the way in our country.

The next piece is mutual recognition. This legislation includes a critical component on mutual recognition of goods and services. There are too many rules and regulations among provinces that have the slightest differences despite them achieving the same goals. So mutual recognition will allow any good or service that meets one province's regulatory standards to automatically be recognized as being equivalent—that's the magic word here—in Ontario, and vice-versa. So we're uniting the provinces by saying, "If that frozen pizza in Nova Scotia is good enough for you, you can ship them to us, and they'll be good enough for us." That's the idea. And you're going to hear more about the pizza delivery person in a second as well.

These diverging rules—those standards, those regulations—serve as barriers that drive up the cost for workers, for businesses and for consumers. We know that every single province and territory has very strong standards right now as it relates to health and safety. So we can trust that if a good or a service is coming from Nova Scotia or Alberta or any other province or territory, it already is safe for use in our province, despite having already met the standards required for use in the province they're coming from. We're saying, "If it's good enough for you, you can bring it here." Even though it's different than our regulations—it may meet or exceed; it may be different—we recognize it as equal.

High apparel safety vests—a really good example. It's designed to make the wearer more visible in a low-light condition. Construction workers, utility workers, miners, others wear it while they're working. If a construction worker goes to purchase their coveralls or vests in New Brunswick, they have to ensure it meets their own province's standards. So if it's good enough for them, when they come to work here or if our Ontario workers go and work there, you shouldn't have to spend two hundred bucks on a new construction vest because it has stripes this way instead of stripes this way. And I'm not exaggerating; that's what it's about. We will recognize your equipment as equal to our equipment, despite not being identical.

Again, this unnecessary duplication in the rules between New Brunswick and Ontario drives up the cost. These are the types of redundancies that Canada needs to prioritize to get rid of. With our legislation, we're going to ensure that a good or service that is good enough for sale or work in one province is good enough for sale or work in Ontario.

0920

Another example is the trucking across the province. You've heard me say before in this Legislature that we have different air pressures of the tires as you cross the country. We have different requirements of what goes in a first aid kit in a truck in the Atlantic, middle of the province, north and in the west. This is what needs to change. These are the kinds of things that we have been changing. We have a pilot right now between all provinces that the truck lengths—what happens in your province will be recognized as it travels through our province, so it can travel freely. The trucking industry contributes \$40 billion in annual revenue through over 63 million shipments each year. It reduces our dependence on the US. And we need to do that by allowing more and more.

Back to the pizza: The person who's now shipping that frozen pizza can confidently hop in their vehicle and have it cross the country, knowing that the regulations, although different in each province, are being recognized as equivalent as that truck passes through. That is good for the potash that Ontario farmers need from Saskatchewan or the cars that are produced here in Ontario that are shipped out west.

Those barriers in trucking, by the way, are about \$500 million per year in direct economic losses. What happens? That \$500 million has to be added to the cost of the products. Each pizza gets another chunk added to the price, so before it gets to your grocer, already the costs have gone up just because of the lack of interprovincial trade agreements.

In February 2025, as I've said, all jurisdictions in Canada signed on to a pilot program. We go a step further here in Ontario: We're saying we are open for mutual recognition, period. But it's mutual; you need to recognize our goods as well. Any province that recognizes our goods and services, we now will have a deal with you. We want to make it easier for businesses to trade your products within our own country.

Again, yesterday, memorandums of understanding were signed between Ontario and Nova Scotia, and Ontario and New Brunswick to bolster interprovincial trade. Those are the kinds of agreements where we are saying we will mutually recognize each other's goods and services. This is just the start. We look forward to more provinces joining us so that goods that are good for use in one province are recognized as equivalent in another.

The third part of the bill is labour mobility, and this is there to ensure there is efficient and productive labour mobility across the province. Minister Piccini will get into more details, but here are a couple of highlights. This part of the bill will allow out-of-province certified workers to practise in Ontario immediately. There are too many

barriers that prevent or slow down workers from one province who wish to work in another. If they're qualified and registered in one province, they should not have to go through an onerous process to get work in another province, especially one that can take several months to complete. That's why this bill, if passed, will expand as-of-right entry more broadly, to get certified workers on the job much faster. Workers who are registered in another Canadian jurisdiction would submit their registration documents to the Ontario regulator and would be deemed as registered with that regulator right away. They would still have to register with the appropriate regulatory body to ensure we know who is working in our province, but this would allow them to work for up to six months while they complete the registration. We're also proposing to impose time limits on the regulator to ensure they're processing applicants as fast and effectively as they can.

When we have massive investments like Honda's \$15-billion investment in Alliston or Ferraro's recently announced \$445-million investment in Brantford, we need to make sure that we have the workers to build these projects as soon as possible. We can't afford for workers who are already registered to work in another province to wait months while the regulator processes their application to work in Ontario. Likewise, if our workers want to work on projects in other provinces, they should be able to do so without a complicated and lengthy registry process.

Here's a practical example: Architects in Canada are registered to their governing provincial body. In Ontario, it's the Ontario Association of Architects. Often, the process for an architect registered in one province who wants to come to work in another is costly and burdensome, but it shouldn't be that way. An architect qualified to work in Nova Scotia should be qualified to work here. This is Canada; we have the same strict standards. That's why we're proposing to allow workers like architects to be able to work in Ontario as of right. Again, you'll hear more from the Minister of Labour, but we want our economy to remain competitive. We need to ensure registered Canadian workers do not have barriers and delays that stop them from working.

Another part of the bill is direct-to-consumer sales. This allows for the direct-to-consumer—DTC, we'll call it—sales of alcoholic beverages. We'll start by negotiating memorandums of understanding with interested provinces. This will only happen with provinces that also mutually agree to the DTC. The end goal is having a fully implemented direct-to-consumer sales system that would give consumers the choice to purchase alcohol directly from producers across Canada.

Now, you'll remember this issue gained a lot of national attention in what was called the famous Comeau case. In 2012, Gerard Comeau, resident of New Brunswick, drove to Quebec and bought some booze. He was driving back across the Quebec border and he was in New Brunswick, and he was stopped by the RCMP and charged with being in possession of more alcohol purchased out of province than was permitted under the New Brunswick Liquor Control Act. He challenged the act as being in violation of

the Constitution, a challenge that went all the way to the Supreme Court, and he lost.

To address this problem in 2018, six years after he was arrested, provinces committed to raising or removing the personal exemption limits on alcohol, allowing people to carry larger volumes of alcohol across provincial boundaries. In the case of Ontario, our government at that time removed the limits altogether. I live 45 minutes from the Quebec border—

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Premier Wynne did that.

Hon. Victor Fedeli: In the case of Ontario, our governments removed the limits altogether, but it didn't go far enough. This legislation will allow direct-to-consumer sales, will allow consumers to buy alcohol from producers in other provinces without having to personally carry the alcohol across the border. Increased competition will broaden choice consumers have and it's going to drive down costs.

As other provinces follow suit, it will create a massive economic opportunity for Ontario producers, giving them direct, easier access to the Canadian market. We need to boost competition in Canada and ensure our businesses have true market access right here in our own country. It should not be easier for Ontario producers to sell to consumers around the world than it is for us to sell to our own consumers in other provinces and territories, and that's the way it is today.

These are the measures that our government, through the Protect Ontario Through Free Trade Within Canada Act, proposes. Interprovincial trade barriers have existed in our country for far too long. We know that they weaken competition, they drive up costs and they limit our country's economic growth. As the largest interprovincial trader in the country, Ontario is proud to lead the way in removing these barriers. This is extremely bold.

0930

Our interprovincial trade committee under this government has been working seven years on this day, and today it happens. For 40 years it hasn't happened under any government. Today, it is going to happen. Now is the time for all the provinces to take bold and ambitious action.

Over the last seven years, we've cut 550 pieces of red tape. We've lowered the annual cost of doing business by \$8 billion annually. You'll remember what we did. We reduced the WSIB payments, without reducing benefits, by \$2.3 billion annually.

We put in what's called an accelerated capital cost allowance. This means businesses can write off the cost of their equipment in a year. It saves them a billion dollars. They've reinvested that, as you'll see in a minute.

We lowered the cost of industrial and commercial energy by 16%, a \$1.3-billion savings. The previous Liberal government had a \$465-million tax coming due January of the year we were elected. We eliminated that tax permanently.

We reduced the province's share of local property taxes by \$450 million annually, and the list goes on and on and on. It adds up to \$8 billion a year in savings.

And what happened by taking an \$8-billion-a-year haircut? Our revenue in Ontario, the day we were elected, was \$150 billion. Today, it's \$214 billion. How do you cut taxes by \$8 billion every year and grow your revenue by \$64 billion? Because you put a million people to work in the province of Ontario since we were elected. That's how you grow your revenue. You put people to work.

Speaker: \$46 billion in new auto investments; \$6 billion in life sciences; tens of billions in new tech investments; one million new jobs since we were created in 2018. But now we are faced with an unprecedented threat from the United States. We must do everything we can to protect the progress that we have made. This remarkable seven years of progress is under existential threat right now. We are in a wartime emergency.

We've got to ensure true free trade and labour mobility within our province. We need to tear down those barriers that are costing our economy \$200 billion annually and costing consumers 14.5% every time they ring a cash register.

Thank you, and now I'll pass to Minister Piccini for his addition on labour mobility.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Lorne Coe): I recognize the Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development.

Hon. David Piccini: It's an honour to rise here in the Legislature during this session of Parliament. I would just like to start my first speech here by thanking the people of Northumberland–Peterborough South who elected me to this place for a third time, and it's an honour to be here to serve my community.

Now on to the bill we're debating here today. As we're all aware of, recently we've been facing difficult times of economic uncertainty as a province, as a country, as a planet. Our sovereignty and prosperity are being challenged by what once was our closest neighbour and friend, south of the border.

President Trump's tariffs have undermined the long-standing and successful trading relationship between Canada and the United States. To reduce our dependence on the United States as a country, we must take action to cut red tape and tear down internal trade barriers so that we can promote free trade and labour mobility within our great country. That's why we've introduced the Protect Ontario Through Free Trade Within Canada Act, and it's an honour to join my colleagues to speak to this bill today.

For those sitting at home wondering what these barriers mean to you, these barriers can add up to 14% to the cost of goods and services that Ontarians use, costing us over \$200 billion. One of these barriers is labour mobility—simple movement within Canada. Now, labour mobility seems like a decently self-explanatory concept, but I'm going to define it and talk a bit about it in my remarks today. Simply put, I think it's the ability of workers to move freely between provinces and territories without having to undergo duplicative, more strenuous and, in many cases, burdensome recertification processes, or processes to acknowledge the certification that they already received within a neighbouring Canadian jurisdiction with

one of their world-class universities or colleges. It ensures that skills and qualifications are recognized across all regions, allowing talent to flow where it's needed most. When a welder, engineer or other skilled professional crosses a provincial border, their qualifications shouldn't be stopped by bureaucracy. And in the trades, we've seen such a north star when it comes to that movement with Red Seal designation.

Bill 2, if passed, will ensure the mutual recognition of goods and services across the country. It will allow workers who are registered in other Canadian jurisdictions to work in Ontario as of right, meaning they could work here in Ontario in the same capacity. This bill is about fairness, common sense and maximizing the incredible potential of our great country, the incredible potential that this province has to offer, and the incredible potential of the world-class, skilled Canadian workforce from coast to coast to coast. And we're leading the charge.

My colleague just came up to me a moment ago and said, "David, we need more ECEs, early childhood educators. Wouldn't it be nice if they could move freely from province to province?" The answer, simply put, is yes, and this bill is making that happen. We have 240 regulated occupations under the Ontario Labour Mobility Act, and as-of-right legislation means that those registered in other Canadian jurisdictions are deemed registered in ours upon submitting your certification to the regulatory body. We're going to impose time limits on acknowledging receipt and time limits to complete that registration process and render a decision, and I'll speak to that later.

In 2023, we signed a memorandum of understanding with Nova Scotia to eliminate barriers to labour mobility between our two provinces. It's the first agreement of its kind in Canada and it's already showing results. We saw Premier Houston was here yesterday with Premier Ford and Premier Holt from New Brunswick. We're taking the lead and other provinces will follow suit. We've been calling on the federal government and other provinces to join us in strengthening free trade in our country for quite some time now. It's time to modernize and enforce rules that guarantee mobility rights for workers across Canada because in our federation, borders should never be barriers to Canadians.

You might be asking, "Why does this matter so much right now?" The answer is simple: It's going to make our economy more resilient and stronger. We're facing a demand for skilled labour in the province of Ontario. We're building highways, homes, hospitals and, yes, schools in rural Ontario that once were shut down, not so many years ago, by the previous government. We need over 100,000 new skilled trades workers in this decade alone to meet increased demand, and that's only going to further increase with the national consensus we're seeing today around nation building. But there's another reason we need these 100,000 skilled trades workers. It's because the number of journeypersons out there over the age of 55 is increasing—affectionately called the silver tsunami in some unions and on some job sites across Ontario. We've got to get that next generation of talent in the pipeline. We

need to attract the best and the brightest, regardless of where in Canada they live.

0940

I think to some of the monumental projects we've done here. I think to Trillium, to what they're doing with the new hospital. I think to the Gordie Howe bridge. I think to the fact that in Windsor, after not so many years ago we were slated for zero dollars—zero dollars—of automotive investment. Fast-forward—what is it now? Some \$42 billion-plus, the minister tells me.

What does that mean? We get that investment and we go—as you heard from our Minister of Economic Development, Ontario is open for business. But what does that mean once we've attracted that business? Once he's done his job and we negotiate that deal and we say we're in the game, we're going to attract these businesses, well, guess who gets to work? Workers—men and women in our provincial building trades.

Do you know, Speaker, what the weekly paycheque is in Windsor on the plant alone? It's \$14 million in weekly payroll. That was \$14 million that would have never come under the previous Liberal government—\$14 million. Behind each dollar, behind each paycheque is a family putting food on their table, giving opportunities to their children.

So we need to be competitive, because we're competing on a global stage. We don't just compete within Canada; we compete on a global stage. And so to do that, and in speaking with many of our partners on that project and across our life sciences investments, the new hospitals we're building, STEM graduates in the tech sector—behind that are people and companies that often do business all over Canada, so when they want to bring an engineer or an architect from New Brunswick or Saskatchewan who want to bring their talent as a part of that team, to bring the best and the brightest in that company that operates from coast to coast to coast, we shouldn't be putting up barriers to getting that job done. Normalizing a 10- or 15-year building process, normalizing a 17-year process to open a mine is why we are not as competitive as we can be. I choose, and I know colleagues on this side of the House and that side choose, for Ontario and Canada to achieve our full potential, to not be marred in bureaucratic process.

That's why we're saying to regulatory bodies as part of this bill, "You've got to make a decision within 30 calendar days." We've talked a lot over the last while about 30, 60, 90 days, about the need for this province, for this country, to move. I heard from the president of TC Energy the other day, who said, "David, in this global market when we're building pipelines and we're exporting LNG and things of that nature"—in Mexico, they went two years from start to finish.

Facts don't care about our feelings. In a global market, when that's the time it's taken to get our products to market in other jurisdictions, we lose if we can't even compete, if we can't even show up. The player who doesn't even dress to skate—that's what we have to do here in Ontario.

We've committed to working with all of our regulatory bodies to say—you know what? As much as I talked about competing on a global scale, we're not going to have those barriers within our own country. That's why we're saying to regulatory bodies, "You've got to make that decision within 30 calendar days." And we're prescribing in future legislation, working with them, the sort of service and documentation—and that's written in the bill for colleagues to read. Working with them, we're going to prescribe what you can submit.

How often do we see an engineer, be it internationally trained or from another province, or a working professional, who tells you, "I don't know the process"? Going on a regulator's—if you ever need to fall asleep at night, go on a regulatory body's website and try to navigate it. I'd have an easier job, in some respects, navigating the Tokyo subway system than trying to figure out how to navigate that process. And do you know who loses? Who loses is that new Canadian I've spoken to, an engineer. Who loses is that certified professional from another province who, like so many Canadians, may live paycheque to paycheque, who's here just trying to put food on their table, let alone figuring out how to navigate our own regulatory body's process. We're going to say to them, "Look, it would be nice to have a bit of a common look and feel, it would be nice if we could stay true to the spirit of the Canadian Free Trade Agreement," which prescribes in it documentation and things you can ask for. But of course, over time—I've never seen a government program or bureaucracy that ultimately doesn't strive to grow over time, if not for a keen political eye that holds it to account. These bodies are no different. They've grown and these processes have gotten bigger and bigger and bigger. This minister, our colleagues, our government are saying, "No more barriers within Canada. No more barriers to labour mobility." We're competing for global talent, we're competing for talent, and we have to unlock that incredible potential.

To some other things we've done as a government to do that, our \$1.5-billion Skills Development Fund—I spoke yesterday about the Automotive Industries Association and David who, thanks to the Skills Development Fund, is an automotive technician, is driving a bus today. Whether it's a bus or whether it's a truck getting our goods to market, getting our students, our best and our brightest, our next generation, to school safely in rural communities like mine—we need these men and women doing their job.

Our Skills Development Fund has funded over 600 projects across Canada. More than 600,000 workers—better training, better jobs, with a bigger paycheque. If that's not ultimately why we're here, then why are we here? That's got to be, at its core, what we're striving to do as members of this Legislature.

We've helped people get those skill sets. Yesterday, I was with the hospitality workers. HTA and Unite Here had an incredible session yesterday morning that brought employers and labour together at the table. I've always said government, employers and labour are the three legs of a stool that make for a strong Ontario, and they brought

them together. I got interviewed by a remarkable woman who came here in 2020, thanks to our training, thanks to our Skills Development Fund. Not only is she a leader in training our next generation in working—I spoke to many women there who are leading and training. One said to me, “David, I worked hospitality for Denzel Washington when he came up here and filmed in Ontario,” and spoke about what that meant and what hospitality means as a profession, because without it, we can’t function. Things happen here and we are unable to keep our day-to-day lives clean and orderly. We’re unable to function.

I am amazed by the professionalism and the drive those remarkable workers exhibited, working with employers to ensure we are a world-class destination. Just think, the World Cup is here next summer. We’re going to lean on the backbone of our hospitality sector. So again, back to that fund that gave a sense of purpose and dignity—words not from me, but words that they used: purpose and dignity. That’s what we’re doing.

And when you say to a man or a woman from another province who’s here to work on a large project, who’s here to mould the hearts and minds of our next generation—we’re saying, “We’re not going to leave you in a never-ending merry-go-round of bureaucracy,” but that if you’re educated and certified within Canada, you can work as of right here in the province of Ontario. Let’s put workers first. Let’s recognize that credentials don’t change their value at the provincial border and let’s make a country where opportunity is unlimited, where a Canadian is a Canadian and can move and work freely across our great country.

Some critics will say that’s not easy. They might say each province has different standards, systems, needs, but that shouldn’t be an excuse for inaction. We’ve seen that bold action has a unifying effect. Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, our Premier stood shoulder to shoulder to shoulder yesterday. The truth is, as a country, we’ve been talking about this for far too long, and it’s high time we acted.

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Protectionist policies that deter movement of Canadian talent threaten our fundamental long-term prosperity. We need transparent reporting, measurable outcomes and consequences for provinces that don’t follow through, because this is about real people and real jobs.

A strong Canada starts with a stronger Ontario, and a stronger Ontario depends on the freedom of Canadians to move, work and succeed. Labour mobility isn’t just a policy; it’s a principle. It’s a principle that says that hard workers across Canada and our country should be rewarded, not restricted. We’re up for that challenge, and we’re leading the charge on that here in Ontario—an Ontario that decided, in 2018, to get back on the ice to play on a global scale; an Ontario that has attracted over \$40 billion in foreign direct investment; an Ontario that has said that through a low-tax, competitive climate, we can attract investment, we can grow and harness our full potential; and an Ontario that, today, says, “No, we’re not going to be marred by a planning process and by permits

and fees that make the dream of a young entrepreneur, the dream of a businessman or businesswoman, the dream of a tech start-up, crash. We’re going to help unlock that potential and help them to succeed.”

To think that a training centre in Ottawa that’s training the next generation of carpenters took six weeks for a sign permit, a permit to just get a sign that says, “Future home of an 11,000-square-foot expansion.” That’s insanity. This Premier has said we have to do better.

We have to have certainty—speak to anyone in our energy sector, any business that operates on a global scale. We’ve seen, from President Trump, that lack of certainty is bad for our markets, it’s bad for our 401(k). That lack of certainty needs the stability that this Premier is building. And that certainty means Canadian workers can travel across our country and can come here and work in Ontario.

That’s the sort of Ontario I want to build, an Ontario that has endless potential, that acknowledges that a Canadian is a Canadian and you can come here and work freely to contribute to our economic success. If you’re willing to work hard and you’ve taken years to train and hone your craft, we want you here in Ontario if you’re from neighbouring Quebec or Manitoba, and vice versa—that an Ontarian who wants to take that idea they’ve harnessed here in Ontario and take it across Canada, we want to support them.

That’s what this Premier is doing. We’re protecting Ontarians who are building a stronger Ontario, and we’re not going to stop.

Speaker, I’m proud to turn over my remarks, and I appreciate the opportunity to rise here today.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Lorne Coe): Thank you for your presentation.

I recognize the Minister of Public and Business Service Delivery and Procurement.

Hon. Stephen Crawford: Thank you to my colleagues for opening up on this wonderful bill.

I’d like to also welcome all the MPPs who have been re-elected back in this chamber—and the newly elected MPPs, welcome you to the Legislature.

Speaker, it’s a great honour to rise in the House today as part of the government leadoff on the second reading debate for Bill 2, the Protect Ontario Through Free Trade Within Canada Act, 2025, alongside my colleagues, who did a wonderful job presenting the early part of this bill, the Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade and the Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development. On behalf of the Ministry of Public and Business Service Delivery and Procurement, I am here to highlight how this landmark bill, if passed, will be a historic step towards a future for Ontario and Canada—one that tears down outdated and costly trade barriers; one that gives Ontario businesses new room to grow; one that empowers Canadian workers to take on new opportunities; one that sends a clear message across the country and around the world that Ontario is open, united and ready to lead.

For far too long, the free movement of goods, services and workers within our own country has been hindered by

red tape and regulatory roadblocks. As my colleagues highlighted, these internal trade barriers cost our national economy billions of dollars every single year. They drive up costs for families at a time when Ontarians are already facing affordability challenges made worse by inflation and US tariffs.

Speaker, it simply doesn't make sense that while we fight against unfair US tariffs and protect Ontario from external threats, we're still letting outdated rules divide our own country from within. Those days are coming to an end. With this bill, as my colleagues have highlighted, Ontario is once again ready to lead by example.

I want to use my time today to highlight a part of this plan that truly captures the spirit of Ontario: our proposal to establish a Buy Ontario, Buy Canadian Day. If Bill 2 is passed, starting this year, the last Friday of every June will be an annual tradition, a celebration of the businesses, producers and the workers who power our economy and serve as the backbone to our communities.

It's no coincidence, Speaker, that Buy Ontario, Buy Canadian Day falls just before Canada Day. As we prepare to celebrate our great country, this new annual tradition gives Ontarians the perfect opportunity to show their pride by supporting local businesses, choosing Ontario- and Canadian-made products, enjoying Canadian-grown food and championing homegrown talent. It's a powerful reminder that our economic strength and national identity go hand in hand. By backing Ontario businesses and workers right before July 1, we are not just waving the flag; we're investing in what makes Canada strong from the ground up.

Having these two important days so close to each other allows us to come together and embrace the values that define our Canadian pride, for Buy Ontario, Buy Canadian Day is more than just a symbolic gesture. It's a call to stand together, a call for every Ontarian to look at what's made and grown right here at home, to choose Ontario- and Canadian-made products, to support and stand shoulder to shoulder with the people behind those products: the farmers, the builders, the entrepreneurs and workers whose livelihoods depend on it.

In a time of global uncertainty, when foreign markets are less reliable, and as the US government places unjustified and unfair tariffs on Canadian goods, Buy Ontario, Buy Canadian Day is about taking control of our economic future. It's about using our collective purchasing power to build resilience, support jobs and invest in our communities.

Speaker, nine in 10 Canadians say they want to see more Canadian products promoted in stores. We are all filled with pride as we see more and more people recognizing that buying local isn't just patriotic; it's practical. It supports jobs, it strengthens our supply chains and it helps families and small businesses thrive.

That's why Buy Ontario, Buy Canadian Day is such a valuable part of the Protect Ontario plan. Because when we buy Ontario, we build Ontario. When we choose a product made here, we're supporting our neighbour's job. When we hire a local contractor or skilled worker, we're

investing in our own economy. And when we stand up for Canadian goods, we are sending a message to the world that we believe in what we make and we won't be pushed around.

Speaker, rest assured that our government is leading by example. Ontario has already taken measures to protect our local manufacturers, producers and the jobs that they support. We have implemented several policies to prioritize procurement from Ontario and Canadian businesses, focused on our spending here at home.

One key initiative is the procurement restriction policy, which applies to all ministries, provincial agencies and the broader public service. The policy is part of Ontario's response to US tariffs, aimed at protecting Ontario workers, businesses and families. The procurement restriction policy restricts the public sector from procuring goods and services from US businesses and encourages sourcing of local goods. We are requiring public sector entities to exclude US businesses from procurements, except if a US business is the only viable source for the good or service, or if the procurement cannot be delayed for health and safety reasons. This policy applies to all procurements of goods and services of any value. We recognize the significant role public sector purchasing plays in supporting local economies, and our procurement framework is directed at ensuring Ontarians receive the best value for their money.

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In 2022, we introduced the Building Ontario Businesses Initiative, also known BOBI, to strengthen the province's supply chain and economic growth. BOBI creates a level playing field by reducing barriers for Ontario businesses with greater access to procurement opportunities. The initiative was designed to allow government to continue conducting business with its trade partners while addressing the needs of the local economy. BOBI mandates that public sector and broader public sector entities, such as hospitals and educational facilities, give preferences to Ontario businesses in the procurements of goods and services below certain threshold values. It also expands on technical requirements to incorporate the evaluation criteria such as social and economic considerations, levelling the playing field for businesses in Ontario and the communities they serve. The initiative strengthens Ontario's supply chain resiliency, preparing the province for any future emergencies or trade situations. Last year, Ontario's broader public sector procurement directive was updated to include new provisions to align with BOBI. This means that broader public service entities must, wherever feasible, give preference to Ontario and Canadian businesses under certain threshold values.

Speaker, as I conclude my remarks, I want to emphasize the measures in this legislation aren't just technical or regulatory; they are transformational. The bill, if passed, is not just about empowering our local economies, though it will. It's not just about getting workers to job sites faster, though it will. It's about showing leadership at this time of economic uncertainty. It's about standing up for Ontario's interests while strengthening the federation we call home.

Speaker, I want to thank the Premier and my colleagues across cabinet for their support and leadership on this important legislation and I want to thank the hard-working public servants and ministry officials who have helped bring this vision to life.

And I want to say to every Ontarian and every Canadian, this bill is for you. It's for the entrepreneurs trying to grow their small businesses across provincial borders. It's for the skilled workers looking for opportunities in a province that's ready to welcome them with open arms. And it's for every single family that wants to buy local, shop smart and support their local community.

This bill is a blueprint for a stronger, freer and more prosperous Ontario, a blueprint for a Canada that works better for everyone. Let's move forward, united, confident and determined. Let's tear down these barriers. Let's open up new doors. Let's build the future that we want to see right here in Ontario for the benefit of all Ontarians and all Canadians. And on the last Friday of June and every day, let's make sure we buy Ontario. Let's buy Canadian and let's build and protect our home together to make a stronger province of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Lorne Coe): We're now into questions.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I would like to thank the Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and *[inaudible]* when someone is able to work. These are certainly laudable goals.

The Ontario Immigrant Nominee Program is a mess, though. My constituents have waited patiently for a response only to see that deadline come and then go. My calls and messages from my office to the minister's ministry go unanswered. There's currently no ministry liaison for MPPs to reach out to. I know every MPP in this chamber understands the hot mess that the OINP is. Will the minister address the mess that is the OINP and fix it?

Hon. David Piccini: While not having anything to do with this bill, I appreciate the question from that member opposite and I'm happy to answer it. It's a good one. Speaker, permanent residency and citizenship isn't a right; it's a privilege. And my team and the ministry work diligently and have seen, because of the levels program and the dramatic increase—I think we can agree, it's without dispute, factually, of immigrants that have arrived, that one in three in other provinces who end up coming to Ontario, a demonstrable increase in fraudulent applications. So they are taking their time and doing their due diligence. And at a time when we're seeing the global instability, our focus really needs to be on prioritizing jobs here for Ontarians and Canadians that we're doing with this labour mobility bill, and that's what we're laser-focused on, Speaker.

Thank you for the question.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Lorne Coe): I have the member from Essex, please.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: My question is for the Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade.

Speaker, I have some great wineries in my riding: Oxley Estate Winery, Mastronardi Estate Winery—great

wineries. They want to sell their wines to other provinces, but interprovincial trade barriers block them from doing so.

I have great breweries in my riding. They want to sell their brews to other provinces, but interprovincial trade barriers block them from doing so.

I have a great distillery in my riding, Wolfhead Distillery. It makes great flavours—banana-flavoured vodka—but they're blocked from selling to other provinces because of interprovincial trade barriers.

We have great producers right here in the province of Ontario, great producers right in my riding of Essex, but they are blocked from selling their products to other Canadians by interprovincial trade barriers.

Will the minister please tell us, what will this bill do to help my people in Essex county sell their goods to other Canadians?

Hon. Victor Fedeli: Thank you for the excellent question. This is going to give your producers—your great producers, and the producers all across Ontario—an opportunity to provide direct to consumer. They don't have to show up at your place. You can go online—if passed—and be able to have direct to consumer, coast to coast to coast, right across all 13 provinces and territories. Gateway brewery in North Bay is going to give them a good run for their money, I'll tell you that right now.

I would say to you, this is the time for all of us to be bold. We are in an economic war right now, and it's time for all of us to be bold and look at this legislation, be serious about this legislation and understand that this is going to add \$200 billion to our economy and save families 14.5% at every cash register.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Lorne Coe): I have the member from Niagara Centre, please.

Mr. Jeff Burch: A question for the Minister of Labour: I have a great college in my riding, Niagara College. They have some great skilled trades programs. But colleges across Ontario are facing some real budget crunches. It's difficult at this time.

First of all, is the minister looking at increasing budgets in colleges? And what role does he see colleges playing in the labour mobility issues?

Hon. David Piccini: Any time to get down to Niagara to see my friend Sean Kennedy and the team at Niagara College is a good time down, and I've always enjoyed working with that member.

Without question, Speaker, we've got to increase the opportunities for young men and women to enter the trades. We've expanded the number of TDAs, training delivery agents, across Ontario; that has come with funding. For every seat that we fund, we've simplified the pathway into the trades with the transition to Skilled Trades Ontario. Without question, due to the federal government's decision on international students, that has posed a challenge, and we're working with our colleges on in-demand programs. And certainly we know some of those in-demand programs in the skilled trades, they're there. And yes, to answer your question, I see them absolutely as

an important part moving forward as we unlock barriers to building in the province of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Lorne Coe): Questions?

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: By now, we've all seen the video of the Premier talking about, was he glad that the US president won? A hundred per cent, he was.

I'm glad that the US tariffs have finally forced this government to get religion around removing interprovincial trade barriers, but my question is to the Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade. I'm wondering where that thinking was when they gave a \$2.2-billion contract to a foreign-owned spa, which actually is taking all of that money out of the country, out of the province. Will they rip up that deal with Therme to make sure that we are now buying Ontarian?

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Hon. Victor Fedeli: I'm going to read some supportive stakeholder reports that have happened because it's so fascinating to hear right across Ontario. From Ryan Manucha, a research fellow at the C.D. Howe Institute—and if you want a really good book on free trade and get to understand what free trade across our provinces are, buy Ryan's book. He says, "This landmark legislation demonstrates strong nation-building leadership. The Ontario government's bold action on internal trade barriers unlocks new heights for provincial and national prosperity." This is the kind of thinking that we need to be listening to.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Lorne Coe): Further questions?

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: I want to thank the three ministers here today. A lot of these things have touched me personally: the \$46 billion in automotive investment into the province of Ontario that we've been able to attract through our government, as I used to work at Ford Motor Co. In my riding of Mississauga–Lakeshore, we're building the largest hospital in Canadian history, and we just opened up, a year ago, the largest long-term-care home in Canadian history in my riding.

How will this bill help us bring the workforce we need into the province of Ontario?

Hon. David Piccini: I appreciate the question on workforce and on development. That member has led the charge in Mississauga for better training with better jobs and bigger paycheques. I had the opportunity to see just how respected he is when I joined him this past month because, at its core, when I said those words of "purpose" and "dignity" earlier in my speech, those aren't my words; those are the words of those who are entering the workforce, who are getting greater earnings potential thanks to the training we've invested in—and I'll tie it back to productivity.

Our declining productivity, as a result of duplicative, bureaucratic process and delays exacerbated by the Liberals—then, they migrated up to Ottawa and did the same thing up in Ottawa with the Impact Assessment Agency and beyond—is styming growth and better paycheques for Ontarians and for Canadians. But there is a national consensus today, I'm proud to see, around the

need to build, led by Premier Ford, who's championing this across Canada.

We're going to unlock that workforce potential. We have the Skills Development Fund to make it happen, and that member is going to keep leading the charge in Mississauga.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Question?

MPP Wayne Gates: I'm glad you raise the auto sector because what we need in the auto sector right now is "buy Canadian." If you're going to sell in this country, you should build in this country. That's one thing that we can do.

On the CAMI plant, what we need to do is, instead of the product they're building, we bought 100,000 of them and we sold 99,000 of them to the States. What we need to do, if we're going to build in this country and sell in this country, you've got to build in this country—

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

Hon. Victor Fedeli: Where was that member when we were cutting costs, reducing the cost of business by \$8 billion—

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

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): We're going to go into members' statements. Just a reminder to all members, our new members as well, members' statements are 90 seconds. Your microphone will be cut off at the 90-second mark.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

HEALTH CARE

Mr. Steve Pinsonneault: I rise today to share a great achievement for the people of my riding, Lambton–Kent–Middlesex. The Strathroy Middlesex General Hospital is now home to a brand new, state-of-the-art MRI machine. This marks a major step forward in strengthening health care access in our rural communities. Thanks to this project, residents no longer need to travel long distances to access advanced diagnostic imaging. This means reductions in wait times, faster diagnoses, earlier treatment and better health outcomes, all delivered closer to home.

This is another example of our government's commitment, under Premier Doug Ford's leadership, to delivering more connected and convenient health care for rural Ontarians.

I want to extend my sincere thanks to the Middlesex Hospital Alliance and the Strathroy Middlesex General Hospital Foundation for making this achievement possible.

HEALTH CARE

Mr. Jeff Burch: In my riding of Niagara Centre, this election was about health care. It's what I've talked about for the last three years, and it's what I talked about in

February: hospital parking fees that are an unfair tax on patients, their families and staff; depleted emergency services at the Welland Hospital and the need for a planning grant to start planning the rebuilding of that hospital; and, of course, the Port Colborne urgent care centre.

Last week, Port Colborne city council voted unanimously to send a formal letter to the provincial government about the future of the urgent care centre, which is slated to close in 2028. During her address to city council, Betty Konc of the Port Colborne Health Coalition said, “We need to be clear with the ministry that all services at our (former) hospital site need to stay, including the lab.” The resolution approved by council referenced the recent city survey where 96% of respondents voiced their strong support for maintaining 24/7 urgent care services in Port Colborne.

I look forward to working with this government to make sure that all of my constituents have the care that they need in their community.

GOVERNMENT INVESTMENTS

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

Mr. Hardeep Singh Grewal: Thank you very much, Speaker. Once again, congratulations on your election as Speaker to this House.

Our government, under the leadership of Premier Ford, is delivering on the priorities that matter to Ontarians, and especially those in my riding of Brampton East and Brampton. We recently celebrated a major milestone as the construction officially began on Brampton’s second hospital, with shovels now in the ground. This is an historic milestone that will not only deliver quality care that Brampton residents need but also ensure families have access to the health care services they need, right here in their own communities.

As we address the needs of today, we’re also investing in the future. This September, Toronto Metropolitan University’s new school of medicine will open its doors, creating 94 undergraduate seats and 117 postgraduate spots to train the next generation of doctors right here in our great city of Brampton. Students will benefit from the state-of-the-art facilities, cutting-edge research opportunities and hands-on training, all within their own community.

And we’re moving forward to tackle gridlock head-on. This year, we’ll move ahead with construction and get shovels in the ground as a part of our plan to build Highway 413. It will save drivers up to 30 minutes, spending more time with their families and less time stuck in gridlock. That’s almost an hour a day they get to save from their schedules and spend more time with their families and less time stuck in gridlock, Speaker.

It’s going to be a huge deal for not only Bramptonians, but people all the way from Milton, all the way up to Vaughan. It’s going to be a huge bypass—

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Members’ statements.

First of all, I’d like to apologize to the members of the third party; I recognize the member from Don Valley West.

EGLINTON CROSSTOWN LRT

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Good morning. Thank you, Speaker.

During the cold February election, I knocked on thousands of doors in my riding of Don Valley West, and one question I got a lot was, “Why isn’t the Crosstown open?” Well, I wish we knew.

It’s been 14 years since construction started on the Eglinton Crosstown LRT. It was supposed to open five years ago, and yet this government still can’t get it done. That’s 14 years of traffic, construction noise, closed businesses and broken promises. To add insult to injury, my constituents and residents across this city can’t get an answer from this government about why Metrolinx can’t get the LRT open.

I have called in this House for the government to provide answers, to be accountable. I wrote to the Premier to ask him to launch a public inquiry, to learn what went wrong so it doesn’t happen with other transit projects like the Ontario Line, also going through Don Valley West—no response yet from the Premier.

If this government can’t effectively oversee a tunnel under Eglinton Avenue, how do they expect us to think they can get a tunnel under the 401 built? But I digress, Speaker.

We have waited long enough for the Eglinton Crosstown LRT. It’s time for answers, and it’s time to get those trains moving.

44TH PARLIAMENT

Ms. Jennifer K. French: This is the beginning of the 44th Parliament at Queen’s Park. I’m very proud to rejoin this assembly and take my seat in my fourth term as the proud member for Oshawa.

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Speaker, we all know it takes a village to raise a child, but the truth is it takes a village to elect an MPP. I want to thank my staff, who have worked these past many years to serve the people of Oshawa. I want to thank the campaign team, who invested their hearts, their time and their brilliance to ensuring we could keep Oshawa orange. I want to thank my husband, Jon, and my friends and family for their love and support.

Speaker, I am proud to do this work, and after 11 years, I still wake up every day ready to work sincerely for the people of Oshawa. During the election, it was a privilege to meet people where they live. I appreciate that people trusted me with their fears, their hopes, their challenges and their ideas for the future, and I bring their voices with me. Our neighbours and workers in Oshawa are worried about an uncertain future, and I am grateful to be able to stand with them, stand up for them and fight for a bright future.

This next session, it will also be my honour to serve this House as a presiding officer and deputy Speaker alongside Ontario's first female Speaker, the member from Flam- borough–Glanbrook.

We are beginning a new chapter with many of the same concerns and challenges, but with a fresh sense of purpose and commitment to strengthening our communities and all of Ontario. Thank you, Oshawa.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): And I look forward to working with the member from Oshawa as a presiding officer.

ARMENIAN GENOCIDE ANNIVERSARY

Mr. Aris Babikian: The Armenian National Committee of Toronto held yesterday a sombre commemoration of the 110th anniversary of the Armenian genocide at the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. A large number of the Legislative Assembly members from all parties joined religious and lay leaders of the GTA Armenian community in remembrance of the victims, and paid tribute to the resilience of Ontario's Armenian community and its contribution to make Ontario a better place for all.

As the third generation of survivors of two genocides, Armenian and Greek, I am forever in debt to Ontario and Canada for recognizing the historical truth of the Armenian genocide and providing me the opportunity to fulfill my potential and excel in what I do best: working and serving the residents of Ontario.

The principles and the ethics of my maternal grandfather, Ardashes Amroyan, and grandmother, Sirarpy Amroyan; and my paternal grandfather, Garabed Babikian, and grandmother, Kohar Babikian, who sacrificed and suffered so much during the genocides, were my guiding light. I'm also grateful to my father, Antranik Babikian; my mother, Valantine Babikian; and the entire family for their unwavering support and for making me what I am today. Thank you very much.

HOSPITAL PARKING FEES

MPP Wayne Gates: I want to talk about this government's refusal to cut costs and fees for people in Ontario, and how there's no better example than the cost of hospital parking fees. Recently, we've been talking about tariffs and how they're just another tax on families. I want to be clear: Charging patients, families and workers a fee just to park at a hospital is just another tax on the everyday working people in the province of Ontario.

We desperately need to recruit doctors and nurses in Ontario, and the last thing we should do is charge them a tax just to go to work. Patients should be focused on getting better, and their families and loved ones are already worried about the stress of caregiving. There's no need to add the extra stress of a fee or a tax just to park at a hospital. MPPs don't have to pay to park at Queen's Park to come to work. Why should a nurse, a doctor or a worker have to pay to go to work to save lives?

The Premier has refused to take simple action to save everyday people across this province their hard-earned money. No one—not a patient, not a worker, not a family member—should have to pay out of their pocket to access our publicly funded, publicly delivered health care system. We should increase funding to our health care system and finally eliminate fees for hospital parking across Ontario once and for all. Thank you.

PUBLIC SAFETY

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

MPP Monica Ciriello: Thank you, Speaker. May I start by saying it is great to see you in that chair, making history? Congratulations.

Madam Speaker, what I've heard at the doors in my riding of Hamilton Mountain is that people are concerned about the rise in crime. People are worried about the safety of their neighbourhoods, their families and the security of their property, particularly auto theft, and rightfully so. In Hamilton, 1,612 vehicles were stolen last year.

In response to these concerns, I'm pleased to highlight the massive success of Project Polar Bear, a year-long investigation by the Hamilton Police Service. A partnership between the Ministry of the Attorney General and the Ministry of the Solicitor General, this operation led to the arrest of eight individuals who led an organized auto theft crime ring across Hamilton and southern Ontario. More specifically, 80% of the vehicles stolen in Hamilton were stolen from my riding of Hamilton Mountain.

Thanks to the diligent work of our law enforcement, over 200 stolen vehicles at a price of approximately \$15 million were recovered, along with firearms, drugs and equipment for vehicle theft. I am proud to stand with the women and men in law enforcement, and these initiatives demonstrate our commitment to reducing crime and ensuring safety across Ontario.

I am proud to announce today that we will be partnering with local law enforcement and hold town halls across Hamilton Mountain so we can continue to hear directly from the people on how best to invest in the strategy—

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Thank you to the member from Hamilton Mountain.

Further members' statements? I recognize the member from Perth–Wellington.

KING CHARLES III CORONATION MEDAL

Mr. Matthew Rae: Thank you, Speaker. As others have said already, it's wonderful to see you in the chair. My congratulations, officially, on that.

It's a pleasure to rise today to recognize five distinguished individuals from Perth–Wellington who I had the pleasure of presenting King Charles III Coronation Medals to recently.

Gwen Ament, from St. Marys, is a long-time advocate for inclusion, as represented by her work in helping settle

refugees from Syria and Ukraine. She organizes countless community events, is an active participant in Indigenous reconciliation and a pillar of charitable support within the community.

Jack Chaffe, who many in this place will know, is a fifth-generation beef farmer from Mitchell, an active community member and advocate for beef farming across Canada, Ontario and internationally.

Trinity Skinner, from Atwood, is a caring and active member of our community for many years, despite her very young age. She founded Atwood Rocks to spread joy. She speaks with her local Lions Club, 4-H club and the Blyth theatre on youth programs and activities.

Matt Peck, from Stratford, is a sergeant with the city of Stratford police and has served his community for 22 years. During this time, he has spearheaded many initiatives for young officers.

Kay Ayres, from Mount Forest, is a compassionate and involved member of the community, donating much of her time to help run the local seniors' group.

They represent kindness, respect and growth we wish to build in Ontario and Canada. Long live the King.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): It is now time for introduction of visitors. But before we move on to that, just a reminder that it is five minutes. If you would like to introduce a guest or make reference to a birthday, you can do so within that five minutes. If you do not have your time within that five minutes, we will do this again at 1 o'clock.

Introduction of visitors?

Hon. Rob Flack: It is my honour to welcome my daughter, Emily Flack, and her fiancé, Shaun Baker. They are getting married on June 14.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): And I would like to remind the House that she is a remarkable singer, a remarkable artist, and I know daddy is very proud.

Introduction of visitors?

M^{me} France Gélinas: They are just walking in as we speak. I would like to introduce Lisa Caswell, who is coming down the stairs; Sue Kim, who is also coming down the stairs with her husband, Alan; and Jamal El Ali, who are here because March is Be a Donor Month. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: This morning, I want to welcome guests from Niagara Falls. I want to wish Charlotte and Mark Uhryn a very happy first anniversary and tuning in from Niagara Falls. Happy anniversary to you both. Love you.

Ms. Laura Smith: It is my very great honour to welcome to the House a community volunteer for Thornhill and student at McMaster University, Mr. Ben Birnbach.

1030

Hon. Nina Tangri: I just want to wish my first-born, my son Ram, a very, very happy birthday. Happy birthday, Ram.

M^{me} France Gélinas: My guests that I just introduced are from the Kidney Patient and Donor Alliance. Thank you for coming.

LEGISLATIVE PAGES

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Now we're going to move on to what is a very interesting and fun part of our proceedings, and that is the introduction of our pages. Can I get the pages to gather in front of the dais? Are we all here? No? Have we got a minute? We're going to wait for a few seconds; how is that?

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): A few coming? Ah, there we go.

Interjection: They're busy people.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): They are. Welcome, pages.

From the riding of Milton, Krish Agarwal; from Oakville, Eric Chen; from York Centre, Jovin Chen; from York-Simcoe, Margaret Comerzan; from Mississauga-Malton, Kareem Elbayoumi; from Brampton North, Hasrat Ghai; from Windsor-Tecumseh, Parker Grisch; from Barrie-Springwater-Oro-Medonte, Eleanor Gugula; from Hamilton West-Ancaster-Dundas, Liam Hamilton; from Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke, Lauren Hermans; from Beaches-East York, Grace Krmptotic; from Essex, Vivian LeBlanc; from Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill, Serena Lu; from Markham-Unionville, Haajrah Malik; from Kitchener South-Hespeler, Nathaniel Mollison; from Wellington-Halton Hills, Nimrata Saund; from Ottawa Centre, George Silver; from Davenport, Gabriel Smulowitz; from Etobicoke Centre, Josephine Spracklin; from St. Catharines, Kylian Antonin Tiwa; from Don Valley West, Finn Walsh; and from Richmond Hill, Leah Wong. Please welcome our pages.

Applause.

QUESTION PERIOD

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Ms. Marit Stiles: This question is for the Minister of Infrastructure. Yesterday, the New York Times dropped a bombshell investigation into Ontario Place, confirming what we have all known all along: Therme hit the jackpot and Ontarians got ripped off. Therme lied about its qualifications, they are broke and they still can't find an investor for their luxury spa. The only one buying this gift is this government.

Yesterday, the Premier said that he was going to "look into it and make sure everything passes the smell test." Well, let me save the Premier some time: It doesn't.

To the minister: What is it going to take? Will you cancel this deal?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Response? I recognize the member for Brampton West.

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and I want to congratulate you on your election as the Speaker of this House. Congratulations.

Madam Speaker, we have heard several reports, including the Auditor General report, which on page 77 confirms that Therme met necessary financial requirements for the lease. Ontario Place will have major anchor tenants that will be contributing towards the maintenance of Ontario Place and contributing right back to our local economy. We'll continue to invest in Ontario Place, we'll continue to protect jobs and we'll continue to stand up for Ontario families every step of the way.

Madam Speaker, let's talk about the benefits of Ontario Place: the financial benefits and the jobs it will create. Some 4,700 new jobs will be created during the redevelopment of Ontario Place. Another 2,000 permanent jobs will be created once Ontario Place is completed. So not only are we creating jobs; we are also building a wonderful place for families to visit, with over 50 acres of public realm space for all to enjoy.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Supplementary?

Ms. Marit Stiles: The benefits? Ontarians are going to be stuck paying for this for the next 95 years, right? Every household in this province is going to be paying \$400 for this luxury spa that nobody ever asked for, while people are actually worried about how they're going to put food on the table.

Ontarians are right now making tough decisions about how they keep their money here in Ontario. Now more than ever you would think that they should be able to expect that their government would do the same. Instead, we have a government that is making international headlines for handing public land and tax dollars to a broke spa company.

My question back to the minister is, does the minister agree that there is a credible accusation of fraud against the people of Ontario?

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: Let me reiterate: Infrastructure Ontario issued a competitive call-for-development process, which was verified by the Integrity Commissioner in 2025. The call-for-development process was consistent with one initiated by the previous Liberal government in 2018 and received over 30 submissions from interested parties. All proposals underwent a comprehensive evaluation process, including a detailed financial assessment.

As part of this review, Infrastructure Ontario, supported by its third-party real estate and financial adviser Ernst and Young, analyzed financial statements and determined that Therme met the required net worth cash flow, which is \$100 million. The financial test applied was designed to assess the company's capacity to enter into a long-term ground lease of this scale. The lease signed by Therme and our government also includes that Therme must maintain a net worth of at least \$100 million throughout the project or it would be in default of a term of the lease agreement.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Supplementary?

Ms. Marit Stiles: I'm telling you, Speaker, people are not buying this. Yesterday, I was just appalled to hear the

Minister of Infrastructure praise Infrastructure Ontario for this shady deal. Infrastructure Ontario not only did not perform proper due diligence to verify Therme's qualifications or their financial capacity for this deal; they ignored warnings from the Auditor General about Therme. They moved the goalposts to suit this company.

There is no question that Infrastructure Ontario has not done their job. The minister is too busy defending her own record to see this deal for what it is: a giant scam. So my question to the minister is, will she recuse herself and hand this over to the authorities?

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: Madam Speaker, what the people of this province will not buy is the negativity from the official opposition and their anti-infrastructure policies.

The people of this province have placed their trust in this government, which is evident in the strong mandate we have got not once, not twice; three times in a row.

Look at the Liberals and NDP. The Liberals were barely able to achieve party status, and the NDP lost seats. That is why people trust this government. People believe that this government will get things done for the people of this province, and we will get it done, Madam Speaker.

1040

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Ms. Marit Stiles: My next question is to the Premier.

In the Premier's throne speech this week, I think there was an echo of what many Ontarians are feeling right now, which is that the United States has become a fundamentally unreliable trade partner. And that's why I was so surprised to hear the change of tune yesterday when the Premier doubled down on fortress Am-Can, a plan that would bring us even closer to Trump and to the United States.

I want to ask the Premier: Does this mean that his government is doubling down on our economic reliance on the United States?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize the Associate Minister of Small Business.

Hon. Nina Tangri: I do want to thank the member opposite for the question.

Speaker, yesterday in the House, we introduced a bill to protect Ontarians, to protect Ontario businesses. That's what this government is going to do. We have the backs of Ontarians to make sure that we are there, to make sure that we do all that we can to support them going through this very, very uncertain time.

There's lots of chaos globally right now. Markets have lost trillions of dollars. These are people whose pensions are at risk. We're going to make sure that this government, this Premier is here to make sure that all of the people protect their constituents, protect those pensions, protect those businesses so they can continue to procure from Ontario and Canada and make businesses thrive.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Supplementary?

Ms. Marit Stiles: That wasn't much of an answer to my question. I asked a very specific question about the language the Premier was using yesterday.

I can appreciate that the members opposite might not want to be responding to that, but we know we're always going to have a relationship, of course, with the United States. It's our closest neighbour to the south. But it can't be at the expense of our dignity and our economic future.

Trump is attacking Ontarians. He is attacking workers and families. He is attacking our very sovereignty. It is more clear than ever before that we need to strengthen our other trade relationships. But this kind of language, fortress Am-Can, signals further integration with the United States, and I think it sends a very different message.

I would like to know why this Premier is choosing to alienate our other democratic allies like the European Union and Mexico.

Hon. Nina Tangri: I want to thank the member opposite again for the question.

You know what? We all know the US tariffs imposed by President Trump are really affecting all of our businesses and they're very concerning and, quite frankly, unacceptable. Our government knows that, and that's why our businesses and the people of Ontario need our support. That's why this government is providing \$11 billion in relief and support by deferring the payment of select provincial taxes, and an additional \$2 billion in WSIB rebates for those same schedule 1 employers. That's what protecting Ontario is all about. And this is beyond the rebates that happened in February and March earlier as well.

This government introduced bills this week—

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Supplementary?

Ms. Marit Stiles: I will remind the member opposite, Speaker, that that \$2 billion is being taken away from working people and being given to the businesses instead.

Look, we cannot keep putting all our eggs in one basket. The Premier's language about fortress Am-Can is indicating a greater reliance on the United States. I do not believe that is where this government really wants to take things. It's certainly not where Ontarians want things to go. Growing reliance on the United States is going to put our industries, our workers and our supply chains at greater risk. We have a merchant of chaos down south, erratic and unreliable as an economic partner.

I would ask the Premier why the Premier is doubling down on Donald Trump and opening us up to chaos over the next four years.

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

Let's have a reality check here: Canada's total two-way trade with the US is well over a trillion dollars annually. We can't forget that. The goods that Canadian companies export to the US totalled \$592 billion, where imports were around \$480 billion. With everything else included, the US actually has a trade deficit of about \$60 billion in Canada. These are our companies here in Ontario that are exporting their goods to the United States. If you take oil and gas out of that equation, the US has a trade surplus of about \$30 billion. We know we are looking for more trading partners, especially within Canada and other provinces. That's what this government is going to do, that's

what the bill yesterday was all about, and that's what we're going to make sure Ontarians are procuring—

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Questions?

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

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

The greenbelt is in the news again today. More dominos—they're starting to fall. It's quite timely because this Therme deal smells and looks like exactly what happened in the greenbelt: a small group of well-connected people, valuable land and billions of dollars. What's that saying? If it looks like a duck and walks like a duck and quacks like a duck, it's probably a—

Interjections.

Mr. John Fraser: Come on, guys. Come on, let's participate, okay? I gave you a chance.

To the Premier: How did the Premier allow a foreign company, with literally no money and no experience, get a 95-year lease and \$2.2 billion from the Ontario taxpayer?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Response? I recognize the member from Brampton West.

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: Again, we have had several reports, including the Auditor General's report, which, on page 77, confirms that Therme met necessary financial requirements for the lease. Ontario Place will have major anchor tenants that will be contributing towards the maintenance of Ontario Place and contributing right back to our local economy. We'll continue to invest in Ontario Place, we'll continue to protect jobs, and we'll continue to stand up for Ontario families every step of the way.

As I mentioned, it will create 4,700 new jobs during the redevelopment of Ontario Place. Another 2,000 permanent jobs will be created once Ontario Place is completed. At this time, during these economically challenging times, nothing is more important than protecting our economy, protecting jobs and—

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Supplementary?

Mr. John Fraser: Read those reports—it might be helpful.

So just like the greenbelt, the Therme spa, it's the Premier's baby, right? It's a pet project he's been crowing and bragging about for years, his crown jewel. And just like in the greenbelt, all roads lead to the Premier's office. He's even got an external lobbyist writing speeches for him now, and we're just starting to connect the dots of who knows who.

Back to the Premier: Did the Premier want this project, his baby, so badly that he allowed a foreign company, with literally no money and no experience, to get a 95-year lease and \$2.2 billion from Ontario taxpayers?

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: It's ironic and, frankly, hard to take seriously coming from the Liberals, who ignored Ontario Place for 15 years, let it fall into disrepair and neglect, and did nothing to revitalize it. The Liberal government, led by Kathleen Wynne, stood in front of Ontario Place in 2014 and proclaimed their vision to revitalize Ontario Place. That same member, the honourable member was an MPP at that time in 2013. I wish that he had

shown the same enthusiasm and passion when their party left this place in a state of neglect.

Now they're upset that we're picking up the pieces of their failed project and getting the job done. They had 15 years to act, and they chose to do nothing. And now that our government is finally bringing this land back to life, creating jobs, boosting tourism and building for the future, suddenly, they have opinions.

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

Mr. John Fraser: With respect to this round of questioning, literally half of the people over there are in cabinet. I just want to point that out.

Any reasonable person who looks at this knows it doesn't pass the smell test. We all know that. We also know that it's the Premier's baby and he wanted it badly. So, either he's a chump who got led down the garden path, or he gave a nod and a wink to the minister just like he did in the greenbelt. Either way, Ontario taxpayers are on the hook for \$2.2 billion and the Premier's got some explaining to do.

Speaker, through you to the Premier: Was the Premier duped, tricked, fooled, or did he know what was happening every step of the way?

1050

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: Madam Speaker, the call for development process was consistent with one initiated by the Liberal government in 2018 and received over 30 submissions from interested parties.

Let me again remind this House that it was the previous Liberal government that left this historic place in a state of neglect and disrepair. The people of Ontario still shudder when they think about the Liberal mismanagement that, for 15 years, brought the province down to its knees. The memories of reckless spending, failed promises and botched policies continue to haunt us.

This will not happen under the watch of this Premier and this government. We believe in getting things done, and we will get things done. We will not take any lessons from the Liberals and NDP when it comes to infrastructure.

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Mr. John Fraser: I do want to say to the member, I do appreciate his courage for carrying the can for everybody else.

Speaker, it's interesting that we haven't heard a word from the Premier in this Legislature about these new allegations. It's greenbelt 2.0. And just like the greenbelt, the Premier is trying to put some distance between himself and the minister.

The Premier did say something in the media, and I want to read this and get it right: "I want to double- and triple-check the contract and make sure that anything that was said in the story from the Times, we'll look into it and make sure everything passes the smell test."

How can the Premier not know? We're talking about a 95-year lease, \$2.2 billion in taxpayer money, for his pet project, his baby.

Speaker, through you, does the Premier actually want us to believe he gave a 95-year lease and \$2.2 billion to a questionable foreign company for a pet project, and he's just checking—

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Response? I recognize the member for Brampton West.

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: Madam Speaker, the fundamental difference between our government and the Liberals and NDP is that they merely talk the talk, but our government, under the leadership of this Premier, consistently walks the talk.

During these challenging and uncertain times, nothing is more important than protecting our jobs, our economy and our workers as we fight against the tariff threats south of the border.

That's exactly why revitalizing Ontario Place is such a crucial initiative. This project will deliver billions in economic activity and create thousands of full-time and part-time jobs in tourism, hospitality and local business. It's a bold step to strengthen Ontario's economy at a time when we need it most.

Again, let's not forget, under the previous Liberal government, Ontario Place was shuttered and left to rot. They had no vision, no plan and no results. Our government is fixing the failure.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Supplementary?

Mr. John Fraser: All the Premier had to do was scratch and sniff. This deal stinks. We all know it.

Speaker, \$2.2 billion is a lot of money. It's even more money than this government is spending on its anemic plan for primary care and getting people family doctors.

So, folks, this wasn't a deal. Therme won the prize, and the Premier got his baby.

So, \$2.2 billion—I think we all know what that could be better spent on, if you asked a constituent. It would have been better spent on place—on spending—God, I tripped over my words.

Interjections.

Mr. John Fraser: Guys, I had it down.

You should have spent it on classrooms—\$2.2 billion—so our kids have safe places to learn.

A luxury spa at Ontario Place for the Premier's buddies, and crumbling classrooms for our kids.

Speaker, will the Premier rip up this bad deal, just like he did with the greenbelt?

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: Let me be very clear: Our government is committed to revitalizing Ontario Place and making it the remarkable, world-class, year-round, family-friendly destination that the people of this province deserve.

As the Minister of Infrastructure highlighted yesterday, Therme passed the financial test that was done by the world-renowned arm's-length agency, Infrastructure Ontario.

Again, the Liberals and NDP left this place neglected, closed, abandoned and forgotten, and we're correcting that course.

Madam Speaker, let's talk about the financial benefits of Ontario Place again. Some 4,700 new jobs will be created during the redevelopment of Ontario Place, and over 2,000 permanent jobs will be created once Ontario Place is redeveloped and will generate millions in provincial tax revenue.

Madam Speaker, under the leadership of Premier Ford, we are getting things done for the people of this province.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Supplementary.

Mr. John Fraser: I'm encouraged the member wants to talk about the benefits of this project. I think that's a good thing. I think the benefits are a 95-year land deal and \$2.2 billion to a company with literally no money, no real plan, no real experience, no business being here dealing with this government. And right now, at a time when our citizens are relying on us to have trust in government because it can't trust the one south of the border, you guys are defending something that is totally indefensible. You all know it. I can see it on your faces—half of you over there in cabinet. Did they just herd you in? Did they just herd you in and you guys put a stamp on the darn thing?

Are you going to rip up this deal or not, Premier?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I will remind everyone to direct your questions and responses through the Speaker.

I recognize the member for Brampton West.

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: Thank you once again. It's frankly astonishing to hear the leader of the Liberal Party question our commitment to Ontario Place, Madam Speaker, when it was their government that left this historic place in a state of neglect. For 15 years, Madam Speaker, for 15 long years, they had every opportunity to act, and, colleagues, what did they do? Nothing. Instead, they shut down Ontario Place.

This is what their legacy is. They will stand in this House, talk about a shortage of doctors, but they did nothing to address that shortage. They didn't build any medical schools—no hospitals, Madam Speaker. They shut down 600 schools in this province. This is what their legacy is. The legacy of this Premier and this government is to bring our iconic destination back to life.

HOUSING

MPP Catherine McKenney: To the Premier: We have just learned that Ontario had the worst performance for housing starts in all of Canada last year. We lost over 1,300 residential construction jobs, and that was all before Trump took office and imposed his tariffs.

The Premier has an opportunity to keep people working, with direct government investments, to build the affordable homes that people need. Will this government make the investments required to build new affordable homes?

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

Hon. Rob Flack: You know, on February 28, the people of Ontario spoke and they elected a strong, stable majority government led by Premier Ford. What our job is, Speaker, is to protect our economy and to protect our housing industry. We have headwinds, absolutely. Why? High taxes, high tariffs, President Trump. Our job is to create the conditions, and that is what we're doing. That is what we did under the previous Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing: more homes built faster. We're going to lower taxes. We're going to speed up the time—Speaker, in some jurisdictions in North America, it takes months to get a building permit; in this province, it can take years. We have to speed that up, and we also have to create the talent ready to take on a housing boom that's going to happen again. We will get the job done, Speaker, led by this Premier.

MPP Catherine McKenney: Speaker, but the homes are not getting built. Housing starts this year have fallen nearly 40% from the same time last year—and as a result, over 1,300 residential construction jobs, during a housing crisis, when these workers are needed more than ever.

This Premier claimed he wanted a mandate to spend money to keep people working in the face of Trump tariffs. So will the Premier make direct government investments to build new affordable homes people need and make sure that no building tradesperson is unemployed during a housing crisis?

Hon. Rob Flack: Well, Speaker, I refer to my 30-year-old daughter up in the gallery to say that affordable housing is important for everybody. Everyone needs to get their start in housing and the dream of home ownership has to stay alive for everybody.

1100

Speaker, a bright light on the horizon was that so far, purpose-built rentals this year are up close to 10%; last year, close to 18,000 new starts in the province. This is progress. Yes, we have headwinds, but without critical infrastructure, we can't get the housing built. We have invested almost \$3 billion in housing-enabling water infrastructure in this province to support our municipal partners day in and day out, to get shovels in the ground faster. These are the investments we are making for all types of housing, for all types of people that need a roof over their head—a safe roof over their head. That is our job. That is our mission. We will get the job done.

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Mr. Adil Shamji: For the Premier: As the greenbelt saga ramps up, the Therme scandal is catching fire, giving taxpayers yet another reason to doubt this Premier's ability to manage money. We should be attracting businesses to Ontario, but this Premier's misconduct is simply repelling them.

Just yesterday, he revealed that he has no idea what company he signed a deal with. Is it Austrian, Romanian or German? He still doesn't know. He doesn't even know if it's one company or two, yet he handed out a 95-year lease and \$2.2 billion.

Madam Speaker, do you notice how the Premier only ever says sorry after he has been caught? To the Premier: Can we skip the next press conference, and will you just cancel the deal and apologize now?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Response? I recognize the member for Brampton West.

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: Again, we have had several reports, including the Auditor General report which, on page 77, confirms that Therme met necessary financial requirements for the lease.

Ontario Place will have major anchor tenants that will be contributing towards the maintenance of Ontario Place and contributing back to our economy. We will continue to invest in Ontario Place, we will continue to protect jobs and we will continue to stand up for Ontario families every step of the way.

One thing the member mentioned correctly in his question is that we need to attract more jobs. This is what Ontario Place is doing. It will create 4,700 new jobs during the redevelopment of Ontario Place, and 2,000 permanent jobs will be created once Ontario Place is completed. Not only are we creating jobs, but we're also building a wonderful place for families to visit, with over 50 acres of public realm space for all to enjoy.

Mr. Adil Shamji: Like the member across, I too can read, and the same Auditor General report that he quoted, on page 35, says the call for development did not follow best practices and did not include a fairness monitor.

Now, driving international business investment is what we need to do. In these uncertain times, we must diversify and grow our economy. But what does it look like to companies when they look at this Premier's bidding process, one where he just appoints whoever he wants; one where he gives \$2.2 billion to a company that misleads the government, has no money and no experience? How can businesses have confidence in Ontario when there is a 50-50 chance that the Premier will bungle the bidding process and just cancel the deal? So, Madam Speaker, was Therme's promise of towel-dancing, swim-up bars and in-sauna film screenings all it took for him to damage Ontario's international business reputation?

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: The Liberal government, when they were in power, were all hat and no cattle; full of promises, but lacking in delivery. This is the fundamental difference between our government and their government. We believe in getting things done, especially during these challenging and uncertain times: Nothing is more important than protecting our jobs, our economy and our workers as we fight against the tariff threats south of border.

That's exactly why revitalizing Ontario Place is such a critical initiative. This project will deliver billions in economic delivery and create thousands of full-time and part-time jobs in tourism, hospitality and local business. It is a bold step to strengthen Ontario's economy at a time where we need it most.

TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE

MPP Silvia Gualtieri: My question is for the Minister of Transportation.

This past election, Ontarians voted for the government's plan to build the highways and transit infrastructure Ontario needs.

Every day, thousands of people use our GTA highways to get to where they need to go. But families in my riding of Mississauga East–Cooksville are tired of being stuck in traffic. They want to spend more time at home with loved ones and less time commuting.

After decades of inaction by the previous Liberal government, we know the need for new roads and highways is long overdue. That's why we are building transportation networks to reduce gridlock and get people where they need to go.

Madam Speaker, can the minister please share with this House what initiatives our government is making to connect communities and fight gridlock?

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

Mr. Hardeep Singh Grewal: Thank you to the member for that great question, and congratulations on that amazing election victory in Mississauga East–Cooksville. I know you'll be an amazing advocate for your constituents.

After years of inaction by the previous Liberal government, it's under the leadership of our Premier that we're finally building the infrastructure Ontario needs for the future. We're building new highways, roads, bridges right across this beautiful province.

We know the greater Toronto area—and our economy—is growing fast.

That's why our government is investing \$28 billion over the next 10 years to connect communities and fight gridlock.

While the Liberals and NDP keep saying no to building roads—they keep saying no to progress—we're saying yes. We're saying yes to progress.

To protect Ontario and to grow our economy, we must build a strong and reliable transportation network, and that's exactly what we're doing.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Supplementary?

MPP Silvia Gualtieri: Gridlock is a real problem in my riding and across Ontario. When cars and trucks are stuck in traffic, people lose time. Businesses lose money. It makes goods more expensive. It makes life harder.

Madam Speaker, people are tired of broken promises from the previous Liberal government. They want action. That's why they voted for our government that is getting it done and protecting Ontario—a government that will build roads, highways and public transit. They want to see Highway 413, the Bradford Bypass and the 401 tunnel built. They want 407 tolls gone from provincially owned parts of the highway.

Madam Speaker, can the parliamentary assistant please explain how our government is taking action to fight gridlock and keep people and goods moving across Ontario?

Mr. Hardeep Singh Grewal: Thank you again to the hard-working member for Mississauga East–Cooksville.

Gridlock has a real cost. When our trucks are stuck in traffic, it only makes the goods more expensive. Gridlock already costs our economy more than \$50 billion a year, and this will only get worse if we don't build. That's why, unlike the Liberals and NDP, we won't sit by as gridlock gets worse.

In the last election, the people of Ontario overwhelmingly voted for our Ontario PC government to build Highway 413, to build the Bradford Bypass, to build the 401 tunnel, to build more public transit across this province—and, lest we forget, removing those tolls off the 407 on the provincially owned portions.

Our government will never raise a toll or add a new toll in this province, when it comes to the great work that this Premier has been doing.

We're going to work hard. The people re-elected us for a third majority to protect Ontario and keep our economy moving.

HEALTH CARE

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

One thing that every member in this House can agree on is that we will never be the 51st state. However, the Premier has made repeated attempts to privatize health care, copying the American health care system.

Speaker, why does the Premier want to Americanize our health care system?

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

Mr. Anthony Leardi: Speaker, of course, no government has made more investments and greater investments in the universal health care system than this government. We started with a budget in 2018 of approximately \$60 billion. That budget now stands at approximately \$85 billion for an approximate 40% increased investment in the universal health care system.

1110

We are steadfast in our dedication to this system, and I am supporting the Premier in his efforts to make sure that this system, along with the great project that we call Canada, continues forward year after year after year. That is why we introduced the bill in this House that will tear down interprovincial trade barriers and qualifications, allowing medical professionals to practise in the province of Ontario the way they should be, because we're building a great country with a great medical system.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Back to the member from Nickel Belt.

M^{me} France Gélinas: The member should know, of those billions of dollars of investments, how much of it went to profit and never to care.

The constant talk of tariffs has put everyone on edge. Workers are worried that they will lose their job, their health plan, their drug plan, their dental plan. But do you

know what adds to this anxiety? When the Premier refers to our public health care system as a “dogmatic ideology.”

Speaker, why did the speech from the throne refer to free health care for all as a “dogmatic ideology”?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: Madam Speaker, the only people in this chamber who are relying on dogmatic ideology are the members of the New Democratic Party, who continue to dwindle election after election.

The investments that we've made in the universal health care system reach into the billions, but we are also introducing innovation into our system, innovation which is reaching thousands and thousands more people. We are connecting people to primary care every single day, and we are introducing innovations that are saving money and getting people connected to care faster.

Let me give you an example: Under this government, you can now go to a pharmacist to get treatment for 19 common ailments. That's an innovation. It's an innovation that puts people closer to health care and makes it more convenient and easy to get health care in the province of Ontario. That's what we're for. They're for—

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

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

RESPONSABILITÉ GOUVERNEMENTALE

M^{me} Lucille Collard: To the Premier: Now the government wants to double- and triple-check the Therme deal after signing away public land for 95 years. What credible business person verifies their partners after the contract is signed?

If the government truly acted in good faith and there's no corruption here, then they must be outraged to have been misled by this foreign company, because—let's be clear—if Therme misrepresented themselves, that's potential grounds to cancel the deal under contract law. You'd be well within your rights to walk away from this train wreck of a deal.

My question is simple. If it's confirmed that Therme misrepresented themselves during negotiations, will this government cancel the deal? Yes or no?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Just a reminder to the member to be very careful with your language.

Interjections.

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

Reminder to our members to be careful with your choice of words.

Response? I recognize the member for Brampton West.

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: Again, I will reiterate the call-for-development process was consistent with one initiated by the Liberal government in 2018 and received over 30 submissions from interested parties.

All proposals underwent a comprehensive evaluation process, including a detailed financial assessment. As part of this review, Infrastructure Ontario, supported by its third-party real estate and financial adviser Ernst and Young, analyzed financial statements and determined that Therme met the required net worth threshold.

The financial test applied was designed to assess the company's capacity to enter into a long-term ground lease of this scale, and the lease signed by Therme and our government also includes that Therme must maintain a net worth of at least \$100 million throughout the project or would be in default of the term of the lease agreement.

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

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Madame Speaker, c'est quand même incroyable que le gouvernement veut maintenant vérifier et révéifier l'entente avec Therme après avoir cédé des terres publiques pour une période de 95 ans. Il me semble qu'un entrepreneur sérieux vérifie les qualifications de son partenaire avant d'avoir signé le contrat.

Si le gouvernement a vraiment agi de bonne foi et qu'il n'y a aucune forme de corruption ici, il devrait être scandalisé d'avoir été induit en erreur par cette entreprise étrangère. À mon avis, ça commence à ressembler à un mauvais film qu'on a déjà vu qui s'appelle « le scandale de la ceinture verte », où le gouvernement a favorisé certains promoteurs immobiliers derrière des portes closes et a été obligé de faire marche arrière.

Alors, je pose la question simplement. Si l'on confirme que Therme a induit le gouvernement en erreur lors des négociations, allez-vous annuler le contrat, oui ou non?

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: We wouldn't be talking about Ontario Place had the Liberals and NDP not left this place in a state of neglect and disrepair. Every time I answer this question, Madam Speaker, it gives me the opportunity to remind the public and the members of this House that it was the previous Liberal government that left this place shuttered; they left this place neglected and in disrepair. I drive by Ontario Place every morning, Madam Speaker, and it breaks my heart to see such neglect and indifference of our historic and iconic destination by the previous Liberal government.

And I always ask that question myself, "Why would the Liberals do that? Why in the world would the Liberals do that?" Now I understand—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Order.

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: This is their legacy—

Interjections.

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

Question?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Order. Order. The government side will come to order. I don't want to have to start warning people.

PUBLIC SAFETY

MPP George Darouze: Speaker, my question is for the Solicitor General. People in my riding of Carleton and across Ontario want to feel safe. They are hearing reports about the actions of organized criminal networks that are engaging in drug and gun smuggling, illegal border crossings and auto thefts. Families are concerned, and they

want action. That's why I'm proud that our government launched Operation Deterrence earlier this year. It's a strong, made-in-Ontario plan to stop the flow of illegal guns and drugs into our communities.

While the federal government has been slow to respond, our government is stepping up. We're showing real leadership and doing what it takes to keep people safe, especially in our border towns.

Speaker, can the Solicitor General please explain how Operation Deterrence is being put into action right now?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: I want to congratulate my friend from Carleton for being elected to serve here in the Ontario Legislature.

Madam Speaker, there has never been a government in the history of Ontario that has prioritized our public safety more than our government led by Premier Ford. When the Premier spoke about protecting Ontario, it means not only economically but from a public safety lens as well.

That's why we came forward with Operation Deterrence, a \$30-million investment that's paying dividends now. Over 200 OPP officers being part of the project—6,000 hours of OPP officers helping to keep the guns off the streets and helping to reduce the amount of fentanyl that's crossing the border on the other side.

By land, by air, by ground, we will do everything we can to keep our province safe.

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

MPP George Darouze: Thank you to the Solicitor General for his continued leadership.

People in my riding and across Ontario want safe communities. They are encouraged by our government's leadership and by the strong work being done by our police forces and our border services agents. They see the results of joint enforcement and better coordination across our jurisdictions.

Ontarians re-elected our government to crack down on organized crime, stop gun violence and fight the flow of illegal drugs. They know the federal government has been slow to act. That's why they are looking to Ontario for continuing the leadership on this file. They want to know our government has a plan to keep pressure on criminal networks. Speaker, can the Solicitor General explain how Operation Deterrence fits into our broader plan to keep our Ontario communities safe?

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Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: It's very simple: We're not going to stop. We're not going to stop fighting criminality anywhere in Ontario. We are not going to stop fighting it at the borders. We're not going to stop reducing the amount of fentanyl that's going across the border. We're going to do everything possible with the intelligence that is collected from not only the OPP, municipal and First Nations police services, but with the RCMP and CBSA and other organizations that are helping keep this province safe.

But at the end of the day, the member from Carleton should know that our government, led by Premier Ford, will protect Ontario at all cost, morning, noon and night.

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Mr. Chris Glover: Yesterday, the New York Times reported that Therme lied to the government when they signed a deal to redevelop Ontario Place. They claimed that they were operating three successful spas in Germany, but in fact, they had just taken the name “Therme” and the logos from those spas, but had no business affiliation with those companies.

But this government rolled out the red carpet for this con artist company, giving them a \$2.2-billion taxpayer subsidy and a 95-year lease on public parkland. So my question to the Premier is, will you cancel the deal with Therme, or will you be forever known as the Premier who fell for the most expensive scam in Canadian history?

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

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: Thank you for the question. We have had several reports, including the Auditor General report, which, on page 77, confirms that Therme met necessary financial requirements for the lease.

Ontario Place will have major anchor tenants that will be contributing to the maintenance of Ontario Place and contributing right back to our economy. We'll continue to invest in Ontario Place, we'll continue to protect jobs and we'll continue to stand up for the people of this province and families every step of the way.

Again, on top of the financial benefits and the jobs it will create—4,700 new jobs. Can you imagine, Madam Speaker? Some 4,700 new jobs will be created during the redevelopment of Ontario Place. Another 2,500 jobs will be created once Ontario Place is completed. So not only are we creating jobs, but we're also building a wonderful place for families to visit, with over 50 acres of public realm space for all to enjoy.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Supplementary?

Mr. Chris Glover: I take it that the answer is that the Premier will be forever known as the Premier who fell for the biggest scam in Canadian history.

Look, we need to buy Canadian. We are under a tariff and sovereignty threat from Trump and the United States, and this is an opportunity to do just that. The original vision of Ontario Place was to showcase Ontario innovation. The first IMAX theatre was there; that's a made-in-Ontario innovation.

Ontario Place launched the career of the landscape architect Eric MacMillan. He's behind Children's Place and invented the ball pit. The world's first ball pit was at Ontario Place.

There's an opportunity to buy Canadian, to showcase Ontario innovation to the world, by cancelling the deal with Therme and with Live Nation and, instead of giving a \$2.2-billion tax subsidy to American and Austrian corporations, to use it as an opportunity to showcase the innovation. Will this government do that?

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: The people of this province also remember the one term of the NDP as a nightmare never to be seen again. But history will remember this Premier, who believes in getting things done for the people

of this province: over \$190 billion of investment in infrastructure; not only building hospitals, but building schools, building long-term care homes, building highways like Highway 413 and the Bradford Bypass; and also keeping our legacy, bringing our iconic destinations like Ontario Place and the science centre back to life. This is the legacy of this Premier and this government, because we believe in getting things done and built, not neglecting.

WATER QUALITY

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Congratulations, Madam Speaker—thrilled to see a woman in that chair.

Imagine you are taking your canoe out on an afternoon trip on beautiful Lake Ontario and you dip your paddle into what you think is pristine water, only to find raw sewage. That's what this government's plan is for Therme, the ridiculous spa on the waterfront: altering the sewer pipes and putting swimmers and beachgoers at risk.

More than 80% of Ontarians rely on the Great Lakes for clean drinking water. They are one fifth of the world's fresh water. This government has a horrible track record of stewardship—hello, greenbelt; hello, conservation authorities. With the United States' threats to our country and resources, we need to get serious.

My question is to the Premier. With Therme and the President eyeing up our fresh water, what is your plan to protect our Great Lakes?

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

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: The people of this province know the track record of this government. That's why they have given us a strong mandate—not once, not twice, three times in a row.

Let me be very clear again: Our government is committed to revitalizing Ontario Place and making it the remarkable, world-class, year-round, family-friendly destination that the people of this province deserve. As the minister highlighted yesterday, Therme passed the financial test that was done by the world-renowned arm's-length agency in Infrastructure Ontario. Again, it was the Liberals, always supported by the NDP, that left this place neglected, closed, abandoned and forgotten, Madam Speaker, and we are correcting that course.

Let's again talk about the benefits of Ontario Place. Some 4,700 new jobs will be created and 2,000 permanent jobs will be created when Ontario Place is developed. This is the legacy of this government.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Question?

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Now, back on topic: the Great Lakes. The Great Lakes basin is more than a biodiversity marvel. It is literally a lifeline affecting a large chunk of our agricultural lands, our manufacturing sector and our power source. We are completely reliant on the health and safety of our Great Lakes. So when the President of the United States spouts off about getting a very large faucet in British Columbia to California, and when he guts the country's environmental protection agencies, and when he says he will tear up the Great Lakes

agreements and conventions, we all need to pay attention and this government needs to get more serious.

My question to the Premier: What are you actually doing to strengthen the environmental protections of our Great Lakes and prevent any water diversion projects by—

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I have to interrupt the member. It isn't consistent with the original question.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I apologize. I've been corrected. Your first question referenced the Great Lakes. We will ask the member to respond.

The member from Windsor–Tecumseh.

Mr. Andrew Dowie: Madam Speaker, it's such a privilege to see you in the chair. To the member opposite from Beaches–East York, thank you for the question because it gives me, once again, a great opportunity to speak of all the great work that our government is doing to protect our air, land and water in the province of Ontario.

We know that the Great Lakes and the inland waterways are the foundation of Ontario's economic prosperity and our well-being. We know that they supply water into our communities, support our economy and provide healthy ecosystems to canoe in—and I can't wait to go canoeing with you at some point this summer—and tourism and support thousands of species of animals and plants.

We're undertaking new and continued actions to restore and protect Ontario's Great Lakes. Since 2018, Ontario has invested over \$80 million in 679 projects to safeguard the Great Lakes.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I just want to clarify: That was a bit of a stretch connecting the question, so let's just be very careful moving forward.

Further questions? I recognize the member for Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound.

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FOREST INDUSTRY

MPP Paul Vickers: Thank you and congratulations, Madam Speaker.

My question is to the Associate Minister of Forestry and Forest Products.

The US is once again talking about the use of tariffs on our forestry sector. That puts our mills, jobs and forestry towns at risk. Hard-working people across the north depend on this industry to feed their families and build a good life.

The last Liberal government called the north “no man's land” and let mills shut down. They walked away from the people who built this province.

Our government won't do that. We know the forestry sector matters. And now, this sector needs our help and leadership.

Speaker, can the minister tell the House what our government is doing to protect forestry jobs and mills in the north from the threat of US tariffs?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Response? I recognize the Associate Minister of Forestry and Forest Products.

Hon. Kevin Holland: Thank you, Speaker, and congratulations.

Thank you to the member for that great question, and congratulations on earning your seat in this House.

Speaker, under our government, the forestry sector will not be left behind. Unlike the previous Liberal government, we recognize the immense value and potential of our northern communities and industries. Under the Liberal government, we saw a drastic decline in operational mills in Ontario. Well, that kind of neglect is over.

We are committed to ensuring the forestry sector remains viable and competitive, not just for today, but for the future—supporting projects like the Forest Sector Investment and Innovation Program, with an \$8.4-million investment.

The north offers an exciting opportunity for our province's future, and under our leadership, it will never be ignored again.

Ontario is investing in the future of these mills and their communities by creating opportunities like the forest biomass program and the newly introduced Advanced Wood Construction Action Plan—which, since 2018, we have boosted funding by \$12 million.

We will never abandon the north, and we will continue to work to be the leaders in our industry.

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

MPP Paul Vickers: Thank you to the associate minister for his answer and leadership.

The forestry sector needs support right now, and our government needs to continue to be here to help. The threat of US tariffs continues to create fear and uncertainty for our workers in mills across the north. This vital sector can't afford delays, red tape, or rules that make it harder to get the job done.

The forestry industry supports thousands of families and helps drive our whole economy forward. Forestry jobs are good jobs that help grow our local communities, and they deserve our support.

Speaker, can the associate minister please tell the House what steps we are taking to cut red tape, speed up approvals and help forestry companies keep building?

Hon. Kevin Holland: We're taking real, concrete action to secure the future of forestry in Ontario. That includes increasing investments in forest access roads, supporting research into value-added wood products, and working with Indigenous communities to create meaningful partnerships.

Last year, we invested over \$59 million into our roads programs to ensure we continue to exceed the needs of our industry as we grow and evolve.

We're also streamlining approvals and reducing unnecessary regulations that have slowed down progress for years.

These are the kinds of initiatives that make the industry stronger, more efficient and more resilient in the face of global economic uncertainty.

Our government isn't just talking about supporting the forestry sector; we're doing the work to make sure it thrives for generations to come.

UNIVERSITY AND COLLEGE FUNDING

Ms. Peggy Sattler: My question is to the Premier.

Speaker, last week, this government's own agency reported that Ontario will need 225,000 more student spaces in our colleges and universities over the next two decades. But instead of increasing enrolment, lack of funding is forcing colleges and universities across the province to cut hundreds of programs, shut down entire campuses and lay off staff. This hurts students and it hurts communities. At a time when our economy and our workforce are under attack from Trump tariffs, we need our post-secondary institutions more than ever.

How does the Premier expect to provide the upskilling, the reskilling, the talent development, the innovation that our province requires without strong, stable and viable colleges and universities?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize Ministry of Colleges, Universities, Research Excellence and Security.

Hon. Nolan Quinn: Funding for colleges and universities has never been higher in our province's history. I will repeat that: Funding for our colleges and universities has never been higher in our province's history.

Our focus has not changed. We're working tirelessly to ensure that students graduate into rewarding careers that address Ontario's current and future labour market needs. But as always, we're working right alongside the sector to ensure they can keep delivering for Ontario students.

As part of our plan to protect Ontario, Speaker, we are investing over \$500 million into STEM and the skilled trades programming to prepare our students for successful careers in critical sectors that will protect Ontario's economy. This is on top of the \$1.3 billion we invested into the sector last year. That's on top of our \$5-billion annual investment into our post-secondary sector.

We'll continue to deliver for our students and the economy of Ontario.

NOTICE OF DISSATISFACTION

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Pursuant to standing order 36(a), the member for Ottawa South has given his notice of dissatisfaction with the answer to the question given by the parliamentary assistant to infrastructure regarding Therme. This matter will be debated on Tuesday, April 29, 2025, following private members' public business.

CORRECTION OF RECORD

Mr. John Fraser: I would like to correct my record. Yesterday, in my questions in reference to the Therme spa, I said "\$2.1 billion" multiple times. The actual number is \$2.2 billion, and I would like to correct my record.

Today, I also—

Interjections.

Mr. John Fraser: Guys, I'm just correcting my record. It's a point of order; I'm not asking any questions.

So today, I referenced babies a lot in my question. What I want to say is it's so wonderful that the Minister of Long-Term Care has her son here, and it was so great to look over and see a baby. If you have babies, bring them in because it makes this place so much better.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Mr. Steve Clark: I want to update the House, pursuant to standing order 59. As you know, next week is Easter. I want to wish you and all the members of the House a happy Easter, so I'll be giving you a standing order 59 for the week of April 29 to May 1.

As members know on Monday, April 28, pursuant to standing order 9, the House will not meet due to it being the federal election day.

On Tuesday, April 29, in both morning and afternoon, the second reading of a government bill to be introduced, and during routine proceedings, a government bill will be introduced.

On Wednesday, April 30, in the morning, we'll have second reading of a government bill to be introduced. During the afternoon proceedings, a government bill will be introduced. And in the afternoon, it will be opposition day number 1.

On Thursday, May 1, in the morning, there will be a second reading of a government bill to be introduced. During afternoon routine proceedings, a government bill will be introduced. And I'm pleased to report that, in the afternoon, there will be continued debate on the motion for an address and reply to the speech of Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor.

That's my standing order 59 report to the members.

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

The House recessed from 1139 to 1300.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

M^{me} France Gélinas: My grandson Maddox Harris is on his way over. I'm sure he will be here right after he finishes eating all of the treats in the dining room.

Welcome to the House, Maddox.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): If he arrives, please point him out. We'd love to welcome him to the chamber.

I recognize the Minister of Energy and Mines.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I would like to introduce the amazing team from the Ministry of Energy and Mines who have joined us today in the House.

Thank you for your work on this bill and so much more.

INTRODUCTION OF GOVERNMENT BILLS

PROTECT ONTARIO BY UNLEASHING OUR ECONOMY ACT, 2025

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

Mr. Lecce moved first 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): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Would the minister like to make some comments about the bill?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: The Protect Ontario by Unleashing our Economy Act, 2025, if passed, will cut red tape and streamline approvals for mining, infrastructure, and energy projects. If passed, this legislation will create a new “one project, one process” model to cut government review timelines by 50% and establish special economic zones, while protecting our environment. It would also provide new authorities to block bad actors and protect our mineral wealth from adversarial foreign actors.

In short, our mission is to position Canada as a clean energy superpower. This legislation will further protect our economy, our sovereignty and our security as we stand up for Canada.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

1976998 ONTARIO INC. ACT, 2025

Ms. Dixon moved first reading of the following bill:
Bill Pr1, An Act to revive 1976998 Ontario Inc.

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

First reading agreed to.

MOTIONS

COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP AND SITTINGS

Mr. Anthony Leardi: I move that, pursuant to standing order 109.1, the membership of the Standing Committee

on Procedure and House Affairs be appointed for the duration of the 44th Parliament as follows:

MPP Smith (Thornhill), MPP Allsopp, MPP Vickers, MPP Denault, MPP Gallagher Murphy, MPP Sandhu, MPP Armstrong, MPP Burch and MPP Hsu; and

That these committees be authorized to meet on the following days when the House is scheduled to meet for the duration of the 44th Parliament:

Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs may meet on Tuesdays and Thursdays; and

Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs may meet on Tuesdays and Wednesdays; and

Standing Committee on Public Accounts may meet on Mondays; and

Standing Committee on Justice Policy may meet on Wednesdays and Thursdays; and

Standing Committee on Social Policy may meet on Mondays and Tuesdays; and

Standing Committee on Heritage, Infrastructure and Cultural Policy may meet on Wednesdays and Thursdays; and

Standing Committee on the Interior may meet on Mondays and Tuesdays; and

Standing Committee on Government Agencies may meet on Thursdays from 9 a.m. until 10:15 a.m.; and

That on the committee's motion, the following committees are authorized to meet from Monday to Friday when the House is scheduled to meet and during adjournments of the House specified in standing order 7(b) or other adjournments of the House which do not exceed one week:

Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs; and

Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs; and

Standing Committee on Social Policy; and

Standing Committee on Heritage, Infrastructure and Cultural Policy; and

Standing Committee on the Interior.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The deputy government House leader has moved government notice of motion number 1. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Motion agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Does the member wish to make a brief statement?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: No, thank you.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): No? You weren't going to be allowed to anyway.

PETITIONS

ONTARIO PLACE

Mr. Chris Glover: The petition I'm reading today is entitled “Celebrate Ontario Innovation at Ontario Place,” and it's addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

It says, with the US threat to our economy and our sovereignty, that our tax dollars should be spent supporting Ontario businesses and celebrating Ontario innovators.

It also argues that the Ontario government is currently planning to spend 2.2 billion tax dollars to subsidize the Therme spa and the American Live Nation.

It also talks about the history of Ontario Place. Ontario Place was originally designed as a place to showcase Ontario ingenuity and innovation to the world with displays such as the IMAX, which is an Ontario technology.

Therefore, it asks this Legislative Assembly to cancel the Ontario Place deals with Live Nation and with Therme and to recruit Ontario companies to redevelop Ontario Place to showcase Ontario innovation and creativity to the world.

I fully support this petition. I will affix my signature and pass it to page Liam to take to the table.

UNIVERSITY FUNDING

Mr. Ted Hsu: This is a petition from my constituents regarding the base operating funding of universities.

They're asking this government to invest in Ontario's future by boosting Ontario universities' base operating funding to the level recommended by its own blue-ribbon panel.

This petition points out that there are ongoing austerity measures because of the dire financial situation at Ontario's universities, which is hurting them. It's hurting the quality of the education that people are receiving.

1310

It also makes a point which I think is very relevant today: There's a reason why Donald Trump is fighting Harvard University; it's because universities nurture informed, equitable and democratic societies. That's right on this petition. I think they understand the importance of universities.

Madam Speaker, I fully support this petition.

ONTARIO PLACE

MPP Lise Vaugeois: I would like to introduce a petition entitled "Celebrate Ontario Innovation at Ontario Place." This is of great interest to people in the north, as well, who remember coming to Ontario Place as younger people.

It's really about challenging the \$2.2 billion that has been spent and the removal of 800 trees when, really, we should be investing in Ontario innovation. And they would like to see the deal cancelled.

I fully support this petition. I will affix my signature to it and give it to page Liam.

HEALTH CARE

M^{me} France Gélinas: I'm glad to bring these petitions from people from all over this province. It is called "Justice after Birth Injury."

The petition is in honour of Ayla Fisher, a young girl who sustained a preventable injury at birth. Ayla's story is one of courage in the face of a tragic injury that could have been avoided. She represents countless families impacted by medical negligence during childbirth. Ayla's hope stands as a beacon for every child and family who has endured similar harm. This petition seeks justice and accountability and asks for transparency.

Right now, in Ontario, the Canadian Medical Protective Association is a taxpayer-funded organization which will protect the health care providers, will protect the physicians.

It often takes years for a birth injury to go through trial and be resolved, often resulting in a lot of compensation to the family to help support the disabled child from the birth injury. But those years—and sometimes it's six, seven, eight years where the child has received no support because things are going through trials.

Parents who have had to go through trials because their babies were injured at birth have signed this petition from all over the province.

There are other models that are not confrontational. Japan has one where, if there is a birth injury, there is some form of support for the parents and the baby from birth—we don't try to find who's guilty, who's at fault; we just support the family, for health care as well as socially and emotionally.

The people who have signed this petition would like to see a change in the judicial system in Ontario, to more or less copy what is done in other jurisdictions—Japan is one that I mentioned, but there are others that do this—to make it easier, when there is a serious injury at birth, to support the baby and support the family, and not wait for years for that support to come.

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

ONTARIO PLACE

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: The petition I have to read today is entitled "Celebrate Ontario Innovation at Ontario Place."

This petition concerns what is meant to—what is about to be a wise fiscal expenditure. Our tax dollars should not be going to foreign investment that is questionable; it should be going towards Ontario businesses, and it should be supporting Ontario innovation.

This petition points out that \$2.2 billion and a 95-year lease are going to a financially questionable Austrian corporation. Not only that, but it delves into the history about what the entire purpose of Ontario Place was—it was to showcase Ontario ingenuity and innovation.

This is a petition that I fully support. I will affix my signature and deliver it with page Kareem to the Clerks.

ONTARIO PLACE

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I am very pleased to present a petition entitled "Celebrate Ontario Innovation at Ontario

Place.” I am among the respondents who recall that iconic venue—visiting it in my youth. I am very concerned about the \$2.2 billion that this government plans to spend to redevelop it, using a questionable, to say the least, Austrian spa company, and to give away a 95-year lease.

The petition puts this within the context of the threat of Donald Trump’s tariffs to Ontario’s economy and Canada’s sovereignty. It calls on the Legislative Assembly to cancel the Ontario Place deals with Live Nation and Therme and to look at Ontario innovators to come and assist with the redevelopment of that venue so that we can truly showcase Ontario innovation and creativity on a global scale.

I fully support this petition. I will affix my signature and give it to page Liam to take to the table.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank Bryan Smith, a volunteer member for the local coalition in Oxford. He collects petitions from all over Ontario that basically have to do with Ontarians’ opposition to privatization.

It has been revealed that the cost of surgeries in private clinics and independent health facilities significantly increases the cost to the public purse. We have seen in other provinces—British Columbia and Alberta—that have introduced private clinics for routine surgeries that wait times did not go down. The backlog actually increased.

We have, in Ontario, capacity in our current hospitals, with underused surgical rooms for both complex and routine surgery.

So they ask the Legislative Assembly to stop all funding to the private clinics and independent health facilities immediately and use those funds to perform medically necessary surgeries in our publicly funded, publicly delivered hospitals.

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

BLOOD AND PLASMA DONATION

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank Joanne Mann for gathering these petitions. Joanne is from Hanmer in my riding. It’s called “Blood and Plasma Donations Not For Sale.”

You will remember, Speaker, that in 1980, 30,000 Canadians were infected with HIV and hepatitis, and 8,000 of them died after receiving tainted blood transfusions. The Royal Commission of Inquiry led by Justice Krever made recommendations to protect the integrity of our blood product supply, and the second recommendation from the Krever inquiry states that donors of blood and plasma should not be paid for their donations.

Right here, as we speak, there is a pay-for-plasma collection centre opening up in Hamilton. People are not happy about it. You can expect to see of a lot of demon-

strations in front of Grifols, a pay-for-plasma donation centre.

This is a basic part of the security of our health care system. This is something that people are serious about. We lost thousands of people with tainted blood. We don’t want to go through that again.

They want our blood and plasma system to continue to be on volunteer donations, not paid, so they have signed this petition.

I’m also happy to sign it and to send it to the Clerk with page Kareem.

GASOLINE PRICES

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank Aline Easton from Hanmer in my riding for these petitions. It’s a petition that I hear about all the time—it’s the price of gas.

We all know the price of gas continues to see wild fluctuations. We were all happy when we saw a little bit of a decrease at the beginning of March, when the tax was taken away from the price of gas. But it didn’t even take 10 days for the price of gas to go right back up in northern Ontario.

I’m always interested, when I drive down to Toronto, to see the difference in the price of gas. How can it be that in Sturgeon Falls and in Espanola, which are further away from Sudbury, the price of gas is lower than it is in Sudbury? I will tell you why: because they sell at what the market can bear. And apparently, in Sudbury, we can bear really high prices of gas because everybody who works in the mining sector has to drive long, long distances to get to work. They make a good salary, and they will pay for gas, no matter the price.

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They want the government to regulate the price of gas. It is done in other provinces. We just had the proof: The gas tax got taken off on March 1; the price of gas went from \$1.63 to \$1.29. We all couldn’t believe it. I even saw one at \$1.19 in my riding—\$1.19. We haven’t seen this. Well, I left on Sunday night to come back. and it’s back at \$1.53—not because there’s a tax; just because they can.

Regulate the price of gas—that will make it fairer for the people in northern Ontario—like they do in many US states, like they do in many other provinces.

I fully support this petition. I will affix my name to it and ask my good page Kareem, who is very patient, to bring it to the Clerk.

FRONT-LINE WORKERS

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank Sylvie Brûlé and Erick Brunet from Blezard Valley in my riding for this petition. The petition is quite simple. It says, “Make PSW a Career.”

We have, in Ontario, faced a shortage of PSWs in every sector of our health care system. Whether you look at home care, home and support, long-term care, there is a shortage of PSWs. Many, many people in Ontario, mainly

women, have the training; they're willing to be a PSW. They would love nothing more than to take care of us. But if they work as a PSW, they cannot pay the rent and feed their kids.

So they're asking the government to step in, to make PSW a career—a career with permanent, full-time employment, with good wages, with benefits, sick days, and maybe even a pension plan. And then the problem is solved. We don't have all of those missed appointments in home care. We don't have all of the agency nursing in our long-term-care homes.

Quality of care is directly linked to continuity of care. You can't have continuity of care when you have different health care providers.

PSWs give very personal care. They are the one who give you your bath. You strip naked in front of PSWs. It would be nice for it to be the same person more than once in a row who helps you with your bath.

We can do this. Make PSW a career, and the quality of care goes up, the continuity of care goes up—stability in long-term care, stability in home care. Let's do it.

I'm happy to sign this petition and ask the very patient page Kareem to bring it to the Clerk.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PROTECT ONTARIO THROUGH FREE TRADE WITHIN CANADA ACT, 2025 LOI DE 2025 POUR PROTÉGER L'ONTARIO EN FAVORISANT LE LIBRE-ÉCHANGE AU CANADA

Resuming the debate adjourned on April 17, 2025, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 2, An Act to enact the Buy Ontario, Buy Canadian Day Act, 2025 and the Ontario Free Trade and Mobility Act, 2025 and to amend various other Acts / Projet de loi 2, Loi édictant la Loi de 2025 sur le Jour « Acheteons ontarien, achetons canadien » et la Loi ontarienne de 2025 sur le libre-échange et la mobilité et modifiant diverses autres lois.

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

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: As I begin, I just want to thank the wonderful people of London North Centre, who have bestowed upon me an incredible honour. It's such a privilege to continue to represent the community here in the 44th Parliament at Queen's Park. I want to thank you, and please know that you will have my greatest effort to represent your needs.

I also want to take a moment, Speaker, to congratulate you on making history, on being the first female Speaker in the history of the Ontario Legislative Assembly. You've done Capreol and Hamilton very proud, so you should be incredibly proud of yourself.

I was raised by a strong woman, someone who—I won't say what year she was born, because she won't thank me for that—always raised me to perceive women

as being equal, being able to perform the same jobs; someone who, despite having a high level of education and being an educator, still had to face those questions of, "Wouldn't you rather be wearing a dress, and wouldn't you rather be home raising children than pursuing education and being an educator?" It's fundamentally wrong.

I'm so glad that we're finally here in 2025—so, very well done to you.

As I take a look at this legislation—oh, and I should mention, Speaker, that I will be splitting with the MPP from London West for this lead.

As I begin my time as the shadow minister for small business, non-profits and the arts, I take a look at Bill 2, and it's an act comprised of six schedules. I believe that we should take a look at this legislation as being one that is timely, but we also need to make sure that we are learning from history. We should look at history both distant and near, and we need to look to find and to perceive the key and vital sectors that are omitted from this legislation. As well, I hope to discuss procurement in employment services.

The attacks from our neighbours to the south are unprecedented—attacking our economy, attacking our sovereignty, attacking our Canadian ways of life.

President Trump has been incredibly chaotic. We look at the industries that he's attempting to target, whether it's steel, aluminum, forestry, the auto sector—he's trying to strike at the heart of the Ontario economy.

During the election, I heard from a number of people at their doors who were asking the question, why was Ontario plunging itself into an election at a time when we should be standing up to these threats?

As we look at these six schedules—this bill is designed to eliminate barriers for interprovincial trade; it will proclaim the last Friday of June of each year to be a Buy Ontario, Buy Canadian Day; it will amend the LCBO act, 2019, to require the LCBO, if directed by the minister, to implement a framework to facilitate the sale of liquor from a manufacturer in one province to a consumer in another province. But there are still many questions with this. It also creates the authority to create regulations to designate another province or territory as a reciprocating jurisdiction if the other jurisdiction has enacted similar legislation, and creates the authority for regulations regarding mutual recognition with those jurisdictions.

I want to take a look at an analysis from John Michael McGrath, who indicated that "anyone thinking that Ontario is about to throw open its doors to a free trade free-for-all should lower their expectations: the province is emphasizing that while the 23 exceptions under the CFTA are being repealed, the underlying policies they protect will remain in place." McGrath continues by saying, "Absolutely nothing is changing in Ontario except that other provinces or firms will now theoretically be able to challenge Ontario's discriminatory policies under the CFTA's dispute resolution mechanism." There were only two cases in last year's annual report that were challenges to the CFTA.

In the distant past, I think of these times of economic crisis, and I think about how a government should respond, how people should respond. As it turns out, I was looking at a house, which was a beautiful house in my riding of London North Centre. I was doing a little bit of research, trying to find out more about it, and it turns out it was built by Hayman Construction. Hayman Construction in London is actually Ontario's oldest and Canada's second-oldest construction firm. It was founded by John Hayman. He was born in England in 1846. He immigrated to Canada, he arrived in London and he began operations of this firm. It went through a number of changes. It was John Hayman and Sons, John Hayman and Sons Co., and then Hayman Construction in 2003. In 2022, it celebrated its 150th anniversary. The reason I bring up Hayman Construction is that in looking at this house—it was built during the Great Depression. At a time when people were struggling, not being able to make ends meet, there was no employment, people weren't actually buying houses. What Hayman Construction decided to do was to create a building program where they built houses for their executives. In doing that, they kept all of their employees employed; they kept their families fed. They made sure that they had a safe place to live, as well, at a time when everyone else was suffering. I bring up that example because that is exactly what the Ontario government should be doing right now and something that we should be discussing.

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With Bill 2 is the largest building program in Ontario's history. We know that our housing starts have not seen as low a number since the 1950s. This would be a perfect time for the government to learn from history—such as with Hayman Construction in London—to create that affordable housing that people need, keep all of those tradespeople employed, and make sure that we are keeping food on people's tables.

Not only that, if we are engaging in a large-scale building program, we will also need to make sure that we are upskilling people—that we are making sure there are opportunities in faculties of education, in different union halls, in different colleges, to make sure that we can help all of the people we will need in order to make sure that that is a possibility.

Some of the recommendations I'd like to make for Bill 2 would be to partner with businesses—to make sure that we are identifying those projects in housing and infrastructure that we can start immediately.

I think about—and this is something I brought up in the summertime—CAMI automotive in Ingersoll, which is currently making the BrightDrop system, a last-mile delivery system of electric vehicles that is fantastic. They've retooled their entire plant to allow for the fabrication of these vehicles.

Canada Post, unfortunately, made a large purchase of electric vehicles for their factories, and they did not purchase from GM in Ingersoll; they purchased from the United States. Can you imagine? Recently, CAMI has had no other option but to lay off hundreds of workers because

the vehicles are sitting unpurchased; they can't keep creating more when there has not been the demand. We see with this current federal election that the Liberal Party is saying, "Well, we're going to buy Canadian. We're going to do this. We're going to do that." But my question is, why did that not happen prior to this?

Further to that, I think about all of our discussions of procurement, more of which should be in Bill 2. And I think of the Alstom plant in Thunder Bay. I think about how, in the recent past, we saw Canadian content provisions for Ontario Line subway cars, which had been at 25%, which is already dismally low to begin with—to think that only one quarter of Ontario Line subway cars had to be fabricated here in Canada. But that number was actually lowered to 10% by Premier Ford. So it took a dismally low number of 25% and actually lowered that to 10%. It makes very little sense.

We should also see measures such as an Ontario tariff fund; a federal-provincial income assistance plan—not one where the government of Ontario is expecting the federal government to do all of the heavy lifting, but a true partnership between them both.

We should be looking at an Ontario-made manufacturing tax credit and an Ontario business cost rebate program, similar to measures that we saw during the COVID-19 pandemic.

What is also missing from Bill 2 is any mention whatsoever of our vital non-profit sector. Non-profits have stepped in in so many different areas where the government has failed, where there have been those dramatic, vast gaps. Non-profits are seeing unprecedented rises in demands for their services, and their costs are going through the roof at the same time.

I was happy to meet with Pillar Nonprofit executive director Maureen Cassidy recently, and she indicated that despite the fact non-profits employ 844,000 people in Ontario, there is not a formal mechanism to collaborate with the provincial government. Why is that? In fact, as a former member of the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs, I heard from government members who blamed non-profits for the number of non-profits. They blamed non-profits for competing for the same level of funding. That just shows a disconnect with the value that they provide for the people of Ontario and how they address all of the issues that the provincial government seems to ignore and not to fund, in addition to which, the non-profit sector is advocating for sustainable funding, year-over-year funding, to make sure that they are able to address the critical needs in our communities that are going to happen as a result of the economic downturn and the tariffs that are being placed on us by the unstable and unpredictable President Trump.

In addition, they're also recommending a home in government so that the government actually won't mis-speak and won't misunderstand, but will actually have a home—someone who can explain to this government what non-profits do, the value that they provide to our communities and how they can be best supported during this time.

I was also surprised that in Bill 2 there is no mention whatsoever of Ontario's culture sector. During a time of economic strife, during a time of instability, during a time of angst and frustration and anger, arts and culture are more important than they ever could be. If you look at when the pandemic was hitting Ontario and was hitting the world, people turned to the arts as a relief. The arts has the power to bring people together, to nourish us, to also develop our province economically.

The Ontario Chamber of Commerce provided a wonderful report entitled Ontario's Arts, Culture, and Creative Industries: Strengthening Competitiveness and Communities. This was a brilliant report, and I recommend that every government member read it. I'm going to discuss some of the key points that were placed within it.

Ontario's arts, culture and creative sector represents nearly half of Canada's cultural economy. Ontario is home to many different diverse and wonderful creators. There are 270,000 jobs across these industries, including film, music, galleries, interactive digital media.

I want to quote Daniel Tisch, the president and CEO of the OCC. Daniel said, "Cultural industries strengthen our communities, make Ontario more attractive as a destination for investment, talent and tourism, and enhance our global business opportunities at a time of uncertainty in our trading relationships. The Ontario chamber's latest policy brief finds our cultural industries brimming with potential to drive innovation, inclusion, and competitiveness. But bold and decisive action is necessary to secure their future."

The report recommends a number of things that I hope this government will take into account: (1) developing a comprehensive Ontario culture sector strategy that integrates cultural development into Ontario's economic planning; (2) enhancing talent development to address labour shortages and promote opportunity for under-represented communities; (3) expanding and simplifying funding mechanisms while streamlining access to capital for small and medium-sized cultural enterprises; (4) strengthening international competitiveness through marketing campaigns, trade missions and cultural showcases; (5) investing in purpose-built cultural infrastructure, expanding transportation networks, and diversifying funding strategies to include rural, remote, Indigenous, and under-served communities.

Michael Murray, CEO of the Ontario Arts Council, said, "The Ontario Arts Council's ongoing investment in the arts fuels a future-proof economy, resilient communities, and the creative infrastructure that drives innovation, tourism, and global competitiveness. Ontario's cultural industries are an engine of growth and social cohesion." I could not agree more.

At this time when we cannot rely upon the United States as a trading partner, we have to think about ways that we can strengthen ourselves. The arts is a perfect way to make sure that people are coming together. The arts and culture are a key economic driver for our province, especially now.

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In order to do this, we also need to make sure we're listening to other recommendations from the Ontario Chamber of Commerce. They're asking this government to "fully fund post-secondary enrolment expansion, align program funding with labour needs, and accelerate immigration and credential recognition for skilled workers.... Invest in transportation, domestic procurement, broadband, energy"—and it goes on to say more. These are key and critical investments that this government could make, because the province's culture sector contributed \$26 billion to Ontario's GDP in 2022 alone and, as I mentioned previously, there are 270,000 direct jobs related to the arts and culture sector.

Next, I wanted to discuss something that should be included in Bill 2, and that was from the London Chamber of Commerce and Graham Henderson, the CEO. He provided a series which discusses how cultural investment is a sound economic strategy.

Graham's first recommendation or reason was for economic growth and job creation. Investments in arts and culture can generate new employment opportunities, attract businesses and stimulate local spending. It not only creates jobs directly, but it also relates to those ancillary services, such as hospitality, retail and tourism. At a time when people are concerned about going to the United States—where, at best, they might be turned away or, at worst, they might be detained. They may have their devices searched for any criticisms of the dictatorial policies of President Trump. This is why we must now take a look at how people can travel and invest in tourism here in Ontario and across Canada.

Graham talks about the UNESCO research, which highlighted that investment in arts and culture fosters innovation and entrepreneurship. Creative sectors account for 3% of global GDP. Then it goes on to say, Music Canada and the Canadian Live Music Association—they say that live music contracts \$1.2 billion annually. In London, we have organizations such as the London Arts Council and the London Music Office, and different events such as Sunfest. These are key investments that end up helping so many other businesses within the area because of those tourism dollars. Whether it's through festivals, whether it's through art walks or cultural events, these sorts of things not only are economic development, because there are all of those tourism dollars that go to different hotels, different businesses, different restaurants, but it also is something that helps establish the city's appeal for residents.

The next reason is community engagement and quality of life. Whether it's through social interaction, civic pride, a sense of belonging among community members, these sorts of investments have a ripple effect for an entire community. Concerts, art exhibitions, cultural festivals—it allows people to connect at a time where people are suffering, people are struggling. People are worried about their future, and they're worried about Canadian sovereignty. We need to make sure that we are bringing people together for the right reasons.

UNESCO also emphasizes that culture plays a critical role in sustainable urban development. It shows how these cultural activities contribute to social cohesion, community well-being. Through music, Music Canada and the Canadian Live Music Association also say how live music events create inclusive spaces that bring people together.

Our third reason is for those enhanced tourism dollars. The Ontario Arts Council, in their 2023 report Ontario Arts and Culture Tourism Profile, they show the outsized economic impact that arts and culture have on tourism. While these activities, as Graham points out, account for only 13% of unique tourist trips, they generate 30% of total tourism spending in the province. People stay longer, they spend more than other visitors. Some 40% of Canadian cultural tourists take trips of three days or more compared to just 13% of non-cultural tourists. Not only are they going to see one thing, but they're probably going to see more things, and if they stay longer, they're going to restaurants, and they're going to bars. They're going to other shops that are located along the way, and they're spending that money in so many ways for small businesses.

Number 4 is attraction and retention of talent. Cities that invest in culture, they create these dynamic atmospheres. They attract top talent and they inspire retention. Graham uses the example of Seattle, which has always had an amazing musical heritage, but they were able to build a global identity. It attracts young professionals, it attracts entrepreneurs, because it's a cool and hip city and place to be. So they have venues, they have industry support, they have culturally friendly policies. This has allowed them to create themselves as a creative hub. They retain that talent and tech and all those other sectors.

There's also the example of Berlin, Germany. It's a magnet for all of these different people who want to stay.

That's the opportunity Ontario has at this moment. While we face these unprecedented threats, we have a real economic opportunity and can realize that long-term sustainability through investments in the arts and culture.

Number 5 is for branding. When you look at all of the different attractions that Ontario has, whether it's museums, galleries, festivals, creative industries elevate those cities and they have that branding, that identity. It draws tourists, it draws business, it draws investors.

Coventry, UK, is the UK City of Culture from 2021, and it explains in this report how they were able to revitalize their cultural scene.

The city of Melbourne, Australia: There are so many different things because they became a UNESCO City of Literature, and they built a global identity based on that.

There are things in London that I want to make sure I mention. We have the Grand Theatre, 100 Kellogg Lane, the TAP Centre for Creativity, London Children's Museum, McIntosh Gallery, Museum of Ontario Archaeology, Canada Life Place, Aeolian Hall, the Palace Theatre, the London Fringe. We now have a Hard Rock Hotel. We have Sunfest and Rock the Park and the Forest City film awards, Film London, Forest City London Music Awards and so many other things.

Now, this isn't just for those people who want to experience cultural events; this is also for everyone else. The additional reason for this is that there are increased property values and investment, and furthermore, it enhances the quality of life for people. When there is vibrance and when there is activity, when there is interest going on, it allows people to establish that community identity, that engagement. It is just a much better place to be.

Our eighth reason is the revitalization of underused and vacant spaces. When you go through a downtown that has abandoned buildings or vacant offices or neglected urban areas, it has an impact on our vision of that city or our apprehension of that city. So in investing in these, we can turn them into vibrant cultural hubs that will attract people, that will attract businesses, that will attract visitors. It fuels economic growth, urban renewal and community well-being.

An example I wanted to bring up is the former Kellogg's factory at 100 Kellogg Lane. That is home to so many different amazing businesses. It's home to the London Children's Museum, it's home to Paradigm Spirits, it's home to the now Hard Rock Hotel in London. It's fantastic. That was an amazing, huge factory space, obviously purpose-built, very engineered to a high specification, and rather than let that sit empty, it has now been invested in. That's the kind of thing the province can and should be doing, and should be doing with Bill 2.

If we look, as well—I don't know that we see enough supports in Bill 2 for small businesses. I wanted to bring forward the voice of the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, who have been taking a look, of course, at the impact on the economic backbone of our province, which is—80% of our activity is comprised of small businesses. This trade war is going to have an incredibly massive impact on all of those small entrepreneurs and all of those people who put their life, they've put their money, and they've often compromised their personal relationships and their time in pursuit of this business.

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They did a survey just in March of 2025 and I wanted to go over some of their key findings. Four in five businesses have been impacted by the US-Canada trade war. They've seen rising costs, a weaker Canadian dollar, lower demand and pricing difficulties. They're really worried about that economic uncertainty and that's something that the province could address. Now, as we look towards finding new trading partners, that's going to take quite a bit of time. We don't have the infrastructure built to help us with interprovincial trade. That's something the government is going to need to invest in, and that will also help these small businesses. We have to consider also the small businesses who have a great deal of stock that is US-created. What kind of things are we going to do to help them off-load that stock when we see this greater focus on buying Ontario and buying Canadian?

The CFIB indicates that all provinces have seen large drops in business confidence, and Ontario is in the top three in the business barometer. They've seen higher costs,

pricing challenges, reduced profits and lower demand. They're also concerned about the rising operational costs—the difficulty in pricing products and services competitively.

So, Speaker, as we take a look at all of these things, it's not as though Bill 2 is without its merits. There are some important things that we are doing within this bill but there is so much more that is left missing. There are key sectors, critical sectors that are going to really contribute to the long-term sustainability and viability of our province. We have to consider how the arts and culture are economic development. We have to consider where people are going to go, given the trading relationship between the United States and Canada. We want to make sure that we're attracting investment, that we're keeping people here. That's through investing in the arts. That's through investing in education, making sure we're up-skilling people and we have the people to fill all the roles. We also need to engage in the largest scale building program in Ontario's history, making sure people have a safe place to call home and also making sure we have the key and critical infrastructure so that we can actually trade interprovincially. And we need to make sure that we're supporting small businesses at this time who are going to face some of the worst economic outlooks in Ontario's history.

We saw what happened during the pandemic. We saw so many businesses that were struggling. We need to do yet more. Unfortunately, we also saw at that time a provincial government that did not act quickly enough. We saw a provincial government that relied too heavily on federal measures rather than being a stand-up partner to small businesses.

So as we look at this legislation, there is so much more that we need to be doing. You know, I'm thankful that the election is behind us. I think it was an unnecessary election, when we should have been here in this Legislature throughout January, throughout February and also into March, making sure that we were discussing how we can save these key and critical sectors.

Thank you very much for your time, Speaker. At this point I'll pass it over to the MPP from London West.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Brian Saunderson): Go ahead.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Thank you very much, Speaker. I'm deeply honoured to rise today as the MPP for London West to participate in this important debate on Bill 2. Since this is my first opportunity to rise to speak in this place—following the election—during a debate, I wanted to begin with some thank yous, but before I do that I want to say congratulations to all the members who were re-elected and also offer a special welcome to the newly elected members. We heard some wonderful inaugural speeches here yesterday, and I think it made us all reflect on what brought us here in the first place, so it was a really nice moment. I want to say thank you to the people of London West, who put their trust in me once again, for the fifth time. I have to say, Speaker, after each one of those elections, when I take that oath of office, I am truly struck by the enormity of the responsibility that has been placed

on all of us to represent the concerns and aspirations of the people who live in our communities and to provide the help, support and advocacy that they need.

I want to thank my staff. I have to say how gratifying it was to go to a door and to be told that someone had contacted my office and had received the help that they need. We all know that when people reach out to an MPP's office, they are often at the end of their rope; they've exhausted all other avenues; they're angry; they're frustrated; they're hopeless; they're distraught. Our staff are on the front lines of all of that, and I know it is heavy and difficult work. It's so great to have staff who go to bat for people and try to get folks the help that they need.

I want to thank my campaign team and the hundreds of volunteers. They put up over a thousand lawn signs. They delivered thousands of leaflets, knocked on doors, made phone calls. And of course, this was during one of the coldest and snowiest Februarys we have seen in Ontario.

I do want to say, interestingly, my campaign—and maybe others on this side of the House—received more \$200 donations than we ever had before. Some people came in with their rebate cheque and asked if they could just sign it over in the campaign office. They told me that they were appalled by this very questionable use of public dollars—to send out those cheques at a cost of over \$3 billion, when our health care system is in such crisis, when so many people are living unhoused, when students aren't getting the supports they need at school, and when vulnerable people are struggling more than ever before.

That brings me to the bill that is before us today, the Protect Ontario Through Free Trade Within Canada Act.

I do appreciate the government's commitment to make sure that the first bill that we are debating here in this House is a response to the existential threat that has been posed to our economy and our workforce by President Trump and his tariffs, and his direct attack on Canadian sovereignty and independence.

Certainly, we know that the US is Ontario's largest trading partner. Ontario is the most trade-reliant province in Canada. We have one in five of the jobs in this province dependent on trade in the United States, and the government has estimated that as many as 500,000 Ontario jobs could be at risk if Trump goes ahead with this trade war. Ontario does \$500 billion of two-way trade annually with the US. And if Ontario were a country, it would be the US's third-largest trading partner. Nearly 85% of Ontario exports go straight to the United States. Ontario is the number one trading partner with 19 states and the second-largest trading partner with nine others. So when the relationship that we have with the United States is disrupted, there are serious consequences for our economy and our workforce.

Given the scale of the threats that Trump has posed and the dire implications for our collective well-being, I do have to say how disappointed I am by the Premier's refusal to establish a multi-party table. We believe, the people of Ontario believe that we need to be working together in a collaborative way. We need a Team Ontario approach to tariff-proof our economy. This is what Ontarians expect to

see in a moment of such crisis. As I said, it's disappointing that the government doesn't want to go that way.

Ontarians are calling for divisive partisanship to be put aside. They want to see us working across party lines to strengthen this province. We need to make sure that we are looking after people, that we are getting Ontario building, that we are growing our economy. We need a tariff response that puts workers first and strengthens our province for years to come. We need income protection for displaced workers. We need support for trade-exposed industries. We need tough measures to stop government-supported manufacturers and equipment from packing up and leaving.

1400

But even though the Premier isn't interested in working across party lines, I am excited about the advisory council that has been launched by the leader of the official opposition to help inform the tariff response of the Ontario NDP. It's going to be chaired by my very capable colleague the member for Waterloo, shadow minister for economic development and trade, and it will include many of my caucus colleagues. That advisory council has been tasked with leading a number of consultations with industry, labour, sector-specific experts and elected officials. The approach that we are taking is collaborative. It is solutions-oriented. It is focused on realizing Ontario's economic potential at a time of unprecedented uncertainty. The goal is to stabilize and build new export opportunities for Ontario industries through forward-looking strategies for procurement, research, innovation and intellectual property that creates economic growth and good jobs here at home.

Speaker, I mentioned earlier some of what I heard at the door during the campaign, and definitely the threat of Trump's tariffs was one of the issues that people raised again and again. I heard a lot of fear and anxiety about what tariffs would mean for our economy and hope that the new government would help shield Ontario from the most negative impacts.

In my community, however, in London, people also recognize that shielding Ontario means shoring up our health care system. It means urgently addressing the housing crisis, in addition to responding to the tariff threat. They understood that it's not either/or. Strengthening our public institutions has to be a key part of a smart, effective tariff response. Unfortunately, we did not hear that same kind of commitment in the government's throne speech earlier this week, and so that leaves us with the bill that is before us today.

This is a bill, Speaker, as you know, that was only tabled yesterday, so there has not been a lot of time to thoroughly review its contents, to consult with stakeholders, so I'm going to keep my comments on the bill mostly high-level. We know that opening up interprovincial trade has been a long-standing project across Canada, beginning in 1995 with the Agreement on Internal Trade. Much progress was made in 2017 with the signing of the Canadian Free Trade Agreement, which created a formal and binding process to reduce existing interprovincial

trade barriers across Canadian provinces, territories and the federal government. So that deal, the CFTA, applies to all interprovincial trade, but a detailed list of exemptions was negotiated for each province and territory.

For example, Ontario negotiated 23 exemptions, and those include—I'll just give you a couple—rules that allow the province to limit the number and location of cannabis retail stores. The province is able to limit the number of forest resource licences that are issued. The province is able to mandate these of locally grown grapes in wine production. Yesterday, when the government tabled this bill, they also announced that they intended to remove all of those 23 exemptions that had been negotiated in the CFTA. But it's interesting to hear from the government that in fact the policies covered by the exemptions, they say, will remain in place, and that any challenges to those policies would have to be resolved through this CFTA dispute resolution process, which is a process which has been very, very infrequently used. So we'll have to see what happens with that.

In the context of Trump's threats, in the context of the loss of those US markets, in the context of Trump's complete unreliability as a future trading partner, Ontario is really left with only two options: to look for new trading arrangements with other countries or to expand trading opportunities within Canada. This has suddenly made the removal of interprovincial trade barriers an urgent policy priority. Everybody is talking about it, not just politicians and think tanks but the general public as well. I know I have received emails and phone calls to my office.

It makes sense, Speaker, because not only does it seem like an obvious solution, but it also speaks to the moment. And all of us have really focused, I think, on making sure that we are buying Canadian and that we are supporting Canadian products.

Essentially, barriers to interprovincial trade fall into four categories. There are natural barriers, such as geography; there are prohibitive barriers, such as restrictions on the sale of alcohol; there are technical barriers, such as vehicle weight standards in transportation, tire sizes and safety regulations for commercial trucks; and there are different rules for oil and gas refineries in terms of the ethanol mix that is allowed in fuel.

There are also regulatory barriers, such as licensing and paperwork, food safety regulations, supply management and marketing boards for eggs and dairy, which is certainly something that no one would like to see removed.

But there are regulatory barriers as well to labour mobility, such as the need to register with multiple workers' compensation boards across jurisdictions, and there is often a wide variation in health and safety standards between provinces.

But of course, Speaker, in a country as vast as Canada, the biggest barriers to interprovincial trade are distance and market size. That's why so many Ontario businesses have looked to the US for trading opportunities rather than, say, western Canada, because of the transportation challenges that would be involved.

As well, markets that are south of the border are typically much larger than potential markets in other Canadian provinces. I know, for example, in London, the US border and those markets in Michigan are only a couple of hours away.

The government's legislation addresses those three other categories of barriers that I mentioned earlier. Given the Premier's track record—and some would call it an obsession—with liberalizing alcohol sales, it actually comes as not much of a surprise that the bill proposes new rules for direct-to-consumer sales for beverage alcohol. These new rules will allow Ontario producers to sell directly to consumers in other provinces and Ontario consumers to purchase alcohol directly from producers in other provinces.

This may or may not be a good idea, and certainly we'll want to hear from people in the industry when this bill goes to committee, but the one thing we do know is that any liberalization of alcohol sales is always accompanied by an increase in an alcohol-related health care cost. So once again this reinforces the importance of making sure that at the same time that we are looking at a tariff response we are also addressing the problems in our health care system. We have 2.5 million Ontarians who currently do not have a family doctor, and we have unacceptably long wait-lists for specialists and emergency room care, so we need to look after those things at the same time that we are responding to Trump.

Bill 2 also includes a number of measures to expand labour mobility. Currently, workers from other jurisdictions who want to come to work in Ontario must register with the relevant Ontario regulator. The applicant has to wait until the process is completed before they can work in their occupation in this province. Most Ontario regulators do not have any required timelines to complete the review of that registration, and they could also ask for additional requirements, which extends the time that these new workers have to wait before they can start their employment in this province. So Bill 2 creates an as-of-right framework that allows a worker to be registered in Ontario within 10 days and to work for up to six months while the registration is being reviewed by the regulator. Again, this is a measure that—it will be very useful to hear what stakeholders have to say in committee.

1410

We are aware that there are concerns about potential gaps in regulatory oversight during the six-month period that an individual is working as their registration is being reviewed, and that is a special concern if, at the end of that six-month period, it turns out that they do not meet the standards that the Ontario regulator has set.

In addition, the public interest is not served if regulatory bodies are overly restricted in their ability to assess the qualifications and conduct of applicants. This may, of course, result with individuals whose competence or conduct is questionable ending up being certified.

I want to note also that Ontario actually lost more people to interprovincial mobility than we gained, and that was largely due to the lack of affordable housing here in

this province. In January 2025, we got a report from economist Mike Moffatt that stated, "Over the last four years, 100,000 more Ontarians have moved to other provinces than have moved from those provinces to Ontario. Those leaving are disproportionately the young professionals, from doctors to carpenters to coders, that the province needs to thrive."

So once again, if we want to keep these people here, if we want to have that mobile influx of labour into this province, if we want to attract people, health care workers and others from across Canada, Ontario must be able to offer affordable places to live and strong public services like access to a family doctor, like child care, like good schools.

Finally, we need to keep in mind that the removal of interprovincial trade barriers may not be the panacea that the government and many others hope that it will be. There is a long-standing dispute between and among economists about the actual economic impact of removing interprovincial trade barriers.

The government's briefing materials on the bill cite studies saying that the removal of barriers could increase Canada's economy by up to 7.9%, that it could add \$200 billion per year to our GDP. These numbers have been widely cited by the federal government and many other business organizations. But what's important to keep in mind about these numbers is that they are not based on actual increases in GDP, but they are based on projections of the cost of removing the barriers—based on, quite possibly, faulty assumptions about interprovincial trade. And one of the challenges is that there is actually no solid data on what the barriers are, and that's why many organizations, including the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, are urging the creation of a database to collect a comprehensive listing of the specific barriers that businesses are encountering when they engage in interprovincial trade.

A related challenge is that what one party may perceive as a barrier, another party may perceive as an important regulatory protection. In the past, what businesses have called barriers are, in fact, requirements that unions have fought for, and these can address anything from occupational skills to health and public safety, local hiring rules etc., and on occasion even worker protections, protections for public infrastructure, supports for small local businesses have been called barriers to interprovincial trade.

There was a recent analysis by CIBC Economics that cautioned that the benefits of removing these interprovincial trade barriers may be nowhere near what is predicted. They conclude that there are "reasons to be skeptical over claims about the size of the pot of gold waiting to be found at the end of the interprovincial trade rainbow." They also point out that interprovincial trade barriers affect a very narrow slice of the economy.

Marc Lee, who is a senior economist from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, says that in fact, there is a very small list of actual barriers to interprovincial trade. He agrees that there is work that could be done in some areas, especially that credential recognition for skilled

workers who are moving from province to province, and that is something this bill addresses. But he says that “the low-hanging fruit of trade barriers was harvested long ago.”

A major concern among many progressive economists—in addition to CIBC Economics, which I mentioned earlier—is that attempts to remove interprovincial trade barriers may be mostly a push to water down regulations that are in fact important from a worker or consumer safety standpoint. Some of those progressive economists who have been very public about their reservations include Jim Stanford and Armine Yalnizyan.

A particular issue that they have raised is the push for mutual recognition of regulations, which is the process that is outlined in this bill between reciprocating provinces. In effect, a mutual recognition could result in all reciprocating provinces accepting the least stringent safety regulations for environmental protection, consumer protection, and worker health and safety.

Mutual recognition is an arrangement where governments agree to accept each other’s standards, regulations or laws for goods, labour and services. The challenge with mutual recognition is that it is very broad, so we have heard already concerns that harmonization can create an incentive to actually lower these safety and consumer protection standards. It could be a way to prevent provinces from passing laws to strengthen environmental worker and consumer protection—which, of course, Speaker, I think we would all agree should be harmonized at the highest standard, not the lowest.

There was a recent National Post op-ed by John Ruffolo of the Council of Canadian Innovators that I encourage everyone to read, because he also questions the gains that can be made by focusing on interprovincial trade. He says, “When it comes to improving our economic resilience, there are other opportunities we should immediately focus on, with objectively larger upside potential. Significantly, they all involve putting energy into diversifying our products, not just markets.

“To improve our current poor terms of trade, for example, we need more high-margin Canadian-made products and more value-added exports from our natural resources sold in more markets. We must also reform our tax code to support the creation of entrepreneur-led companies in the innovation economy and develop strategies to help new companies scale up, increasing our stock of valuable intellectual property and maintaining control of crucial data.” These are all good ideas, Speaker, and I certainly hope that the government is seriously considering them.

In the time I have left, I want to focus on a particular priority that I believe has been overlooked by this government in the face of the tariff threat, and that is the government’s responsibility to help stem the collapse of our post-secondary sector.

1420

On Monday of this week, the day that Queen’s Park returned, there was a media conference here in this building. It was held jointly by OPSEU, the union that

represents college workers; OCUFA, the union that represents university faculty; the Canadian Federation of Students—Ontario; and the Ontario Federation of Labour. They came together to sound the alarm on the crisis facing our post-secondary institutions, and our colleges in particular. The message they came to relay to the government was, “How well Ontario weathers the storm depends on reversing course on the crisis facing its college system. Without significant ministerial intervention—including raising baseline funding—Ontarians could be left unsheltered.” They wanted to impress upon the government that in a period of significant restructuring, local post-secondary institutions are absolutely vital for workers who will be transitioning between jobs and industries.

This is at a time when 21 out of our 24 public colleges have been forced to cut programs, suspend intakes, lay off staff—and even, in the case of Centennial College, closing an entire campus. It’s not just these 24 communities where these public colleges are located; they are connected to campuses in hundreds of small communities across this province.

In London, Fanshawe College just announced the suspension of 40 programs, including programs such as advanced police studies, aerospace manufacturing, business management, cannabis applied science, construction project management, fine art, journalism, public relations, retirement residence management. There are an additional five programs that are being closed at the surrounding campuses in the London area. The loss of these programs will not only mean, of course, the layoff of staff, but it will deny local students the opportunity to get these credentials that are in demand in their own community.

None of this should be a surprise for this government. They knew the crisis that the sector was facing back in 2023, when their own blue-ribbon panel report said they needed to invest \$2.5 billion. What did they do? They invested half of that in the post-secondary sector, and that was before the pressure that was created by the federal government’s changes to international student study permits.

Last week, the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario projected that an additional 225,000 student spaces would be needed in our post-secondary sector over the next two decades to meet domestic demand. And this is happening. This need for more spaces is happening at a time when colleges are basically in free fall.

The Ontario Chamber of Commerce, together with Colleges Ontario and the Council of Ontario Universities, sent this government a letter earlier, in March, talking about the need for immediate investments in the post-secondary sector to ensure that the sector remains stable and viable to meet the economic threat that has been posed by Donald Trump in the US and to ensure that Ontario remains competitive and self-reliant. They made four specific recommendations:

- increase base operating revenues;
- fund enrolment expansion;
- enhance research funding;

young people, fewer opportunities for those who were seasoned.

I was hoping to find out if the member opposite sees the path here to supporting our industry so that we don't rely on other jurisdictions for the goods that we need.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I'd like to thank my friend from Windsor–Tecumseh for the question.

However, I will point towards StatsCan numbers which have shown that this Conservative government's numbers on manufacturing jobs are actually worse than Kathleen Wynne's. I don't know how you manage to dig any deeper than Kathleen Wynne, but you guys certainly found the way.

We need to make sure that we are investing in key sectors such as education. I am old enough to remember when the Harris government ripped all of the shop classes out of elementary schools—and now is pretending as though they support the trades. That should never have happened in the first place. The trades pathway needs to start from a very early age, starting in grade 7. I'd love to see further investments in education, such as making sure those opportunities are provided to all students.

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

M^{me} France Gélinas: My question is for the member from London West. I really enjoyed her take on the Protect Ontario Through Free Trade Within Canada Act—her analysis of this bill. I especially enjoyed the part about making the link to post-secondary education; making the link to how what makes us strong is because we have an educated population.

When the Council of Ontario Universities—the member said 225,000 more spaces were needed. I would like her to enlighten us a bit as to what will happen if Ontario is not an educated population anymore, or if our colleges and universities are allowed to crumble.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Thank you very much. I think that it's that exact fear that motivated HEQCO to produce that report to inform the ministry planning. We need to make sure that those spaces are there for the domestic students who want to pursue the education that they dream of. If we do not have those spaces, they are either going to leave and go to other provinces, other jurisdictions where they can access the programs that they want, or they're going to put those dreams aside. They are not going to engage in the upskilling and the new career paths that lead to jobs that are in demand in this province.

We have to ensure a strong, stable, viable post-secondary sector and a college and university system that is able to meet the demand of domestic students and prepare our economy for the future.

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

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: It's an honour to rise today to speak to the Protect Ontario Through Free Trade Within Canada Act, 2025, as the Ontario Liberal critic for finance and trade. It's also great to do this because this is my first leadoff as a member of an official party. The only people in this province who wanted—

Interjection.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Thank you to the member from Essex and my colleagues here—that cold, unnecessary, early, expensive election were the Premier and his team. But as the saying goes, every cloud has a silver lining. And for me and the 30% of Ontario voters who voted Liberal, the Ontario Liberals regaining official party status was that silver lining.

Speaker, I know politicians can throw around a lot of slogans. Today, I'm going to talk about this bill using three popular sayings. So here is the first one: as I mentioned, "Every cloud has a silver lining." Just like that cold, dark February election had a silver lining for us, we can also talk about this bill as being a possible silver lining to the dark cloud of US trade tariffs. But let's not forget that this silver lining will come at a high cost and that it comes in response to the US President's harsh economic measures against Ontario and Canada—its northern and one of its longest friends and partners.

Let's also not forget that this Premier wanted this president to win—this president, who is prepared to cause great economic harm to Canada and Ontario. We've all seen that video where the Premier says: "Did I want this guy to win? A hundred per cent." This Premier was basically cheering for the president—a president who talked about tariffs while he was campaigning, while our Premier stood by and cheered him on. So while the Premier found tariffs as his excuse to send the people of Ontario into a cold, expensive February election, it's cold comfort now to the people of Ontario that this government is finally doing something about interprovincial trade barriers.

Speaker, this bill proposes to reshape how Ontario interacts economically with its fellow provinces and territories and the federal government. So let me just say at the beginning: Interprovincial trade absolutely matters. I actually said this time and time again at the doors, during that cold February election we just had. Economic cooperation between our provinces is long overdue, so we welcome this conversation and this debate today, and I thank the minister for introducing the bill.

I'm glad this government is finally talking about doing something about interprovincial trade—but what I really should say is doing something positive about interprovincial trade. This government actually did things that hurt our interprovincial trade between 2021 and 2024. These exceptions that the Premier and the ministers were talking about this morning and in trade conferences—they actually increased the number of exceptions between 2021 and 2024. You can read all about that in the CFIB's excellent report on this topic. That report also shows that Ontario is in the middle of the pack, at best, when it comes to interprovincial trade leadership. We're behind Manitoba, which is in first place, Alberta, the federal government, Saskatchewan and BC. The only large province we're ahead of is Quebec, which is in last place, and this government has to own up to that. While they talk about now being a leader, it could be just another attempt to grab a headline. But if it took US tariffs for this

government to take action on interprovincial trade, then, okay, maybe that cloud of US tariffs did have a silver lining.

On to my next saying: “Better late than never.” This government needs to own up to the fact they could have done something positive about these trade barriers any time in the last seven years since they’ve been in power, but they didn’t. They’re only now talking about doing something to remove them because of the US President. They talked extensively in the last number of weeks about how this was going to be the first bill they introduced. Well, we’ve actually heard that before. Seven years ago, it was Premier Jason Kenney who tried to lead the change to break down interprovincial trade barriers, and it was our current Premier himself who was the obstacle. Back then, the idea of interprovincial free trade was dismissed, blocked and treated as political theatre. In fact, like the member from London North Centre said earlier, why was nothing done sooner? I completely agree.

As far back as October 30, 2018, the Premier stood in this Legislature and proclaimed, “We’re going to blaze a new trail... We’re going to have a deal with Saskatchewan, and then you’re going to see all the other provinces hop on board.” But let’s be clear: That was six and a half years ago. The trail he promised to blaze could barely light a candle. Because what has actually happened in that time? More of the usual—more photo ops, more headlines, more memorandums of understanding, but no meaningful change.

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Yesterday, the Premier announced a new memorandum of understanding with the provinces of New Brunswick and Nova Scotia. But he already signed an MOU with Saskatchewan all the way back in 2018. If we’re being candid, what has really come from that agreement? He stood here in 2018, saying we were going to make history. Six and a half years later, we’re still here, waiting for something to happen. It does raise the question, Speaker: Should we really believe that with this legislation and the MOUs from yesterday anything is going to be different?

In 2018, the Premier said that interprovincial trade barriers were costing Ontario between \$15 billion and \$20 billion a year. In 2019, he updated that figure to \$50 billion for Canada, and he repeated that number later that year, quoting the Senate committee that pegged the cost of regulatory burden at about \$130 billion to the national economy. We know now that number—it has been talked about—is about \$200 billion. But back then, he said, “We talk about the USMCA deal, and we can’t even get trade done within our own country. But under our leadership, we’ll make sure that happens.” Well, we’re now in 2025, and we’re still waiting for it to happen, and so are Ontario businesses; so are Ontario workers. And now, with this threat, this legislation and change becomes absolutely even more critical.

In November 2019, the Premier again stood here in this Legislature and said, “The impact of interprovincial trade regulations is staggering, a major roadblock to economic

growth...” It’s “just regulation over regulation. That’s putting a burden on trade.”

On December 10, 2019, he declared that every Premier he met with “left here feeling positive.... We discussed interprovincial trade; that’s \$50 billion sitting on the table.... Mr. Speaker, it’s easier to trade with the United States than it is amongst the provinces, but we’re going to fix that.”

Well, as I said, better late than never. They’re finally—six years later—talking about doing something to fix it. They’ve been dragging their heels on interprovincial trade barriers and removing them and adding all that value to Ontario’s economy since 2018. So yesterday’s announcement and the legislation we’re talking about today is long overdue. But it’s unfortunate, as this government has billions of dollars still sitting on the table. Why did we have to wait for this crisis to do anything about it?

Speaker, we know this government likes to brand itself as a champion of red tape reduction. In fact, they have a minister with that title. But let’s be honest: They’ve made more noise and spent way more money—about a billion dollars actually—getting beer in corner stores than they have talked about eliminating regulations that hurt businesses and workers. What’s most frustrating is not just the inaction; it’s the contrast between the Premier’s rhetoric and his record. He said he would “get the ball rolling.” But what we’ve seen instead is a government that’s great at kicking the can down the road.

Let me be crystal clear: We support reducing interprovincial trade barriers. In fact, back in September 2023, at the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs, when discussing a bill with the Minister of Red Tape Reduction—he criticized opposition members like myself for not offering up suggestions. So I actually took that opportunity to remind him that just a few moments earlier, I had said to “reduce barriers to interprovincial trade, which has been talked about extensively by experts in the economy. There’s lots of work to do there—things like reducing trucking requirements between borders so that we have standards etc.”

So we have been talking about this for a few years, as an opposition. I’m glad the government is talking about it today. It is good for workers, it’s good for investment, and it’s good for economic growth across Ontario and across Canada, no doubt. But the time for self-congratulations and symbolic gestures is long past. We need more than announcements. We need more than headlines. We need more than press conferences.

The government is boasting about becoming the first government in Canada to unconditionally remove all 23 of the PSEs, the party-specific exceptions—those are under the CFTA, the Canadian Free Trade Agreement—and that they’re going to maintain no trade-related exceptions against other provinces, territories or the federal government. Yet, the throne speech this week said, “Goods produced and services provided in other provinces and territories will be treated the same in Ontario, provided other provinces and territories do the same.” And schedule

5 of this bill says that Ontario will only do this, provide this reciprocity, if other provinces do it. So that's one of the questions I have about this bill. Making a loud announcement that you're going to be the first in Canada to remove all trade barriers but then in the fine print saying that you'll only do it if other provinces do the same is inconsistent and it's not leadership.

For far too long, these barriers between provinces have hurt businesses. They've slowed growth, and they have made it harder for workers to move around this country and take their skills where they're needed. A tradesperson certified in Ontario should be able to work in Saskatchewan without red tape; a tradesperson in Saskatchewan should be able to work in Ontario without red tape. I completely agree.

We slow down truck drivers as they cross provincial borders. Recently, I heard that truck drivers are—it's the most common job for men in Canada, so we want those truck drivers to be as productive and efficient as they can be, so they can earn a good living and get home to their families safely. We need to make sure we do everything we can to make their work easier. When our provinces are disconnected and not on the same page, it is those businesses, those workers, those truck drivers, those families who pay the price.

There's no doubt that interprovincial trade reform does hold real promise. If done right, it can benefit workers, and it can benefit consumers and businesses. This morning, the minister talked about how the trade barriers could add 14.5% to the cost of goods and services paid for by the people here in Ontario. It makes me wonder why they didn't tackle this sooner, when they spent months—a couple of years—talking about affordability and blaming the federal government for all of their problems. People in Ontario could have really benefited from a 14% reduction, if that's what it is. Again, I know the government is quoting a study, and I respect the work of that study, but it's an estimate of what that's costing Ontario families. So, yes, we do want to remove them. We want to make it easier for businesses and for professionals to move around, to move across borders, and provide small businesses with new opportunities and new markets.

In this economy, we know that we need to be flexible, we need to be adaptable and we need to be mobile, and moving across provincial lines is no longer a luxury; it's a necessity. The idea that a professional trained and certified in BC should have to start from scratch to practise in Ontario isn't just inefficient; it is wasteful. By removing these barriers, we do empower those workers to follow opportunities and go to the communities where they can maximize their skills and maximize their earnings.

We know there are regions in northern Ontario where there's a severe shortage of mental health professionals. We know that small towns in eastern Ontario wait months for locum physicians and specialized care. If we can fast-track certification for these professionals who are qualified and willing to help, it's not only sound policy; it's a moral imperative.

So what do we do to allow those nurses and physicians to practise across provincial lines more easily? We know we've got lots of medical professionals here in this Legislature now who have great ideas about that. It's absolutely a step in the right direction, and this bill does talk about doing that and adding more professions to the ability to move around without having to get recertified, so that's a positive thing. If this bill means that the 2.5 million people in Ontario who don't have a family doctor might get some help from that, that's certainly welcome.

In my riding of Don Valley West, almost one in three people don't have a family doctor—it's kind of shocking, in midtown Toronto. You think of it as a place where there are lots of doctors. And there are lots of doctors, but there are also a lot of people without a family doctor.

So we are certainly encouraged. We want to make sure that people have family doctors and all the other health care practitioners who serve and support people's well-being and good health—it's those lab technicians, physiotherapists, paramedics and mental health counsellors. They can be held back by this red tape and the administrative burden, the paperwork they have to fill out just to be able to practise in a different province from their home province, where they were initially licensed.

Speaker, let's move on to alcohol. This government likes to talk a lot about alcohol. Direct-to-consumer alcohol sales across provinces is long overdue, so that's great news. A Quebecer should certainly be able to order an Ontario craft beer, just as the people of Ontario should be able to order a bottle of wine from Nova Scotia or the Okanagan. We know we have incredible producers across this province, across this country—small, local businesses that are driving innovation and quality and generating tourism for their communities. We know that they want the chance and they're happy about the chance—they deserve the chance—to expand beyond the provincial borders without facing an outdated regulatory maze.

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But we know it's about more than just convenience and getting your favourite BC wine shipped to your house. It's about fairness. It's about opportunity and fair markets. We don't want an Ontario distiller to be locked out of the market of Alberta or New Brunswick, or international companies to have easier access to those markets than we do. Why do we want a winery in Prince Edward county to face higher costs and regulatory hoops to sell their product in Quebec than it does to export to Europe? Just last night, one of the wine industry executives was talking about this—how it's easier for them to ship to Sweden than it is across borders in this country. Certainly, that is a welcome change, and we are supportive of that.

Speaker, the principle of internal trade reform is part of the problem, but we also know that execution is really important too. We know that this government has had some challenges on that front.

Does anyone have one of those blue licence plates that you can't read in the dark? That was an implementation problem, for sure.

Then, of course, we've got the \$2.2-billion Therme spa. We know that there are all kinds of problems related to that. We've been talking about that for a couple of years now—first of all, giving away a piece of beautiful, prime Ontario real estate, one of the most valuable pieces of real estate in the country, to a foreign-owned spa. That's an execution problem.

We know that this bill opens up risks that relate to things like that.

Deregulation: We want to make sure there are still sufficient guardrails for things to be done effectively and safely and that there's accountability. We don't want to let positive steps and principle obscure the fundamental flaw in practice. We want to make sure that we get this right. So while I certainly appreciate the government's focus on getting this done soon, by July 1, we also want to make sure that we get it done right. We have to make sure that we do this with clarity and some caution, because we know that legislation can have unintended consequences. We do want to make sure that we think about those risks and that we're prepared to manage them. We don't want to make sure that we're focusing just on the headlines and not on actual outcomes.

We do know that in 2015—one of the ministers spoke about this this morning—Ontario took a meaningful step to reduce interprovincial trade barriers when the Liberal government of the day lifted restrictions on individuals bringing alcohol into the province for personal use. It was a simple change but a powerful one. It's actually not against the law for you to drive across the Quebec border and buy a bottle of wine and bring it back—if it's personal use, that's okay. For decades, Prohibition-era rules had prevented Canadians from doing just that. Under Premier Kathleen Wynne, Ontario recognized that those rules no longer made sense—not for consumers, not for producers, and not for a country that claimed to believe in free trade. By aligning with federal reforms and choosing co-operation over control, Ontario demonstrated that modernization doesn't have to be chaotic or partisan; it can be responsible, deliberate and fair, and it can be rooted in the basic idea that Canadians should be able to trade across our borders and support local businesses.

This bill does signal a change in direction from this government, which, as I say, has been talking about this for many years but has done little. Speaker, it is better late than never.

On to my third saying: "Let's not make promises you can't keep."

Let's look at what's actually in this bill. The bill is going to enact new trade and labour mobility provisions. It's updating credentialization timelines. It's enabling interprovincial alcohol sales. It introduces a new symbolic recognition day, which my colleague here just referenced earlier. Those are positive steps.

When we frame this as a pro-trade, pro-domestic-business bill, the legislation does appear to be harmonizing standards and supporting local purchasing. Well, in substance, there is some risk to deregulation. It creates all kinds of legal protections for the crown and expansive

regulatory override powers. So those need to be thought about. We need to make sure that, again, we don't have unintended consequences from this bill.

We know that there's the promise of opening up trade, adding to our GDP and, of course, as I say, we welcome that. But we don't want to do that at the expense of safety, of the environment. My colleague, this morning, talked about the fresh water in Lake Ontario. We want to make sure that we do this and keep those safeties and protections in place.

The \$200 billion that is being thrown around—and I mentioned that number—we're not sure how much that will actually create for Ontario. That's another question I have about this legislation. I don't think the government has actually made a commitment. So, again, while they're spending \$2.2 billion—it made a very strong commitment to Therme, to give them \$2.2 billion, to give them a 95-year lease—there has been actually no commitment made yet about how much this will add to the Ontario economy.

Speaker, that does again make me question: Are we really going to get something done from this bill, or is it just about the headline? Certainly, it has caught headlines. The Premier has been talking about it. The ministers have been talking about it. "This is the first bill that we're going to introduce." It's getting lots of headlines. But we need to make sure there's some substance.

The government has yet to make a promise about what this will deliver. I'm not sure if that's because they don't know how much it will deliver—or maybe they know that it's going to be less than they would like, and so it is just a headline and not a substantial change. But if you aren't able to provide a number, we're not going to know if this bill has actually been successful. We won't know if the truck drivers are actually making more money and getting home sooner if we don't actually put in place some metrics to track those things.

Speaker, I also want to talk about the promise related to doing business with our own government. Small businesses are talking about the challenge that they have with getting contracts from this government. Government procurement is about \$30 billion, and the government has talked about how there is an opportunity to buy Ontario, buy local and, certainly, again, we welcome that. That's just as important as removing interprovincial trade barriers, especially when you're talking about \$30 billion in government procurement—if it's \$200 billion being added to GDP in Canada, we could estimate that it could be about \$40 billion, \$50 billion to the economy here in Ontario. So \$30 billion in procurement—that's pretty close to that number. So \$30 billion in procurement—we should be taking a very close look at that.

We have a government, right now, that's being less than transparent about what this will actually do for business here in Ontario, for small businesses. We've got a government that's talking about doing more business with Ontario companies. They have ripped up one contract, we believe. I don't think we've seen the shredded paper, but I'll trust them on that.

We also still have existing companies here in Ontario—Ontario companies employing Ontario workers, Ontario engineers from Waterloo and other universities—that have a contract right now with this government. There was a story in the *Toronto Star* a few months ago about how they are being basically excluded from bidding on the next phase of work because the government is requiring that Amazon Web Services is the underlying platform for the service. That takes them out of the running. So it's a multi-million dollar contract that an Ontario company could lose.

Certainly, the government is talking about how they're going to be helping Ontario businesses, how Ontario businesses will benefit from this bill, but there's a lot that we could be doing that is tangible, right now, to be helping Ontario businesses that are struggling.

There's another Ontario business that is a world leader in MRI technology. I think it's some kind of portable MRI equipment. They've been quite open, in the last number of years, about how it has been easier for them to sell into the US than to their own province. Recently, they hit the news again because they're facing some financial challenges. Because it's so difficult for them to sell in Ontario, they turned to the US market.

A number of years ago, they wrote a piece, I think it was, in the *Globe and Mail* about how, in Ontario, to sell their MRI machine. If they wanted to sell 10 machines, they had to sell to 10 different hospitals. That's 10 different decisions, 10 different testing processes—it's very cumbersome—whereas they can go to the US and sell to one corporation and sell 10, 20, 30 machines. Now, I'm not saying that the US system is better—far from it—but in terms of actually being able to support Ontario businesses, our current system is failing them; it's letting them down.

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This company—because, as I say, they're now relying on the US—given what's going on in the US, their US financiers are saying, “Look, we can't help you anymore. There's just too much uncertainty being created by all of this tariff situation.” And so, they're about to lose their financing, which means they could actually go under, and that would be a real loss, Speaker. A company, built here in Ontario by Ontario workers, by Ontario engineers, creating leading-edge technology, driving innovation in their field—we want those kinds of companies to succeed. We want to make sure that their product can get into Ontario hospitals and other Canadian hospitals. We need to make sure that we're not only looking at these kinds of interprovincial trade barriers but those other kinds of barriers that are preventing companies like that from succeeding.

So, Speaker, back to promises: As I've said, there really is no assessment from the government yet about what the economic impact from this bill will be. There is no modelling that we've seen. There are no projections. There's no sector-by-sector analysis of who stands to gain and who stands to lose. We know that that's really what has kept these interprovincial trade barriers in place. Each

province has a responsibility for its various sectors, its businesses, and they put legislation in place to protect those businesses, to support them and to support their workers, licensing, registration and all of those things. Those rules were put there to actually protect workers here. If we remove those barriers—which, again, is the right thing to do in the long run, but there could be some short-term pain for those people and we need to understand what those impacts are, what sectors will be affected and what we can do to support them during this transition period.

Some of these rules, Speaker, are kind of invisible. We don't really hear about them, or we haven't been hearing about them until recently when people are calling in to talk shows and other things, talking about the challenge they're having. Again, there is some mutual recognition for workers today amongst the various professions—for example, social workers from most provinces can work here in Ontario simply by filling out a whole bunch of paperwork and applications, but again that does create a barrier. It does create some burden for them before they decide that they actually might want to move to Ontario.

Speaker, there have been many, many studies about this topic. As I said, the one that gets quoted a lot says that there's \$200 billion—that one was done by the Macdonald-Laurier Institute. Others only show about \$50 billion to \$100 billion. Again, Speaker, it really would be helpful for the government to provide an estimate of what they think this legislation will deliver to the economy here in Ontario. Do we know what those impacts, the short-term pain we might feel, that workers might feel from the deregulation or the opening up of borders and removing trade barriers—what that could do to various professions and what the impact will be on that?

We also know, Speaker, that people estimate the cost of this at about, as I've said, 8% to 22%. The government has talked about it being about a 14% hit to goods and services. So, let's just do some serious work and make sure we understand that so we can see—if we put this all in place, is it actually going to reduce the cost of things for the people here in Ontario? Let's make sure we can measure our success.

There's a lot of potential in this bill, Speaker, but there's also a lot of implications. We need to make sure that the structure of our provincial certification systems still works. We want to make sure that the government is prudent with these things so that we don't create any unsafe conditions or unsafe workplaces as people begin to streamline the regulations. We want to make sure that we mitigate any of those risks, and so I would like to hear more from the government on that and how they plan to do that, how they plan to address those risks.

Speaker, the other thing that's interesting about this bill is that—we do need consultation. I don't think we know yet whether or not this bill will go to committee. I hope it will, and I hope there will be sufficient chance for consultations from various marketing boards, regulators, licensing bodies, because those are the people who really know how these changes will affect them, and I expect

most of them will be open to this because they know the potential, but they will also have lots of questions. There will be lots of considerations that they will want to think about as they are asked to make the changes.

Speaker, those changes could take months. I know the government is talking about Canada Day, and I think that's great, to have an aggressive target, an ambitious goal, but is it feasible? Is it feasible for all of these licensing bodies to harmonize or mutually recognize all of these various licensing standards and regulations? And it will take some resources. There are people who work in these organizations who are doing jobs today. Now, they've got to look at unravelling a whole bunch of, again, regulations and rules, and that's going to take a fair bit of work. So we need to make sure that they're supported so they can do that work while also continuing to do their fiduciary responsibilities around actually getting people licensed to practise.

One of the other questions that I have is about, again, the mutual recognition. I talked about this, that the bill says that we only do this if other provinces do the same. So what is that process going to look like? How will the province of Ontario engage with every other province and territory in the country by July 1 to make sure that all of these barriers are removed? As I said, the government actually added a couple of these exceptions since 2021. Now, they're going to work on removing all 23 of them, they say. But again, this has been talked about for many, many decades. One of the reasons it is such a challenge is because it is quite complex; there are many, many licensing bodies for all the various professions. So those professions need to be right at the table, very involved in how this is going to roll out, again, to make sure that we don't have any unintended consequences.

For example, food safety: Maybe if we're transporting things today within Ontario, that's all good. We've got rules around that, we know that the travel times will be sufficient to keep the food safe. Well, what if something is travelling now from BC to Ontario? Are we going to need a new standard? You just need to make sure that we think about those things.

The timeline, again, July 1, it's ambitious. The labour mobility part of the bill is one that will, as I say, help workers to be able to move across the country more easily. But I don't think that all of those regulatory bodies that govern all those professions have been consulted yet, and are they up for the commitment to get this done by July 1? So I think, again, we need to make sure that we give them sufficient time to do the work they need to make sure that this is done right. The absence of a timeline and a plan—it's not just an administrative oversight. We really need to make sure that this bill gets the outcomes that we want.

Another big question around this bill is the legal immunity, as I mentioned. The bill creates a sweeping legal immunity. The only types of claims that can be made against the results from this bill are judicial review or constitutional claims. That means that only in the narrowest of circumstances can the actions of this bill be challenged. I understand that, again, it's a big statement to make. It's

a sweeping statement to make, and it might be done with all good faith; I'm certainly not questioning that. I just want to make sure, if there are unintended consequences, as I've talked about, that we have an opportunity to revisit these things. We know that this government can reverse course when necessary. We've been talking about that a lot as it relates to a few things recently. So that might be necessary, the need to be open to that.

The other thing is workers. Again, as I've mentioned, there are workers who might be negatively impacted by this here in Ontario, because that is why some of these rules were put in place in the first place. The bill doesn't, today, provide for any provisions to protect workers, again, who might face unemployment because of changes or transitions from this bill. When supply chains shift and workforces shift, there could be unintended consequences for the people in those professions. The impact isn't just economic; it can be personal. It can affect people's families, their livelihoods. It can affect their businesses. So we want to make sure there is some transition fund for this. I know soon the government—we don't know when yet, but the government will be putting out a budget. I hope that they consider that as they look at the budget, how to make sure that there is some transition funding for workers who might be negatively affected by this, because, as I say, that's one of the reasons these barriers have been in place: to protect workers and workers' jobs.

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As we look to unroll and unravel all of these regulations, I think we need to recognize that there could be workers who are negatively affected, and we need to think about how we're going to support them, whether that's with retraining strategies, whether it's with moving allowances, whether it's with extended benefits for unemployment. Again, we know that people want to be working. They want to have a paycheque from their chosen profession, but we also need to be prepared that there could be some impacts from this.

Speaker, I also want to talk about the dairy and poultry sectors. These supply-managed industries are foundational to rural Ontario. Just a few weeks ago, I was at the AGM for the Egg Farmers of Ontario, and they had a really great presentation from a professor, I think from the University of Waterloo, who has studied supply management systems here in Canada and around the world. I know that they can be attacked often by economists saying that they drive up prices, but I also know that whenever I'm at one of those receptions here in the Legislature, every politician who is speaking at those events says the same thing: "We are all on the same page when it comes to supply management. We all support it." Well, Speaker, that may be true, and again, that's maybe up for discussion now, because in this bill, it talks about removing every exception. Supply management is one of those exceptions today.

I have a whole bunch of questions about that sector. What are we actually talking about here as it relates to our agricultural sector, the supply-managed industries here in Ontario and across the country? Have the marketing boards been consulted? Have rural communities been

engaged? There was a noticeable absence from them in the press release on this bill. They did not come out. They were silent on it.

So certainly, I'm sure they are looking at this. I'm sure they're wondering about the implications. They may be having conversations that we don't yet know about with the Minister of Agriculture. But I certainly hope that we will hear something from this government about that, because again, it's just a big question mark for me. I'm not suggesting one solution or another; I'm just saying that right now, it is one of those 23 exceptions, and this government has said they're lifting all 23 exceptions. That's a really big unanswered question for me as it relates to this bill, and I'm sure farmers and agricultural communities across this province are wondering the same thing.

We want to make sure, as I say, that we are absolutely creating more free trade here in Canada and Ontario, because we know that that will benefit, in the long run, Ontario workers and the Canadian economy and so certainly we are supportive of that. But let's talk about this consultation again, because, as I say, I'm not sure if the marketing boards were consulted or not prior to this legislation coming out. As I say, I know that the government has, in the past, put out a bill and then gotten some feedback and reversed course. So kudos to them; as we've talked about, when they got caught, they have reversed course. And there have been a few other times when it wasn't so much about getting caught; they just said, "Oh, we didn't hear that feedback. We'll make a change." I accept that and I applaud them in those situations. I say that here in this House when that happens, and I will do that again here. But it is something where we do need be careful.

As I said, at the AGM a couple of weeks ago with the egg farmers, they talked about how without supply management, there can be surpluses and then shortages of these critical food products. He went through a very interesting history of the egg farming sector, and I won't be able to recount it all but suffice to say that—I'll try to summarize—in the 1920s and 1930s, it was often women and children in the farms who were collecting eggs from the chickens in the barn. It was kind of a little bit of extra income, in addition to the other main crop or herd that the farm had. Then when the war came, people began to rely more and more on eggs because they were a cheap source of protein. They actually started becoming in very high demand, and so prices went way up. So then, of course, that means that all of a sudden, prices are up and people go, "Oh, I'm going to produce eggs." Then the supply gets bigger, and now all of a sudden the price falls because there's more supply than you need.

So that was actually kind of one of the basic reasons for why supply management was introduced. I think, generally speaking, it has been a good thing. I know a lot of economists say, "Oh, we should just get rid of it; it drives up prices for consumers." But I think this recent situation in the US where—if you were in the US recently or you've read stories, you know that there were grocery stores with no eggs on the shelves. You couldn't actually buy eggs.

They were importing them from—I forget the country now, but they were importing them from somewhere—because there were no eggs because of the avian flu.

So in the US, where they have got a very different system, these large, large producers end up buying small farms when a farmer retires or if the family can't afford to pass it on to the next generation. And then those farms are more susceptible, those large farms are more susceptible when they get avian flu. The whole heard is—or the whole flock? I want it right—the flock is wiped out and then we have no eggs.

So this is where, yes, we might pay a little bit more for eggs in Canada, eggs in Ontario. Maybe it's 10% more, maybe sometimes it's a little more. But at the end of the day, I think what people around the world have observed—experts according to this professor—is that that system has actually worked very well for us, because it has basically helped to manage the supply and demand for eggs, and it has provided stability in pricing and in supply. So, yes, we pay a bit more, maybe all the time, like 5% or 10% more than you might pay in the US, as an example, but that means we have a very strong, safe, reliable supply of things like eggs, which are of course a very important part of many people's grocery lists.

I'm not weighing in, per se. I just want to make sure that there is sufficient discussion with the stakeholders around this. Is it the intention of the government to remove that particular exception, or are they going to pull back on it? It's just something worth considering, and we need to have a very fulsome discussion about it.

We know that the lack of consultation can be very harmful. We know that the greenbelt scandal was a case of that where there was no consultation. The government said they weren't going to do it, then they said they would do it and then they got caught—\$8 billion was going to be made by some developers, so they backed off. That was a case of lack of consultation. All of the experts had said we didn't need to go into the greenbelt to meet our housing supply, and yet this government decided to do that. They didn't consult with the experts. They didn't take the advice of the experts and it got them into trouble.

We don't want that to happen here. This crisis is really important. It is very worrying. It's worrying people. We know people all across the country, whether they are small businesses, big businesses, manufacturers, farmers—they are all already feeling the impacts of this. The uncertainty is distressing. They are seeing increased prices.

We have got a business park in my riding in Don Valley West called Leaside Business Park Association, and a number of the companies in there are very worried. They're worried about what trade tariffs are doing to their cost, because even if they buy things from the US that aren't being tariffed, those companies might be buying things from China. So the US tariffs on the Chinese imports are affecting the cost of their supplies and materials right now as they cross into the border to Canada. It's driving their prices up. They know that they can't pass all of that on to consumers, because of course

consumers are worried, too, and they're pulling back on spending.

This is where we can get into a really, really dangerous cycle here of economic spin and downturn, and we really don't want that to happen. Making sure that we do this right, making sure that we open up markets in this country and do it safely is absolutely the right thing to do, but we do need to do it safely.

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Speaker, I also want to just talk a little bit about economic justice. We've got workers in this province who face barriers to moving outside of the province to work, and we have the same for workers coming into this province. This labour mobility does actually create great opportunity for workers who are looking to either move here to Ontario, or workers who might be looking to move to Alberta because they can't afford a house here in Ontario. So the economic justice that this bill creates is positive, but we also have to think about the harm it can do to Ontario.

Ontario workers are already leaving this province in droves because of the high cost of housing. We know that other provinces, despite the same interest rates—we all have got the same interest rates—are getting housing built faster than we are, and we know that that has led to young people leaving this province. Now we're going to make it even easier for them to move, because we're going to remove these labour mobility restrictions. That does create some opportunity for them, but it can also be a further drain to Ontario's economy, and we need to be watching out for that.

Speaker, I've talked a little bit about small businesses. Small businesses hope, certainly, that they will benefit from this legislation, but we also know that small businesses have not had the support they need from this government. We know that the small business tax rate is high; we're the second highest in the country. So while we're talking about removing barriers that can help small businesses, there's a lot more we need to do. I've talked about that before. I've talked about the \$18,000 that that would put back into the pockets of small businesses in this province.

And they need meaningful tax relief, Speaker. They've said it again and again. The latest CFIB study shows that consumer confidence among small businesses is worse than even during the 2008 recession, worse than during COVID and worse than during 9/11. Those were all very, very hard times for all businesses in Canada, in particular for small businesses who rely on local customers. When customers aren't shopping, their businesses suffer. So those businesses really have been demanding—asking for a tax cut that would really help them weather the storm.

There were storms before. COVID was a big storm. Many of them are still suffering from that. They're still paying off debt from COVID. And now we've got US tariffs, which are also causing them a lot of angst.

Speaker, the bill that I introduced last year—Bill 195, Cutting Taxes on Small Businesses Act—is really something that I think the government needs to reconsider

as they look at what they can do to support small businesses, especially during this time of economic uncertainty and threats from the US.

I'm going to quote a small business in my riding who serves youth and students with coding. They do coding; it's called Code Ninjas. Emma, the owner, said to me, "The economic challenges we've faced have been difficult, especially for small businesses. We've seen enrolment drop as families struggle with rising costs, and our expenses have gone up. Despite that, we haven't raised fees because we know our families are hurting"—so the small business tax cut bill would help them "stay open, keep our staff employed, and continue serving our community."

Speaker, if these small businesses close, opening up trade across the country isn't going to help them. They won't be here to benefit from it. We need to make sure they are supported now, that they stay strong. A tax cut is absolutely something that would help them do that.

You could pay for that tax cut for four to five years, Speaker, with the \$2.2 billion that the government is spending on Therme. That money is leaving the country. Yes, it might employ a few workers, but that's not the reason they did the Therme deal—let's be frank. We don't actually know why they did the Therme deal. We know that it was an under-qualified company. We know that it was underfinanced. We do know that there were friends of the Premier's who worked there. We also know that there were over a dozen Canadian/Ontario companies who actually talked about submitting a proposal for that, so there are absolutely great companies here that would benefit from the opportunity to reinvigorate Ontario Place, and absolutely that \$2.2 billion could be better spent. We need to be talking about that now.

This bill will deliver some benefit for sure, but it's going to take some time. We know that it's going to be at least July 1 before any of this happens. That's a few months away. We know that many of these things—as the bill says, it could be July 1 or later, depending on when various measures are able to be implemented. So we know it's going to take some time; I know the government knows that, too. And we know there are businesses hurting now that could benefit from opportunities to redo the Ontario Place deal; also to take advantage of the \$30 billion in spend this government spends every year.

Speaker, we can't live on press releases alone. We know that these kinds of measures will cost money. We know that certification harmonization takes coordination. We know that workers who are displaced must be supported and that the bodies who oversee all of these things need to be funded. Many of them work with limited numbers of staff, and we know that, looking at all of this, it is very important work. They know it is important work, but it's going to take some resources, and the government should make sure they fund that.

I will summarize again. Consultation: We need to make sure there is sufficient consultation. The stakes are too high here for shortcuts and we know that shortcuts do not lead to good policy. We know that the people of this

province—its workers, its families, its small businesses—deserve a policy process that is open, that is consultative, that allows them to air their concerns and make sure risks are addressed. And so I certainly hope that, as this bill moves along in the House, there is sufficient time for that consultation and opportunity to improve the bill.

We are not here to obstruct. We are here to strengthen. We want to help the government. We want to support them in this plan. We want to make sure that we do harmonize standards, that we open up markets, that we reduce duplication, because right now, the only thing we're really trading between is press releases and promises. We need to make sure we can deliver on those promises. Again, Speaker, we know every cloud has a silver lining. We know that we need to make sure we don't overpromise and underdeliver. Don't make promises you can't keep. It's been six and a half years, seven years since this government came into power. We know they've been talking about that for all this time, so we want to make sure that they get the work done to get this bill right and we want to make sure that everyone has an opportunity to speak to that.

We know that when we go into committees, quite often there are many organizations who submit a request to come and share their views on the bill, but there isn't sufficient time or opportunity. Speaker, this is a big one. This bill can have a big, big impact. It needs more than a day of committee hearings to get it right. I'm sure every marketing board in the province could spend a day talking to the government about what needs to be done here before that exception is removed. We know all of the various colleges, whether they are about social workers or medical technicians, lab technicians, psychologists—there are dozens of colleges that will be affected by this. They need to have sufficient time to be consulted and to provide their expert input. We want this government to listen to expert advice. Experts are the people who drive innovation, who drive improvements in how we do things. We ask them to give their advice; if we don't listen to it, we're just wasting their time or wasting our time. These people are the experts, and we need to make sure they provide that meaningful advice so that we don't have any unintended consequences from this bill.

Speaker, making something easier, quicker, isn't automatically better. We need to do this carefully, and I'm not trying to sound like we want to put up barriers—we absolutely want to remove these barriers—but we need to make sure we do it with caution and we do it with care, so we don't make mistakes we will regret later. We don't want to put people's safety at work; we don't want worker's rights to be put in jeopardy. We want to maintain our environment. We know that we rely on it. We know that we need drinking water—as I said, my colleague talked about it earlier today—we know that we need clean air to breathe. We know that we have regulations around those things, and we need to make sure that they are protected.

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So let's not legislate by slogan. Let's not just break down barriers in speeches; let's make sure we do it in substance. We will be here to support the government in that, to talk about the plan. We urge the government and this House to listen to all voices, to make sure that those who are impacted by this bill have the opportunity to speak about the impacts of this bill.

We want to make sure that we don't have such sweeping changes that we don't have a clear vision or understanding of what the consequences will be. This government has been having some challenges in getting the basics right. Look, we had Bill 124, which caused a whole bunch of harm in our health care system, which we are still recovering from. We have had legislation that relates to environmental protections, that people are now worried about the loss of farmland. The farmers who are going to be affected by these exceptions need farmland to grow our food, to raise their crops, and we need to make sure that those things are protected.

We need to make sure that these decisions are thoughtful. We need to make sure that we are focused on the right outcomes, that we have measurable outcomes and that we don't have unintended consequences.

Let's make sure that we rise to the challenge and that this bill, on this first reading, goes to committee, gets some feedback, and we get a bill that we can be proud of, that we can go out with confidence—a bill that will help our Ontario economy thrive, that will help the Canadian economy, that will ensure fairness, that will protect workers and uphold the high standards that Ontarians expect. Because we certainly want to find the balance between progress and fairness, between opportunity and accountability, and that's part of our job as legislators. I want to make sure that we are all doing that together because we want Canada to be stronger, we want Ontario to be stronger and we want the workers and families in Ontario to be stronger coming out of this legislation than they were before, because we know it will help build up our economy, and that will be good for our workers and families.

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

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: Thank you to the member from Don Valley West for her remarks this afternoon. I was listening intently to it, specifically when she spoke about alcohol. I know that, like anyone, she likely is a fan of having more choice and convenience, not just for herself but also for her constituents. As part of this legislation, we are working to make it easier for Ontarians to purchase alcohol directly from producers across Canada. So this will be better for consumers and businesses across Ontario and this great country.

I know the member talked about Prohibition rules. You also talked about better later than never—is what you noted. So I ask you this, to the member of Don Valley West: Will you join us in strengthening the Ontario economy and vote in support of this Bill 2?

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Thank you to the member from Newmarket–Aurora for that question. I think that I was pretty clear about my support for removing interprovincial trade barriers. I talked about that at SCOFEA in 2023, so I'm absolutely in support of doing that. I believe there will be great value added to our economy here locally in Ontario and across the country.

But as I've said, there are still a number of questions that I have about this bill; that's what debate is for. So I look forward to hearing responses from the government, from the official opposition, from other members here who debate this bill. As I said, there are still a lot of questions that remain, so I look forward to seeing those responses, and I will decide at that time.

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

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: It was wonderful to listen to the member from Don Valley West. We're debating this bill less than 24 hours after receiving it, and I commend you for all the information that you spoke about today. It was wonderful.

Most of all, when I was going through some of the notes here, I noticed that we should be listening to our unions and our union labour partners. They've obviously gone through negotiations for an even playing field to make sure they have safe working conditions.

I'm just wondering how the third party plans on supporting labour unions in the midst of the government introducing a bill that could be bulldozing workers' protections and some of the acts that unions have worked for over the years to make sure they have safe working conditions.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Yes, and thank you to—oh, my goodness, I'm going to get it wrong now.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: St. Catharines.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Thank you to the member from St. Catharines for the question. It's a very good question.

As I said, making sure that workers' rights are protected is one of the things that we need to watch out for and look out for.

I know that just this morning there was some talk about why Ontario already doesn't have some reciprocity with the province of Quebec as it relates to labour mobility. It's exactly for that reason, because of the unions, and their concerns about people who might live across the border from Ottawa and then come into Ontario to work.

So, absolutely, they are one of the important bodies. All the unions need to be consulted to make sure we, as I say, don't have any unintended consequences for workers who, as you say, have fought hard for the protections. I absolutely support that discussion.

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

MPP Stephanie Smyth: I echo my colleague's sentiment on Bill 2. Bill 2 gives the government significant discretion to recognize other provinces' standards. I wonder, should Ontarians have clarity on how those decisions are made?

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Thank you to the new member from Toronto–St. Paul's. It's great to have you here sitting beside me. Thank you for the question.

Yes, absolutely we need to have clarity. There are a number of things that, as I say, right now the government is kind of saying two different things. They are saying, "Absolutely, we're going to be the first province to remove all 23 exceptions that we have to the Canadian Free Trade Agreement," and yet in the bill, it says in the fine print, "If they do the same." So, we need to be very clear about what the impacts of these changes are. If we remove an exception, are we doing it simultaneously? Is there going to be a transition period? How will that be negotiated with all of the provinces as it relates to all of these regulations, rules, licensing agreements etc.?

Lots of discussions still to have. This bill did grab the headlines but now we need to do the hard work to make sure we get it right.

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

Mr. Aris Babikian: The Liberals and NDP always made it difficult for businesses to operate and invest in Ontario. In contrast, our government, since we took office, we have cut 550 pieces of red tape, which created over one million jobs in Ontario. Those measures that cut red tape were voted against by the opposition.

Why does the opposition always want to make it difficult for businesses to establish operations, invest in Ontario, and create more jobs for Ontarians?

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Thank you to the member for the question. My mother taught me to never say "always" and never say "never." So when you say "always" done something, I think that's an inappropriate thing to say about this side of the House.

I would say that we absolutely support business. We have business people standing right here. We have business people in all parties. Absolutely, we support business.

As I said in my remarks, this government added exceptions to the Canadian Free Trade Agreement, so that was not helping businesses. This government has been not supporting small businesses who've been asking for tax relief for years. Many of them have closed their doors. Ontario's closure in small businesses went up under this government.

So I absolutely support small business. The Ontario Chamber of Commerce, the CFIB and the Tourism Industry Association of Ontario supported my bill to cut small taxes. I'm sorry that you didn't support it, so you don't always support businesses either.

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

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Ms. Peggy Sattler: I want to commend the member for Don Valley West on her lead speech on this bill. I had the opportunity to speak to the bill earlier this afternoon and in my remarks I talked about the difference of opinion that exists between economists about the actual economic gains that the removal of free trade barriers will provide.

It's not just progressive economists like Jim Stanford and Armine Yalnizyan; it's also CIBC Economics and others who are quite skeptical about the claims that the government has made about the economic potential of the removal of these barriers. I'd be interested in the member's opinion about that issue.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Thank you to the member from London West. I had the chance to listen to some of your remarks, and I think you raise a very good point.

Again, economics is a study that is both art and science, so it is not surprising that economists from across the spectrum have varying views on this topic. As I mentioned in my remarks, some estimates are as low as \$50 billion. The highest one, which is the one the government is talking about, is \$200 billion, but we don't really know if that number is a good, solid number, especially given that that estimate was developed before this tariff situation, which has disrupted our supply chains. The whole model has actually changed, and we have not had an update to these estimates.

What I will say is that things like reducing some administrative burden for a social worker to have to fill out fewer forms do create less of a barrier for that worker, but it might not actually create any new GDP in the economy.

So I completely agree with you: lots to debate. That's why I'd like this government to come up with an estimate.

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

Hon. Nina Tangri: It is great to be here this afternoon with everyone. First, I just want to begin by saying that I have had the absolute honour, as the Associate Minister of Small Business, to meet with driven and highly motivated business owners and entrepreneurs of every kind and background across Ontario. I've sat down with business owners in such sectors as financial services, agriculture, tech, tourism and hospitality. The undeniable drive to succeed is at the core of every business owner and entrepreneur that I meet. There is ambition to grow, the desire to hire employees and the motivation to make a difference in their communities.

Two consistent topics of discussion are access to new markets and the need for less red tape. Well, Speaker, we have been working hard on reducing red tape since 2018. We've lowered taxes, reduced electricity costs and cut red tape, actions that are enabling an estimated \$8 billion in cost savings and support for Ontario employers in 2025. Of that, about \$3.7 billion impacts small businesses.

Our government is committed to creating the right conditions for Ontario businesses to succeed. Every day I am in awe of the spirit of entrepreneurship across our province. That spirit extends to Ontario's 500,000 small business owners. That's 98% of all businesses in the province, which employ around 2.5 million Ontarians.

We're also proudly home to the largest concentration of fast-growing, privately held start-ups in Canada. These business owners and entrepreneurs are the backbone of our communities, creating jobs, fostering innovation and contributing to the economic fabric of our province.

But with uncertainty and economic instability, we understand how tough things are. President Trump's tariffs have undermined the long-standing trading relationship between Canada and the United States. Unfair tariffs and economic uncertainty created by the US are affecting the global marketplace and creating real challenges for small businesses and families across our province. It's a wake-up call, a reminder that we must never again allow ourselves to be so reliant on any one trading partner, especially when that reliance can be weaponized against our businesses, our workers and our economy.

But one thing is clear: The Ontario government is standing firm in our support of businesses, and we're working on a Team Canada approach with the federal government and each province and territory to make Ontario and our nation stronger, because it's the small business owners, from that young entrepreneur getting their idea to the marketplace to a family business that is passed from one generation to the next—they are the ones who will help this province weather the storm and achieve economic prosperity.

That is why, to reduce our dependency on the US, Canada must take bold action to cut red tape and tear down internal trade barriers, so that we can bolster free trade and labour. That mobility needs to happen within our country. With the Protect Ontario Through Free Trade Within Canada Act and related initiatives, I'm pleased to say Ontario is leading the nation in removing internal trade barriers. We are the first government to unconditionally remove every single party-specific exception under the Canadian Free Trade Agreement.

We know that internal trade barriers can add up to 14.5% to the cost of goods and services that consumers purchase. The economic benefits of removing internal trade barriers are clear: It will help lower costs, boost productivity and see Canada's GDP grow by up to \$200 billion annually.

As the largest player in interprovincial trade, Ontario is leading the country with our legislation, and we hope more provinces and territories will follow our lead. This act is a proactive step to strengthen Ontario's economy from within by opening domestic markets and removing unnecessary and outdated trade barriers, creating new opportunities for Ontario companies and workers right across Canada, and giving consumers—all 35 million of them—more choices for made-in-Canada products.

The Protect Ontario Through Free Trade Within Canada Act would, if passed, encourage consumers and businesses to choose Ontario and Canadian-made products, and shine a spotlight on the importance of buying local that will help us build a stronger economy.

The proposed act would also declare the final Friday of every June as Buy Ontario, Buy Canadian Day. Establishing a Buy Ontario, Buy Canadian Day, held annually, will help promote local businesses, workers and even more. It's more than just a symbolic gesture; it's a call to action. This will help encourage consumers to leverage their purchasing power to support local businesses and workers through programs such as Ontario Wood, VQA wines,

Foodland Ontario and Ontario Made. The goal is to support our local businesses and showcase the incredible products and services made right here in Ontario.

I want to specifically mention a standout homegrown initiative. The Ontario Made program builds consumer awareness of products made in Ontario and promotes business-to-business purchases among Ontario-based companies.

In July 2020, the Canadian Manufacturing and Exporters launched the Ontario Made program pilot, with support from the Ontario Together Fund, to help promote Ontario's manufacturing sector during the pandemic. The program encourages manufacturers and producers to register and promote their products on the supportontariomade.ca site and use the Ontario Made logo to identify locally made items. As of January 2025, close to 5,000 large and small manufacturers have registered over 80,400 products and obtained the Ontario Made designation. This includes cars, cosmetics, pharmaceuticals, technology, food, clothing and much more.

Dennis Darby, who is the president and CEO of Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters, stated, "This legislation is a historic step toward making the movement of goods and people freer across Canada."

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Each year, Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters holds the Ontario Made Awards to celebrate manufacturers and retailers dedicated to helping consumers and businesses make informed choices, while promoting the sale and visibility of Ontario-made products. I want to mention last year's Ontario Made Award winners who integrated the Ontario Made logo onto their products.

Thiru's Gourmet from Waterloo makes flavourful, healthy foods and is committed to quality, sustainability and community with bold, easy-to-prepare products that bring the joy of home cooking to Canadian families. K-Line Insulators, based in Scarborough, is a manufacturer specializing in high-performance polymer composite insulators and components for the electrical grid. And Woodstock's Cheesy Cow Company has a wide selection of locally sourced and international artisan cheeses along with an array of preserves, craft sauces, confections, quality meats and charcuterie. These companies proudly use the Ontario logo. These are the companies who are working for us, and it's our duty to help ensure that their businesses survive and flourish through this economic headwind blowing in from the south.

When we buy local, we create jobs. When we buy Canadian, we invest in ourselves. This is more than just trade; it's about identity, resilience and pride. This act, if passed, would help reinforce this government's strong track record of building a more resilient economy by investing in Ontario-made goods and services to support our local economy, keep Ontario strong and provide more choice for consumers. Julie Kwiecinski, the director of provincial affairs for the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, stated that they applaud our government "for introducing bold legislation that responds

to several" of their asks and "helps to build Canadian economic independence."

Reducing internal trade barriers can increase competition, reduce costs and allow for more efficient distribution of goods and services. Right now, the rules governing alcohol sales between provinces are outdated. They were designed for a different era. In many cases, Ontario producers face far more red tape to sell to Canadian customers than they do for international exports. With this legislation, we're working to change that.

Interjections.

Hon. Nina Tangri: About time, right?

When we remove barriers, consumers will benefit from increased choice and faster access to goods and services. For example, allowing direct-to-consumer alcohol sales would give Ontarians access to a wider selection of domestic products, while helping those producers grow their operations. Ontario has world-class wineries, breweries and cideries from Niagara region to Prince Edward County and beyond, and most of them are small businesses. Our producers make some of the finest beverages in the world. Let's give them the freedom to share that with all Canadians.

Allowing direct-to-consumer sales with reciprocating provinces and territories helps reduce barriers to allow these local companies to expand their reach beyond the Ontario consumer base and meaningfully grow their operations across the country, while also expanding consumer choice. As we make Ontario the most competitive economy in the G7, a direct-to-consumer sales model for alcohol would help protect Ontario businesses, communities and workers by removing internal trade barriers, investing in our workforce and strengthening our supply chains for long-term growth and resilience.

Speaker, amid global economic uncertainty, it is more important than ever to tear down trade barriers and eliminate redundant regulatory processes within Canada. That is why we will work closely with other provinces and territories to ensure the mutual recognition of goods, services and registered workers across the country. Unnecessary red tape and duplicative assessment processes that drive up costs for workers, businesses and consumers happen right across this country. If a good meets the relevant standard and has received the corresponding approval in one province, it shouldn't have to go through an additional costly, duplicate regulatory assessment in another.

As announced yesterday by Premier Ford, Ontario is signing memorandums of understanding with New Brunswick and Nova Scotia in support of landmark mutual recognition arrangements that will bolster interprovincial trade. These arrangements seek to reciprocally remove barriers to trade across these provinces through mutual recognition, such that a good, service or registered worker that is acceptable for sale, use or work in one province is acceptable in the other. This collaboration will enhance economic resilience, create job opportunities and set a precedent for other jurisdictions to follow.

One example of this is high-visibility safety apparel that includes construction vests, bibs or coveralls. The apparel is designed to make the wearer more visible in low-light conditions where visibility is crucial for safety. Currently, certain rules in provinces and territories have slight variations despite the clothing being similar in appearance and performance. My colleague the Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development hears this often on jobsites, but going forward, if a safety vest meets the standard in one of our partner provinces, it should meet the standards in Ontario as well, without being subject to an additional regulatory burden that drives up costs.

For example, if coveralls for technicians or construction workers cost \$200 apiece and a team of 20 from New Brunswick wants to come work on a project in Ontario, they would have to repurchase the coveralls to meet Ontario's standards, costing them upwards of \$4,000. It doesn't make much sense that a high-visibility construction vest that meets Nova Scotia's safety standards would need to be retested and repurchased to meet Ontario's. By removing unnecessary barriers that exist between provinces, we will ensure true free trade in Canada that will grow our economy and create more good-paying jobs.

One thing is clear, Speaker: The Ontario government is standing firm in support of our businesses. We are working on a Team Canada approach with the federal government and each province and territory to make Ontario and our nation stronger. With the Protect Ontario through Free Trade within Canada Act, Ontario is advancing internal trade, deepening economic integration across Canada and strengthening the economy by reducing barriers that limit the movement of goods, services and workers across Canada.

With US tariff threats and global trade uncertainty escalating, Ontario is leading Canadian provinces and territories in driving a new approach to internal trade to support businesses and workers across the country.

Ontario is Canada's largest interprovincial trader. With over \$300 billion in cross-Canada trade in 2023, the province is fuelling job creation and driving economic growth across Canada. A more open and integrated Canadian market will allow Ontario businesses to scale across Canada and expand opportunities for certified workers to work across provincial and territorial borders without unnecessary costs or delays.

Speaker, we as a government need to take action. Greater internal trade between our provinces and territories has been in the works for many years, but now is the time to act. Entrepreneurs and small businesses play a critical role in our communities by creating jobs and contributing new ideas and resources to the economy. This legislation is a game-changer for small businesses. We owe the half a million small businesses owners, their employees, families and communities every opportunity to succeed.

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This act will help ensure our province's dreamers and innovators who take the risk to start up or scale up a business feel supported and empowered. With help

through the Protect Ontario Through Free Trade Within Canada Act, Ontario small business owners will weather the storm and achieve economic prosperity.

I urge all members of this House to support this bill, to support our businesses, support people, support families, support Ontarians. Let's all work together to protect Ontario. Let's work together to build a stronger, more unified Canada.

Thank you, Speaker, and I look forward to the questions.

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

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: I want to congratulate the member on her re-election. I want to congratulate everyone in the House on their election. To those celebrating, happy Easter this weekend.

One thing that we hear sometimes in the chamber is a little bit of revisionist history. Many of us here are part of the class of 2018, and over the last seven years, we've seen a lot of favouring of a certain type of business over others. When I say a type of business, I mean foreign international businesses over small business owners. We've seen privatization. Look at Staples; look at Ontario Place. Is the government willing to now think about and reflect on how this has not been a good direction, especially in light of what's been happening recently south of the border?

Hon. Nina Tangri: I do want to thank the member from Humber River-Black Creek, and congratulations on your re-election as well. It is great to be back here in the House with members that have come back and to the new members as well.

I just want to go back to a piece of legislation when I was the Minister of Small Business and Red Tape Reduction. The Building Ontario Businesses Initiative: This was something that we brought about during the pandemic. Through that initiative, it was giving Ontario companies priority in procuring with Ontario through Supply Ontario. I'm very proud of that piece of legislation, but in that legislation, we had to respect our free trade agreements. And through those free trade agreements, we were seeing that sometimes we had to allow other companies that were global to procure and bid on certain projects.

Right now, with the addition of many things that are happening, this government stands forward in making sure that we work together, we reduce those barriers from the other provinces and territories, we work together as Team Canada so that we can procure from within as much as we possibly can and build a stronger, better Ontario.

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

Ms. Lee Fairclough: I applaud the intentions of Bill 2 to increase interprovincial trade in Canada, and I'm supportive of its intent. As my MPP colleague from Don Valley West mentioned earlier, it's better late than never. I did hear some hope in your remarks that this will be reciprocated, so I'll be interested to see what the plan is.

My one concern, having spoken to many in my own riding, is: Will we lose our own workforce? We've been

left vulnerable given the state of housing, increasing rents, access to health care. Will this actually make it easier for them—which they're talking about—to go and settle elsewhere in the country? What is the plan to make sure that we don't lose them in this arrangement and we actually address some of those important basics?

Hon. Nina Tangri: Congratulations to the member from Etobicoke–Lakeshore, and welcome.

I hear what you're saying. This legislation is not a piece of legislation brought by one ministry. It's a multi-ministry approach, it's an all-of-government approach. We've been listening to businesses, we've been listening to communities. Of course, with the uncertainty that we're seeing today, this has allowed the opportunity for us to break down those barriers with other provinces, things that we've been listening to many of our labour force for many, many years, if not decades, where they come from another province and the accreditation process has been so cumbersome that they choose not to come. This will help break down many of those barriers and help get them accredited and able to work super quickly here so we can get them working.

We're working very hard with the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing to get housing built much faster, breaking down the permitting process to make that much faster, so we can get shovels in the ground and build that housing necessary for that great workforce that's already here and—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Brian Saunderson): Question? The member from Windsor–Tecumseh.

Mr. Andrew Dowie: Thanks, Speaker—well done.

And to Ms. Tangri: Thank you. This is an incredible set of remarks and I wanted to, just, through you, Speaker—we know that, now more than ever, we need to increase interprovincial trade. Certainly, as long as I have been alive, we've talked about improving it but these exceptions have been there through and through, and ultimately preventing us from being able to make sales from our local markets to others that are within the country. We want to strengthen the economy here in Ontario and all throughout Canada.

So I want to thank the minister and the members that have spoken to the bill so far for their statements highlighting what an important moment in our history we're at right now, because we're on the cusp of receiving something great.

I want to ask a little bit more about the direct-to-consumer sales model that was mentioned. Could the associate minister explain what it is, and how it will help the Ontario economy and Ontario's consumers?

Hon. Nina Tangri: I do want to congratulate the member from Windsor–Tecumseh for coming back here, for the great work that he's not only doing today but the great work he has done previously. I've seen it first-hand and visited Windsor–Tecumseh with him, and being a border city, I think, has significant challenges when you're bordering the United States.

One thing we heard very often, especially from our wineries, breweries and cideries, was how difficult it was

to sell their products to other provinces and for people within Ontario to purchase from other provinces. They often stated that it's easier doing trade with other countries than it is from within Canada. So this piece of legislation helps remove some of those barriers, and it is reciprocal. So if Nova Scotia has a great product that we would like to purchase—direct alcohol sales—we can also direct sell to their consumers there too.

I'll give an example of British Columbia: their wine, our wine; they want to purchase ours, we would like to purchase theirs. This will help us to each purchase it directly without the barriers and the extra costs that they have to face.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Brian Saunderson): The member from London West?

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: London North Centre.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Brian Saunderson): Sorry; London North Centre.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Thank you, Speaker. I would like to thank the Associate Minister of Small Business for her presentation on Bill 2.

According to the CFIB, four in five small businesses report being impacted by these tariffs. They are worried about rising costs, a weakened dollar, lower demand, pricing difficulties. They're really concerned about economic uncertainty at this time, whether it's operational costs, pricing challenges, cash-flow issues.

In Bill 2, there's no particular mention of small business which is a concern. You've mentioned in this bill there's the direct-to-consumer sales model, but will there be direct-to-business supports? Will we see a new Ontario Business Costs Rebate Program from this government?

Hon. Nina Tangri: Congratulations again on your victory to come back to the House.

This bill speaks to all businesses in Ontario and it's small businesses that sometimes have the biggest challenges which is why this legislation is so important, because it's often the small businesses, when they're buying products from other provinces—we'll take an example of the vest that I spoke about earlier. Sometimes it's a smaller construction company that perhaps can't absorb that extra \$4,000, so it's really going to benefit them directly because they were able to bring those construction workers with those vests that they're already using in another province, to be able to utilize that here. And that works across the board.

So when we talk about businesses, this really, really—more so than probably the larger businesses—will support our smaller businesses because it will remove a lot of those barriers that they have been facing constantly. We have fantastic products here in Ontario that they really do want to sell to other provinces, but it has been difficult. So now with this reciprocal, mutual agreement, we can make sure we can send our great products all across Canada.

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The Acting Speaker (Mr. Brian Saunderson): One quick question.

MPP Andrea Hazell: To the member across the floor: Thank you for your re-election. It's great to see you back in the House. Love the green outfit.

I want to talk about small businesses. Our relation is based off of small businesses. I was having a hard time understanding this part of the bill that is going to really show true support for small businesses. Small businesses are the backbone of this economy. They pay their employees; their employees take care of their families. When I speak to so many small businesses across Scarborough, they're having a hard time. Can you help me to understand which part of the bill is actually going to impact our small businesses so I can go back in Scarborough and give them some confidence?

Hon. Nina Tangri: Thank you, and congratulations on your re-election.

The member opposite and I, prior to her coming to Queen's Park, I visited previously throughout the pandemic, where we visited and met with many of her constituents and small businesses. I remember that of all the things that they were challenged with, it was having good Internet, so that's something—since being elected, having an Internet service across all parts of our province is unbelievably important to keep people connected.

Let's add to that. The things that we're seeing in this bill really help all of our businesses, but more so our small businesses. Again, they cannot always absorb those extra costs of importing goods from another province, from workers coming across from another province, or getting their goods to another province. They often have to reduce their prices for those other consumers in other provinces to absorb that extra cost that they then have to pay going forward.

We want to make sure that our businesses, especially our small businesses—so it's not just one part of this bill; it's the entire bill. This bill really—

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

MPP Alexa Gilmour: When the member from Spadina–Fort York asked me why I decided to stand for election, I told him that all my life I'd wanted to tell stories that make a difference. "Tell us about that," he said. But fellow members, do not think that my storytelling is mere entertainment. Because in his CBC Massey lectures, "The Truth About Stories," Indigenous storyteller Thomas King quotes Leslie Silko and says, "Don't be fooled ... stories are all we have to ward off illness, death ... you don't have anything if you don't have the stories."

As a country involved in Indigenous settler truth-telling, we know what happens when stories are stolen through genocidal policies or retold in death-dealing ways. Each of us comes to Queen's Park with our story, and our constituents' stories entrusted to us. We are changed by their stories, and I hope that we are changed by the stories we share with one another in the House. Today I will share my story, and the story of the much-loved riding of Parkdale–High Park, where I grew up. But before that story is told, we must acknowledge a more ancient story.

Mes amis, nous qui sommes réunis aujourd'hui reconnaissons la nature sacrée de cette terre sur laquelle vivent des humains depuis 15 000 ans. Elle est le territoire des Premières Nations des Hurons-Wendats et des Pétuns, ainsi que des Sénécas, et plus récemment des Mississaugas de la rivière Credit.

Le territoire faisait l'objet du traité de la ceinture wampum faisant référence au concept « d'un bol avec une seule cuillère », entente entre la Confédération iroquoise et les Ojibwés et les nations alliées convenant de partager et préserver pacifiquement les ressources sur tout le pourtour des Grands Lacs. Aujourd'hui, le lieu de rassemblement de Toronto est encore l'endroit où habitent de nombreux autochtones de l'Île de la Tortue. Nous sommes reconnaissants d'avoir l'occasion de travailler au sein de la communauté de ce territoire.

I want to thank my French Immersion school teachers from Howard Park Public School for the gift of fluency. I also want to acknowledge my special-ed teacher, M^{me} Pinard, who took this failing student from nightly tears of frustration to being on the Humberstone Collegiate honour roll. Teachers, school administrators, school board trustees, you were there when I needed you most, and here I am now, amplifying your call for publicly funded education that leaves no student—no student—behind.

I know what life is like without publicly funded schools, social programming and infrastructure. For three years, until the age of five, I lived in a rural village in India. Imagine: no running water, no electricity, no schools. My parents believed in the Christian story that says we find our lives, we find our meaning, our purpose when we lay it down in service for others. For three years, they were part of an organization that built wells and schools and electricity lines in Maliwada and other small villages. Returning to Canada, my eyes were trained to see the global disparity and recognize it here too.

We can tell a story of scarcity, that only those with bootstraps to pull on will win at life, or we can tell a truer story: that abundance in community is found in the paradox of giving your life away in service for the common good. That is what I believe we in this House are called to do.

Believing that stories were transformational, I began working life as an actor. The arts, you see, are a passion of mine, and most of my family makes their living in music, theatre and visual arts. But as I began working in film and television, I realized that some producers aimed not to change lives with their stories, but to sell beer during the commercials. I had a vocational crisis, which led me into ministry in the United Church of Canada.

It was just at that same moment that the Rev. Dr. Cheri DiNovo was taking her seat in this House, tabling important legislation that would protect our 2SLGBTQ siblings. I carry on the Parkdale–High Park human rights legacy started by Cheri, with whom I share a dedicated passion to 2SLGBTQ justice, and my trail-blazing predecessor, Bhutika Karpoche, the first Tibetan elected to office in all of North America.

Just last week, Speaker, I met with the Regional Tibetan Youth Congress, and I am proud to be the MPP for the largest Tibetan community outside of Tibet and its surrounding areas right in our riding. I'm thrilled to announce that we are bringing back the Ontario Parliamentary Friends of Tibet Summer Youth Program to Queen's Park, a program begun by the former MPP Karpoche.

Now, Parkdale is sometimes called the landing strip, a home for many newly arrived residents—Caribbean, Indian, Vietnamese, Filipino, Tamil, Chinese, Hungarian, Roma. West of Parkdale is Roncesvalles, the home to many Polish friends and family. Still further west of that is Bloor West, where many Ukrainians first settled.

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Parkdale–High Park is also the birthplace of the very first business improvement area in all of Canada. Bloor West Village BIA was established in 1970. Local businesses and BIAs continue to play an essential role in shaping the vibrant communities in our riding.

Every resident with their stories is part of a long tradition of human beings finding their home at the place where the Humber River and Lake Ontario kiss. It's the place the Indigenous people call Kabechenong, which means "leave the canoe and go back," because the river was a portage route that took you from Lake Ontario to Lake Simcoe. Just a little further up that river, the place that the settlers called Baby Point was a cut of land that breaks into the river like a knife. Diago was the local Indigenous name for that spot.

I only know a few Indigenous words so I was very excited to learn that the Ontario Legislature offers training to its new MPPs in Canada's official languages, and I requested to have instruction in Anishinaabemowin, the local Indigenous language from my riding. Sadly, we do not yet pay for MPPs to learn Indigenous languages—note the word "yet."

My constituent Michael Thunderbird, co-chair of the NDP Indigenous Peoples committee recently asked what truth and reconciliation mean to me. It means that there is a debt to be paid; reconciliation and reparations to be made."

On one side of my family, we are sixth-generation settlers. My great-great-grandfather—to my knowledge, the only other politician in our family ever—was actually an MP under Sir Wilfrid Laurier and then Senator for York. He lived on Annette Street in the riding that I now serve and was a wonderful grandfather to my grandmother. She spoke of his kindness and his generosity, but he governed at a time when women did not have the right to vote. What would he make of me, a woman speaking before you now?

He governed during the time of the Indian Act and the Chinese head tax, and as we, my friends here, spill ink into Hansards that will be judged by our descendants, whose stories are still missing from these halls? Whose stories are still missing from these halls?

When I hear the government say it will burn through the Ring of Fire territory, expediting processes that take

decades into months, I hear the echoes of colonialism. Without full, free, prior informed consent, without consideration of generations to come, without the rights of the earth and its creatures at the forefront, we dishonour the trust placed in us and we risk telling another Canadian horror story.

There are many voices that I would like to bring to you today from over the years, but the ones that cry out the most today to me are my unhoused friends. During my time as the minister at Windermere United and St. Luke's United, which was across the street from the Allen Gardens encampment, I became known as the reverend with a passion for housing.

I did memorials for people we lost way too soon to addiction, suicide, murder. One of those stories was Nelson's. Nelson lived in a two-bedroom apartment in Swansea near Bloor West until he had a work injury, and when he couldn't pay the rent, he lived in his car and then in my living room and then in a shelter. When his car was repossessed, he lost his low-paying job. I missed a call from Nelson one day, and when I called him back, there was no answer. Ten days later, his son was in my office, and we were choosing which of his teddy bears to put in his father's coffin. I never got to do Nelson's house blessing, but I did his funeral.

Years later I would find myself working with members of the Black community—I want to lift up the Crisis in Our City Network and the African Canadian Collective—and we were trying to find shelter for the African refugees from Toronto when the shelters were full to them, and the Canadian-Ontario Housing Benefit was all dried up. Some of them waited weeks, sleeping on our sidewalks. Some of them died.

I'm here, Mr. Speaker, with the stories of my constituents, to make sure that our government prioritizes the vulnerable and shores up the safety net through which my friends fell through.

My own family, especially our five children, have taught me so much about autism, childhood trauma, family shelters, children's aid, foster care and adoption. And I stand here today for my stay-at-home spouse, Adrian, and for every parent who has filled in the holes of our social safety net with their own safety plans, home-schooling curriculums and suicide watches. I'm proud to fight for the families who have hung on by the skin of their teeth, waiting months—sometimes years—for the mental health and the special-needs support to come, and who have been forced to innovate when that help never came.

Parkdale–High Park has shown me what a community means. During the pandemic, we launched the Neighbours Helping Neighbours mutual aid network. We fed thousands, delivered masks, offered care. We created programs like Stone Soup, founded by Windermere United and the residents of the Swansea Mews Toronto Community Housing, where local businesses gave generously to neighbours in need. These are a testament to the spirit of the people in Parkdale–High Park.

In the east end of the riding, organizations like Bryan's Place, Parkdale Community Food Bank, the West Neigh-

bourhood centre and My Brother's Keeper do life-saving work. Parkdale Queen West runs the only supervised consumption site in Toronto that was not ordered closed.

As someone who has lost friends to the toxic drug crisis and was the minister at a church that offered harm reduction, I add my voices with those who say we must listen to the experts, not ideology. We must stop criminalizing the addicted, the unhoused and the poor.

I want to share one final story with you about a small church of about 35 on a Sunday, a brave family of Roma human rights activists and an octogenarian rabble-rouser by the name of Mary Jo Leddy, who pulled us all together. Mary Jo is a companion of the Order of Canada for her work with refugees at Romero House. One day she called me, saying, "Please, Alexa, I have a family in need of sanctuary." Now, church sanctuary is an ancient tradition. It's not protected by law; it was practised in the Middle Ages. It was practised during Nazi Germany when the Jews were being persecuted. It's being practised in the United States of America right now as Christians shelter the un-statused migrants in their churches, refusing to surrender them to the authorities. And Mary Jo asked my church to take in a young couple with their five-year-old child—human rights advocates from Eastern Europe who had survived an assassination attempt by neo-Nazis. A negligent lawyer had mishandled their case and, like so many others, they were forced and facing deportation and death.

And here's what the little church of Windermere United in Bloor West did: Fifty congregants stared down the Harper government, knowing they risked \$50,000 in fines and two years in jail. The Pusumas lived in my office, and I moved into the toddler room for a year and a half. They were cared for and they were fed by the people of Parkdale–High Park. And when the government changed, finally, the family who had fought for the rights of others was granted freedom and asylum in Canada. It was a powerful reminder, such a powerful reminder of the ways in which our laws must be tested and changed when they uphold unjust systems, instead of giving life to people.

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Members, this is but a snapshot of my beloved Parkdale–High Park. A place of courage, resilience, community. A place of parklands and homes and businesses, where humans and deer and coyotes and savannah oaks and community gardens nourish body and soul.

I want to take a moment to thank the people and teams who were writers in the last few months of this story. To the people of Parkdale–High Park, who have put your trust in me and gave me your vote, thank you. To our riding association, led by Jason Wagar, and our campaign team, led by Francis Kung: Thank you for our tireless work together. To my dedicated staff of Marshelle Woodward, Sarah Frame, Tsomo Chime and Matthew Gur: Thank you for your belief and your brilliance. To my family, my beloved spouse Adrian, our children, Bailey, Casandra, Terri, Jacob and Quinton: You have my heart. And to Ian and Brenda—my parents—and Ramona, Luise, Ellory and

Sasha, your unwavering support has lifted me to this place here.

To my colleagues, congratulations on you all winning your seats. To our new Speaker, who made herstory, may we do our work well for the people in this House and beyond. And let us remember this: The stories we choose to tell in this House, the ones we choose to hear and ignore, will build the future. Let them be stories of healing justice, inclusive hope and mutual prosperity. Thank you. Merci. Meegwetch.

Applause.

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

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: Alors, tout d'abord, je voudrais bien vous remercier pour votre discours aujourd'hui et félicitations pour votre élection.

J'ai bien remarqué que vous parlez français, donc c'est pour ça que je voudrais bien demander une question en français, peut-être une histoire en français. Pourquoi avez-vous appris le français? Est-ce qu'il y avait quelque chose dans votre vie, ou avez-vous pensé que c'est la culture ou la langue, je ne sais pas quoi? Peut-être pouvez-vous nous donner une histoire dans la langue française?

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Merci pour la question. Oui, moi, quand j'avais deux ans, mes parents ont travaillé en Belgique et moi, j'étais dans une garderie, une crèche—une petite, petite, petite enfant. Et là, j'ai appris le français pour la première fois. Après ça, on a traversé en Inde et j'ai habité là pour trois ans. Quand je suis retournée ici au Canada, mes parents ont décidé de mettre leurs deux petites filles en français immersion, et c'est comme ça que je suis ici et que je parle français avec vous maintenant.

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

Mr. Peter Tabuns: My congratulations to the new member on an excellent inaugural speech.

You talked about housing and as you are well aware, there are a variety of areas where one can focus on housing. Could you speak a bit to us about where you want to focus when we discuss the whole issue of housing in this Legislature?

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Thank you for that question. Yes, we need a full spectrum of housing, but my own expertise and experience of the last few years has been to work part-time as a church minister, part-time in a community engagement firm that was working with the city of Toronto on shelters, on deeply affordable housing, on safe consumption sites—and so what I've seen is a real lack in the affordable housing sector.

I also see a tremendous opportunity in that sector for the government to get involved; get people working; building housing of all kinds, but in particular the deeply affordable housing. We have a housing crisis like no other. We're seeing people more and more who can't afford to pay their rent, who are now becoming unhoused. There was a woman in my riding who I met and she said, "I can't believe this. I've grown up here my whole life, and I'm being moved out because they've just raised my rent to \$2,000."

So affordable housing, yes, but also real rent control is key, and housing that is the rental stock is another piece of that. Thank you for that.

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

Interjection: Don Valley North

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Brian Saunderson): Sorry—Don Valley North.

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: Thank you very much, Speaker. I would first like to say congratulations to the honourable member from Parkdale–High Park.

You mentioned how you came from the United Church and that you were a minister there. I wonder if you could elaborate a little bit more about how you'll take your skills of ministering to your spiritual flock, now taking those skills to minister to your constituents, and how you're going to serve them similarly.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: That's a lovely question. When I was an actor and I became a minister, I thought, "Oh, shoot, all these skills that I built up for years of knowing where your light is and how to speak to the camera and in front of people are all gone." I discovered that on Sunday morning, I was doing that every single time—making stories, making meaning.

So I similarly wonder, how do these gifts and skills translate? But then I was at the doors, and I'm sure each and every one of you knows: It's a mini pastoral moment, where they hand you their heartbreaks and their hopes. You take it in and you're roldexing through your mind, "What's mine to do? How can I help? How can I bring this and change this and help this individual?"

So it feels to me like an extension of the work—of the community organizing work, of the pastoral piece, making sure that peoples' needs are cared for. I think what's really important that I'm taking with this is that it takes more than grocery carts to feed the soul. There is the human piece that we need as well.

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

Mr. Anthony Leardi: I want to congratulate the member for taking her chair in this assembly, and we look forward to having constructive debate and discussion with her.

I tried to do a Google search of the grandmother's grandfather to find out who this ancestor of the member was, and maybe she would like to elaborate on this. Who was this politician who served under Wilfrid Laurier? I'd be interested in knowing who that was and what that person was about.

If she can't offer us that information, then I invite her to offer us information about the Stone Soup Network.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: You've given me such a dilemma. I'll let you all look up Stone Soup Network because that's more easily found.

Senator Archibald Campbell—his parents came over from Scotland, and he settled first north of the city and eventually made his way to what is now the Junction. He owned the Campbell flour mill, which was instrumental—small businesses are, you know—in making that neigh-

bourhood thrive because now farmers didn't have to bring their grains all the way down to get it milled and put on trains at Union, they could do it up at the Junction.

It was that call that led him into Parliament, and as I said, he served at the time of Sir Wilfrid Laurier and was very much a part of the railroads. I think that was part of his portfolio at one point. Then he became a senator and passed away, I believe—don't quote me on this—around 1913.

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

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MPP Robin Lennox: Thank you for that. That was wonderful.

You mentioned that your church offered harm reduction services. Could you speak a little bit about what that experience was like for your congregants and what it meant to your community, for you to take that on within your church?

MPP Alexa Gilmour: The church that I'm speaking of now is not in my riding; it's downtown. It's Saint Luke's United. It wasn't so much about taking it on as being part of our community.

On a Sunday morning, you'd see individuals who were from the old families who had started that church, you'd see newcomers, you'd see refugees, you'd see people who were staying in the shelters nearby come and join us. As part of our faith, we have been told to care for our neighbours and to love them, and to love them means to meet them where they are, to keep them alive and to, whenever possible, reduce harm. The harm reduction was done in partnership with PASAN, who would come every time we had a meal program. Those are folks with lived experience who are hired to work with individuals. Quite often, they would work with individuals and help move them towards treatment. But what many of us know is that when you're not ready for treatment, you need the harm reduction, and when you're ready for treatment, then you can move into those spaces.

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

Ms. Lee Fairclough: To the member who just spoke, congratulations. That was a wonderful inaugural speech, and what a wonderful storyteller you are. I could see why you've chosen the profession that you had prior to this one.

At the beginning of your speech, you mentioned education, both from your personal experiences—it sounds like you've had some experiences with your children as well. I just wondered if you wanted to make a few comments about what more you think we could be doing on education in this province.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Thank you for that.

While we are investing more and more in education, when you look at the cost of inflation, we're seeing that we're actually \$1,500 per child less per year. I'm seeing it. I've got five children. Last year, three teachers were on stress leave. And my one son has been waiting over a year for an assessment that he needs. So, from personal experience, I'm seeing it all the time.

In talking to those who are in the education field and the ECEs and others, we're seeing that people are burning out at a high rate and that what we need most is the funding to support this system and our kids.

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

Mr. Ted Hsu: It's a pleasure to have the opportunity today to make my first speech in this Parliament and to address Bill 2, the bill on interprovincial trade.

I believe this bill is a very good step, and I'm happy to see that the government of Ontario is moving on this. I think there has been a consensus in this country that interprovincial trade barriers have been a drag on our economy, and we only need to look south of the border for an example. In the United States Constitution, there's something called the commerce clause. It has been interpreted in the United States to allow free trade between the states. Over history, it has contributed to the strength of the US economy. Things are a bit different in Canada. Our Constitution has been interpreted a bit differently. But we know that we could make some changes to allow freer trade between the provinces and, as a result, increase the size of our gross domestic product.

The election platform for the Ontario Liberal Party called for reducing trade barriers, so we've been thinking about this for a while. I ran for the leadership of the party a couple of years ago, and I spoke about increasing productivity and competitiveness, and one way of doing that was to spur competition and innovation. One way of doing that would be to allow more interprovincial trade, but it has been hard to do that because there are winners and losers. Even if overall, in the whole, we gain from trade, there are winners and losers. So it's hard to get different provinces to co-operate because there are winners and losers.

Now we have President Donald Trump, south of the border, threatening tariffs on Canada, threatening our sovereignty, and we need to diversify our markets, our trading partners. We should be taking advantage—I think the government knows this—of this crisis to do something that we know is important to do. So what better way to diversify our trading partners than to start at home?

There are some really good examples of barriers that we should be trying to get rid of. For example, differences in product labelling or packaging requirements between provinces, rules that prevent skilled workers from easily going to work in another province, regulations covering trucking—so a truck going from, say, Manitoba through Ontario, Quebec to New Brunswick, might be subject to different regulations in each province. In fact, there was a paper, the authors of which are Manucha and Tombe, in 2024 which said that these regulations add something like 8% to freight costs. So you can imagine the provinces of Ontario looking to trade more with each other—if we're going to trade in goods, we have to move them across the country, and we don't want unnecessary costs in transportation.

We also have barriers from insufficient infrastructure. In Canada, we have a big country, so we've got to move

goods, people, energy, information—we have to move a lot of different things long distances, and so that is also a barrier to interprovincial trade.

We also have to move things around the world. It actually matters to people in Ontario, whether it's auto workers or farmers, what kind of port facilities we have in Montreal and Halifax, and whether we can access them easily and efficiently. There are also administrative barriers—approval processes, licensing, different forms in different provinces. All of these add costs, and if we could reduce those costs, we would reduce some of the friction in the Canadian economy and help ourselves be more productive.

The point of free trade between provinces is not only to facilitate trade; it's not only to help people buy Canadian, which we've heard a lot about in the Legislature; but it's also to spur productivity growth through competition and innovation. Productivity is really important—it means how much workers can make or do per hour of work, and it depends on things like tools and training and machinery. It's what allows you, as a worker, to ask for a higher salary. It's really, in the long term, the main thing that determines prosperity. So it's a really important thing. If we want to respond to Donald Trump and go out and build relationships around the world with other economic partners, we need productivity. And we need to be competitive. We need to enter new markets, for example.

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We don't want to be just a fortress. I want to digress a little bit by commenting on this government's fortress strategy that they've talked about. I hope I can get the Premier's ear and get him to change that strategy. I'll just mention that federal Conservative leader Pierre Poilievre has also talked about a fortress. I remember he came to Kingston and spoke about "Fortress Canada" in a rally. A fortress strategy, it's basically—I just want to say that I think it's wrong. It sounds like we want to wall ourselves in. The US is isolating itself. We don't want to isolate ourselves, as well. I think a fortress mentality and strategy is the wrong strategy for creating a place for Ontario in a new world order. I also think it's the wrong way to deal with Donald Trump, somebody you just cannot trust. You don't want him on the inside of the tent or the fortress; you want him on the outside. We should be reaching out around the world. What other place than Ontario has such a diverse population with global connections around the world? We should be diversifying away from our dependence on trade with the United States. Removing interprovincial trade barriers, the experts tell us, will also increase overseas trade. This is all part of a strategy to protect our economy, to protect the people of Ontario by reaching out overseas and not creating a fortress.

More trade between the provinces will have big economic benefits.

I want to stop a little bit and criticize this government's communications. We're talking about the economy, about cost of living, about fighting Donald Trump and making Canada stronger. We need to use hard numbers, and we

can be honest with voters; we don't need to skew them for political benefit.

I just want to point a couple of things out. In the press release from the Ontario government yesterday, it says, "Trade barriers within Canada cost the economy up to \$200 billion each year...." That number comes from a Macdonald-Laurier Institute paper in 2022 by Manucha and Tombe. But in that same paper, the authors don't just say \$200 billion; they say it's between \$110 billion and \$200 billion. I think we can be honest with people and just say, "I'm uncertain about what the overall economic benefit is going to be. It's going to be large, but there is an uncertainty, and it depends on what kind of models you use." I have talked with economists about these things, and they say, "Well, it depends on what kind of models you use. It's very sensitive to the essentials. We just know it's a pretty decent number." So we don't need to pick the biggest number. We don't need to exaggerate. We're talking about the economy here, so we can be honest with voters and talk about the real numbers and the real uncertainties.

There's another point in the press release from yesterday. It says, "These barriers also increase the cost of goods and services Ontario families rely on by up to 14.5%...." If you go back to the original paper that comes from, the authors, Albrecht and Tombe, 2016—the actual figure that they say in the paper is, "Well, it's between 7.8% and 14.5%, the increase in the cost of goods and services." The authors also say, "Well, for goods it's less than 5%, but it's a lot more for services."

So we can be honest with voters. We don't have to paint things as rosy as possible. Reducing trade barriers is a good thing to do. Let's just use the real numbers and the real uncertainty in the numbers.

I want to move on and talk about what freeing inter-provincial trade means to the average person. So let me talk about grocery bills, because the cost of living is probably—and everybody knows, because everybody got elected here—one of the most important things on the minds of voters. I'm sure we all had lots of conversations about the cost of living during the election campaign.

A big component of the cost of living that the average person feels is the cost of groceries. A little more than a year ago, federal Industry Minister François-Philippe Champagne said that he was reaching out, he was making phone calls to international grocery chains—in particular, ones in Europe—in the hopes that they would open up shop in Canada and spur more competition. Then Canada's Competition Bureau released a report two years ago that said that Loblaw's and Metro and Empire, which is Sobeys, controlled the grocery sector. This Competition Bureau report said that solutions needed to be generated to bring grocery prices in check. They suggested that there be more competition. That's why Minister Champagne was making phone calls.

Well, here's how we could get more competition for Loblaw's. I remember when I was in Europe a while ago, in France, seeing a couple of low-price grocery chains. I don't know how to pronounce them, but one of them was

Lidl and one of them was Aldi. I believe they came from Germany. These were rumoured to be amongst the chains that Minister Champagne was inviting to Canada. The problem is that interprovincial trade barriers make it harder to attract competitors to Canada. These guys from Europe know how to handle different languages. They have a lot of different languages in Europe. But if they were to come to Canada, they would have to set up a pan-Canada supply chain, with different rules in different provinces, different product approval processes, registrations, financial reporting—lots of things, different in different provinces. So, almost certainly, the interprovincial trade barriers, the differing regulations in differing provinces, meant that it would be harder to attract foreign competitors—say, those two chains in Europe—to come and compete against Loblaw's. So, to the average person—if you're upset about grocery store profits and the high cost of your groceries, you should know that removing trade barriers between provinces can help. A foreign discount grocery chain from Europe can come and give Loblaw's, Metro and Sobeys a fair run for their money—actually, your money.

There are a couple of things that are missing, I think, from the discussion that the government has brought up that I want to just mention. One of them is a solid analysis of what actions to reduce interprovincial trade barriers might result in what dollar benefits, because when it comes to negotiations—we're going to remove trade barriers. It's going to take a while. But if different provinces are negotiating with each other, it's important for each province to know, from whatever action it takes, what the benefit is, and also what the costs are. There are going to be some political costs. There are winners and losers, even if overall there's a benefit.

In trade agreements, often, governments, after concluding a trade agreement, will take the benefits from one sector and help out another sector that is losing a bit. It's important to be able to spread out the pain, to get the political will to get trade agreements done. And what I've heard from a couple of domestic trade experts is that there is not enough quantitative research about how different actions to reduce trade barriers might work.

I'm going to get a little bit academic here, but I think it's important for the government to hear this. I think that the economist Trevor Tombe has done a lot of good research. Most of the people debating this bill will have gone and looked online to see what papers are out there; most of the papers that you see have him as one of the co-authors. And what I would say to this government is that even when you have an excellent researcher—academics know that you'll get closer to the truth when you have different researchers fighting it out until they settle on a consensus. I'm a little bit worried that we're relying a bit too much on research from one research group. And there are economists who will tell me that we need to have more quantitative research. It's a federal government responsibility to fund that research, but just be aware that you could get better information about how to handle inter-provincial trade negotiations.

Nevertheless, there is a consensus that there would be large economic benefits from reducing barriers to inter-provincial trade.

So how does Ontario proceed? Well, one thing we have to worry about is—the provinces are going to sit around the table. They know that if they all co-operate, they will all benefit in the aggregate, so this is kind of like a tragedy-of-the-commons thing where if everybody is just looking out for their own interests and they're not thinking about co-operation, everybody will be worse off. It can be hard—we have a lot of provinces—to get everybody around the table to co-operate. One of the ways to getting around this tragedy-of-the-commons problem, the problem of getting people to co-operate is if the members sitting around the table are of different sizes, different resources.

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And here in Ontario—Ontario is the biggest province. In fact, some of the research has shown that Ontario benefits the least in terms of percentage in GDP increase. Ontario benefits the least when interprovincial trade barriers are reduced, but it's because the Ontario economy is so big. In fact, if we were to lead and just unilaterally remove some trade barriers, we wouldn't get hurt that much. So it's Ontario's role as a large province to think about how it could take the lead and spur on that co-operation between different provinces.

In the throne speech, as my honourable colleague the MPP for Don Valley West also quoted, it says, "Goods produced and services provided in other provinces and territories will be treated the same in Ontario, provided other provinces and territories do the same." What I'm saying here is that if we had more information about the amount of benefits and costs flowing from specific actions to reduce trade barriers—who are the winners, who are the losers—it would be easier for Ontario to take that lead, to take the first step, to maybe put itself at risk a little bit in order to get that co-operation from all the different provinces. We don't need to be staring at all the other provinces across the table, waiting for them to co-operate.

The last thing I want to talk about is just a few things to watch out for, Mr. Speaker. One is that one of the party-specific exceptions, number 22, from the Canadian Free Trade Agreement that is going to be removed concerns supply management. When I talk to some economists, they actually don't know how that's going to affect supply management in the long run, and I'm sure that farm organizations are looking for briefings with the government. This is in eggs and poultry and dairy. They're probably also wondering how the government is going to treat supply management, so that's one thing to watch out for.

The second thing is that economists have estimated that because we're going to improve labour mobility, maybe 1% or 2% of workers are going to have to move. Others will have to be retrained, so we have to watch out for how workers are treated.

We also want to avoid the lowest common denominator when it comes to safety and environmental protections, so

I'm calling on the government to be careful, to listen and be responsive when people bring up concerns.

Finally, we have to be careful about small business, because there's going to be winners and losers. I would love it for the craft breweries in my riding to be able to sell across the country, but they need to know that there are going to be craft breweries from across the country selling their product in Kingston. So how are small businesses going to adjust? Are there going to be funds available for them to upgrade or market across the country or do whatever they need to compete and sell their product across the country?

Those are just some of the concerns I have, and I'm looking forward to seeing this bill in committee. I do support the bill and I support moving forward with removing barriers to interprovincial trade.

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

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: I want to thank the member for his remarks. I appreciate the support from the member on working to eliminate trade barriers between provinces, but interprovincial trade barriers are just the difference in regulations between two provinces. We know that the former Liberal government increased the number of regulations from 200,000 to over 388,000. That's an average of 30 new regulations every year for 15 years. It was twice the amount of regulations throughout any other province.

So I want to ask the member and his party: How much representation do they take for this and the problems that it caused our economy, and what's going on right now in the US?

Mr. Ted Hsu: I'm a little bit surprised at the end of my honourable colleague's questions about what's happening in the US now and responsibility. I would say that we're not responsible for what's happening in the United States.

Let me just say this: Somebody once told me about—he said, "You know what? Did you know that the tax code in Canada in 1970 was about this thick, and now it's that thick? You know, how could that happen? Where is all this red tape coming from?"

Well, the economy does grow, and we get involved in all sorts of new activities. Just think about, for example: AI is an area that has enormous economic potential, and we want Canada to get involved in that sector. But whenever you do something new, there are all sorts of regulations you need to put in place so we can take advantage of all sorts of new technology, new products and new markets, and yet make sure that they benefit the people of Canada and Ontario. So because there are more regulations, it may just mean that there are more economic opportunities that we're taking advantage of.

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

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I listened intently to the member from Kingston and the Islands, and I have lived in Kingston actually for a few years. I was at one of the post-secondary institutions there for years, and I have a fondness for it.

But I'm thinking about the people of Oshawa right now who are quite nervous about what may be coming, broadly speaking, when we're talking about tariffs and what's happening in the United States. But there are opportunities here in the province—and I'm not only thinking automotive, but that's where this stems from—to strengthen supply chains, to develop new opportunities both in our province and cross-provincial.

Are there examples in your riding where, by strengthening supply chains and fostering innovations, there are opportunities for the government to create pathways that we don't yet see in this legislation?

Mr. Ted Hsu: What I would say is this legislation is a step; it's not some magic wand that we're waving that will suddenly remove interprovincial trade barriers. But yes, I think there are a lot of examples.

I think currently, we're just playing defence and we're worried about companies in Kingston having to move some of their operations to the United States because they're afraid of having to transport their product across the border. We have a number of things like that.

But I would say is that we do have opportunities. For example, there is a company in Kingston that developed from research at Queen's University, which does laser-guided welding, and there's a high demand for it in the automobile industry. So we need to make sure that companies like that retain their markets and are able to sell around the world. There is a lot of opportunity for us to sell around the world; we don't want to be a fortress. We have things that people around the world should want to buy.

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

Hon. Mike Harris: Natural Resources.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Brian Saunderson): Natural Resources. You have the floor; you're very good at it.

Hon. Mike Harris: Thank you very much.

I always love hearing the member from Kingston and the Islands. He speaks very eloquently, he has been a parliamentarian for many years, not only here provincially but also federally as well and he always tells good stories. I certainly appreciate it and just found out today that he is the Liberal critic for the ministries of natural resources, forestry, mines, energy and all of the good bits, all of the good bits, so congratulations on that.

You talked a little bit about some of the challenges we run into in Canada with supply chain issues and some anti-competition-type stuff where you find it hard to attract new business here because of those interprovincial trade barriers. It was neat to hear what you were saying about that grocery industry.

I heard a lot of good things come from you today, and the only thing I didn't hear is, will you, or won't you, support this bill?

Mr. Ted Hsu: Yes, I think if it wasn't clear, I'm happy to repeat myself. But I will be supporting this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Brian Saunderson): The member for Humber River—Black Creek.

Mr. Tom Rakocvic: Just a question to the member, and this might be news to him, but it might be ironic: As we're discussing this bill, the government has made a move to change the IRP licence that exists. This is a plan and a plate that allows drivers to cross even interprovincial borders as well to do their business.

But what took a couple of days in the past, thanks to their tinkering, now takes more than a month with a huge backlog, adding to supply chain issues. Many drivers are unable to move their goods, affecting local businesses, affecting consumers in many ways. Are you aware of this? And how does it feel, if you are not hearing that you're getting a scolding from the government side, when their mismanagement is leading to this huge problem with regard to our supply chain that continues to grow?

1710

Mr. Ted Hsu: Interesting point from my colleague for Humber River—Black Creek.

To be honest, I did not know about this, but here's what I think is important: It's important for this government—and they should know how to do this, because they're politicians—to really keep in close touch with stakeholders, with their constituents; to find out, to realize when things like this are happening and to fix it as quickly as possible. You don't want to slow things down unnecessarily or put in red tape unnecessarily.

So I just would tell the members of the government to be politicians. Use your training. Listen to people. Hear about and try to understand problems as quickly as possible and try to fix them.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Brian Saunderson): The member for Don Valley East.

Mr. Adil Shamji: As we all know, we face an existential threat from the United States that threatens our economic prosperity, and the government has indicated that we need to be serious and that we need to work together—which is why, of course, I was so disappointed by the petty chattering from the government side, and in particular from the member for Mississauga—Lakeshore. If he won't address this with the seriousness that it deserves and consult with your wisdom instead of pecking away, then I will.

To the member for Kingston and the Islands: When this goes to committee, what changes are you hoping to see?

Mr. Ted Hsu: To my most honourable colleague from Don Valley East, whom I rely on a lot for good information, I'm going to answer his question with sort of the same answer I gave to the last question. I have the advantage of having Queen's University in my riding, and there are economists at Queen's University who have thought a lot about interprovincial trade. And so my plan is to go out and talk to stakeholders, to talk to farmers who are in supply-managed sectors, to talk to economists who've thought about interprovincial trade.

Remember, I said in my speech that a lot of these numbers about the benefits depend on what model you use, and it depends on what inputs you give to those models, so it's very sensitive. So I would go to the people and ask, "How could this bill be improved?"

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

Hon. Graydon Smith: Speaker, just know that I'll be sharing my time with the member from Windsor–Tecumseh today. First of all, let me say that it's great to be back in the chamber.

It's been, I think, six elections for me since I started running municipally, and now provincially, every one of them with their character and own interesting opportunities within that election. In this election, I got an opportunity to dunk a basketball. I may not look like the kind of person that dunks a basketball often, but the snowbanks were so high, you could actually climb up and just put the ball in the net, so I feel like I accomplished something with the aid of Old Man Winter.

But it's a real honour to be back here to represent the people of Parry Sound–Muskoka in this 44th Parliament here in Ontario and be in this chamber. I just want to take a minute to congratulate everybody that has felt that success after a long campaign, from all over this great province in ridings big and small. Regardless of party or platform, we're all fortunate to be able to conduct the people's business, and I'm proud to call you all colleagues.

To our new Speaker—who's not in the chamber right now, but the job is being carried out well by the deputy today—congratulations to her. I've known her as a colleague and a friend, and to know her now as a history-maker is really something quite special. I know she'll do a great job. As we heard this morning, she can say the word “order” well, so I think she's going to do just fine trying to keep us all well-behaved.

Speaker, I want to talk about this bill and thank the Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade for bringing it forward. It fits right in with the things that Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor spoke about in the throne speech on Tuesday. We know that we're in times that call for bold action; times that call for looking at things differently than they've been done in the past; times that insist we do those things that have been talked about for decades but not necessarily acted upon.

Speaker, our government's efforts to protect Ontario and Ontarians will always be at the fore, and there is no time to waste. That notion of protection takes on many forms. Of course, what comes to mind first is to protect ourselves from that external threat that has consumed our lives in many ways, both literally and figuratively; a consumption so encompassing, we can no longer rely on our economy running the same way it has for decades. We need to break the mould, reshape ourselves, strike out on a path that will protect our economy, our jobs, our communities—protect our people. We made that commitment to the people of Ontario.

In my riding of Parry Sound–Muskoka, while it's most often thought of as a tourist destination, well-known for lakes and rivers and a great place to vacation all year round—yes, it is a shameless plug for everyone to come to Parry Sound–Muskoka. I can't resist a free moment of advertising in Hansard. But at the heart of my riding, there are hard-working families, innovative businesses that

make and keep our communities vibrant, just like the many communities that are ready to grow and succeed not only here in Ontario but across Canada. But we need the right tools and conditions to help those businesses, those communities in my riding and across Ontario thrive. The Premier talks about that often: creating the conditions for success.

But the world we're in right now is changing. It's unpredictable. Ontarians are craving certainty. They need to know their government is there for them and taking the steps that will help and that will matter. President Trump's tariffs sent a clear signal, reminding us how vulnerable we can be when we're too dependent on any one trading partner. It goes without saying, we value our partnership with the United States, and we love our American family and friends and neighbours, but we need to build resilience here at home. That means reducing red tape, breaking down outdated internal trade barriers and opening up new opportunities for Ontario businesses and workers. And the Protect Ontario Through Free Trade Within Canada Act, if passed, will do just that.

At a time when we need it most, this is the most ambitious action on interprovincial trade in Canadian history. This is Ontario again setting the pace for the rest of Canada. No other province has done what Ontario is doing. This is real leadership under our Premier. Because here's the truth: Interprovincial trade barriers are just bureaucratic obstacles that need to go away. They can add, as we've heard, up to 14.5% of the cost of goods and services that Ontarians need to buy. That's real money for consumers, for families, for businesses.

Getting rid of these barriers can lower costs, boost productivity, unlock that enormous economic potential by up to \$200 billion a year in growth across Canada. With our economy, Ontario is a large player, of course, in interprovincial trade, and we hope every province and territory will follow our lead in breaking down these barriers. Bravo to Premiers Houston and Holt for being here yesterday to support our Premier in this important endeavour.

This isn't just about goods, as we know; it's about people too. It's why our government is taking bold action through proposed changes to the Ontario Labour Mobility Act, introducing an as-of-right rule. That means that if you're certified to work in another Canadian province or territory, you're automatically recognized here in Ontario—no red tape; no time to wait.

This matters, especially in ridings like mine, especially in ridings like Parry Sound–Muskoka. Businesses across my riding are hungry for skilled workers. We're doing a great job in training skilled workers here in Ontario, but whether it's Lofthouse Manufacturing in Burk's Falls, Crofter's in Seguin township or MBRP in Huntsville, they're looking for people to help their businesses grow and thrive, and they do keep growing. The same goes for all of our ridings in Ontario: These changes will help those certified workers get through the door faster, into jobs sooner and contributing to the economy immediately.

That's how we build a strong workforce; that's how we tackle labour shortages; that's how we grow together.

I'm excited that we're giving consumers a choice too; working to expand direct-to-consumer sales for alcohol so that Ontario residents can purchase directly from producers across Canada. Not only is that great for you and me, but it's even better for our local businesses in our communities. In my riding, businesses like Muskoka Brewery, Sawdust City brewery, Lake of Bays brewery, Trestle brewery—just to name a few, and there's more. It will allow these businesses—these great contributors to our local economy, and ones like them—to grow, expand into new markets and let people who want to support these businesses get their amazing product brought right to their doorstep throughout Canada.

1720

You know, Speaker, those breweries in the riding that I talk about: People go to them for a reason, and we support them in our communities for a reason. They're amazing at making their product, but they're amazing community-builders who are proud of what they produce in my riding and, again, in ridings across Ontario. That direct-to-consumer sales model will introduce more people to more product from all over Canada.

As we push to make Ontario the most competitive economy, this kind of bold action is needed to get us there. It's making us less dependent on just one trading partner and providing opportunities throughout Canada.

If passed, this bill will remove those trade barriers, unlock labour and support our producers. It's all connected. We know it's all connected. We're taking parts of our nation and making those parts operate together seamlessly in the whole. When we remove the barriers between provinces, we're strengthening the ties that bind us. We're building a country that is more efficient, more productive, more united. And we are, in fact, as we know, greater than the sum of our provincial parts. That's what our Premier believes in. It's what the Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade believes in. It's what all of us in this chamber believe in. It's what Ontarians believe in. It's what Canada is all about.

So we need to work together. We need to take this opportunity as we come together for this new parliament to set a tone that, all throughout our province, we're going to be leaders in helping people, helping businesses, helping communities to move forward again during uncertain times.

I hope that certainty comes back to us in the way that it did in the past, but there is no time like the present to move forward—move forward in the ways that this bill lays out for us very clearly, providing some predictability, providing some opportunity, again, for those people, those families, those communities. So let's do that; let's break down the barriers across Canada. Let's break down the barriers in this chamber and work together to get this session off to a great start by supporting this important bill.

Speaker, thank you very much. Again, I yield the rest of my time to the member from Windsor–Tecumseh.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Brian Saunderson): The member from Windsor–Tecumseh.

Mr. Andrew Dowie: It's truly a privilege to rise for my first debate speech of this session. I want to thank all the residents of Windsor–Tecumseh who put their faith in me a second time—truly appreciated. I never want to let you down. No matter what I do here, I'm always speaking my voice about our region. I look at Bill 2, and I see a bill that is tailor-made for helping the Windsor–Essex region.

I think of our very close relationship to the United States and how intertwined our economies are between the two countries. And now we see from the United States a reaction to some of the successes of the province of Ontario. I think of the \$46 billion in automotive and EV investment that has been attracted to the province of Ontario. The Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade has mentioned multiple times that, when he started in his file, there was zero investment projected for the province of Ontario. All the work that we are attracting to Ontario was destined to go to the United States. Unfortunately, we see that we're a victim of our success. President Trump has seen that Ontario's government has been successful at attracting investment, and he wants that to stop. He wants to repatriate that business that he thought was destined for the United States, even though we had the better business case. Ultimately, these are about wrecking our business case, because we are more competitive, we offer better quality of life. And so now we have an upending of our historical trade relationship.

So, to reduce our dependency and our exposure to the United States, this is a bold action that is truly necessary to speak to our neighbours in other provinces about how we can collaborate and build a united economy. That includes not just the cutting of red tape—and I'll get into a couple of examples that certainly I know of directly—but also how we can prosper together. So, we will protect Ontario through the free trade within Canada Act.

Ontario is leading the nation. I listened to one of the speeches earlier; I believe it was the member for Don Valley West. She had some concerns that there were still some party-specific exceptions, if I heard right. Those are gone. There are no party-specific exceptions. In fact, we are the only province to say we're not putting forward any exceptions. We're going further than the other provinces. In Ontario, this is the most ambitious provincial action on the area of provincial trade in Canada's history.

We know that the barriers will inflate prices by 14.5% just by the added packaging, the added transportation costs, distribution costs that are imposed because we have different requirements in different jurisdictions. We expect that Canada's GDP will grow by up to \$200 billion annually because of the removal of interprovincial trade barriers.

A couple of parts of this bill, I think, really speak to our cross-border relationships that we have, and one is labour mobility. Even though it isn't addressed in this bill, it's an indication of how much talent we can have in the community. I think of some of my neighbours who are nurses who actually travelled from the United States

because there was not a very difficult process to have your credentials recognized in another country. However, in Canada, each province has a very rigorous licensing regime. I'm part of it; I'm a professional engineer. I'm only licensed to practise in Ontario right now, and should the other provinces decide to follow Ontario's lead, then I will have the opportunity, once I'm done my career here, to go and practise in every province in the entire country. That opens up so many—not only just opportunities to earn a living, but even to have great experiences on projects that I would not normally be able to take part in—for example, some of the work they do in the Northwest Territories in terms of cleaning up environmental damage or doing water projects in hydroelectric facilities. This gives opportunities for Ontarians. If everyone else joins in, we can all prosper with this.

Specifically for health care professionals—look, we need it; we need them across the country. I think of, actually, one friend of mine who was licensed as a paramedic in Saskatchewan and cannot get a job in Ontario. He's from my community, lives a couple of blocks away from me. This is what will be resolved, so that a fully trained paramedic will be able to work in our community, where all the local members have been told, "Hey, we have a shortage of paramedics. We can't recruit anybody." Well, we have people in our own community who can't find work because they had to find their licensing path elsewhere in Canada and still can't get back to their home province. So this is going to address this.

In terms of our local industry, we have parts shops; we have manufacturers. We have all kinds of people who export predominantly to the United States, and they're hurting. I've got family members and friends who are now working half-time. They're losing their opportunities to provide income because of the decisions of the United States to impede our trade, make our trade more costly. There is a market in Canada, and if we can get our ducks aligned and also target other countries, we will get ourselves back on our feet and be more resilient towards these kinds of threats.

I think of some of the things that have been mentioned: the breweries and the wineries in Essex county. I think most of the wineries are in MPP Leardi's riding. There are 17 wineries in Essex county, and they are not allowed to ship. In fact, it's hard to find some of them in the LCBO. The direct-to-consumer sales provides a genuine opportunity for the best of the best to be shipped across the country and creates a very good business climate, so that if you perfect a craft and provide a good product, your potential is limitless in this country. This is the benefit of going down this path, so it's certainly our sincere hope that the other provinces will follow.

I know the Premier and Minister Fedeli previously mentioned the mutual recognition of goods and services. You buy a construction vest in one province and, in another province, it doesn't match. Or a hard hat—that's actually one I've run into. It's not the right standard of hard hat. You know what, someone has certified it, someone who's a professional. Provided you have the checks and

balances in place, the change in standard should not be detrimental. You shouldn't need to forgo a different supplier because they're in a different province in the country of Canada.

1730

The bigger part of this bill is creating a consumer awareness of goods and products manufactured in Canada and particularly Ontario. We have the BOBI strategy to build Ontario, but we have such potential in this community and in this province to realize how much we can do together. Have the fortress—I know it wasn't well received in some quarters, but the fortress analogy is a good one. Canada can be a fortress, too, and consolidate our efforts. You can think of things like simply a distribution centre for a retailer. So now you could actually set yourself up in a rural area because now you may be equal distance between two large centres and that opens up opportunities especially for rural communities, but certainly in urban communities it works incredibly well. We want to build a stronger, more prosperous Ontario and a stronger, more prosperous Canada through this bill, and we have so, so much.

I want to close with—I see we've only got about a minute left—but the buy Ontario, buy Canadian day. We have a variation of that with the Ontario manufacturing day. We have the made-in-Ontario—and sometimes in your local grocery store you see the Ontario-made logo. The manufacturers really push that in their field. But, look, we have to be proud of what we build and what we create. We do have products that are in demand. We ship so much in Essex county in terms of vegetables from our greenhouses. They're desired all across the world. We have that marketing potential to do even greater work and keep on repatriating for ourselves too the best of the best of the vegetable vendor contracts. There's so much that I see here that can benefit our home region and the province of Ontario as a whole.

I can't wait to get more feedback in this debate, but I see so much potential with Bill 2 and so much potential to improve our communities, improve our resilience and improve the quality of creators that we have in the province of Ontario because of the decisions that will be reached as a result of this bill.

I want to thank you, Speaker, thank everyone here and have a happy Easter weekend with your families and friends, and we'll see you back on the 29th. Thank you so much.

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

Mr. Peter Tabuns: My question is to the Associate Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. This government has made it very clear that the United States is no longer a reliable partner. It's made it very clear that their actions are unpredictable and certainly their word can't be trusted, and yet, yesterday, the Premier in question period made it clear he still believed in the idea of an Am-Can fortress—of America and Canada together against the world. How does he square the fact that you can't depend

on that country anymore with the idea that we're supposed to be close partners with them against the rest of the world?

Hon. Graydon Smith: I appreciate the question. Of course, we have an incredible history together between those two countries. And I don't think it is irrational at all, in fact it's laudable to want to continue a relationship and build a future together, but, at the same time, we need to take steps based on what we're seeing today. That's why this bill is so important because there is variability and unpredictability in what is happening south of the border. It's never been a better time to take the steps internally that we can do to strengthen the relationships between provinces, strengthen the opportunities for businesses and the communities and the families that we talked about—strengthen the opportunities for labour mobility. We've heard multiple examples from members in our caucus about people that want to come to this province and want to have an opportunity to work here, and we're going to provide that. We're going to provide a future for Ontario to continue to grow, no matter what.

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

MPP Stephanie Smyth: This is for the member from Windsor–Tecumseh. Bill 2 gives the government the power to decide which provinces we recognize for trade and credentialing without needing to go through the Legislature. Do you think that there should be transparency or public input in that process?

Mr. Andrew Dowie: Currently, professions are self-regulated, and, ultimately, the membership decides on licensing matters. So it's not something unfamiliar to our regulated professions, that it not be headed to the Legislature when we have that recognition.

What we do do and did do in previous legislation is, for example, the—sorry; I'm trying to remember the exact term that I want to use. But we were able to find the Canadian experience requirement, for example. When that was brought in, that was done in relationship with the self-regulated professions. Yes, we passed it here, but, ultimately, they agreed to do it, and they did so voluntarily.

There's no reason why we can't find the same path here because we have the same educational standards for most regulated professionals. A medical school, for example, in BC would not have any reduction in standards versus Ontario. Certainly, for engineering, I can go anywhere across the country to be educated and just take my exam in the province that I would intend to practise in.

We have a lot of these already in place. The standards are the same, and I really don't foresee any issues there.

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

Mrs. Daisy Wai: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm so happy that I have this chance to speak up now. It's my first time speaking up in this 44th session.

I want to say thank you to my colleagues for sharing your insights. I do have a question, and I would hope that both of you can share your thoughts on it.

I totally agree with what the minister is saying, that we are facing an economic battle. We're hearing it, that this is

a battle we are facing. I also see that in the 15 years of a Liberal government we halted a lot of economic growth, and yet I also hear from the members opposite saying that we need to stop and take time to analyze before we take any actions.

But I want to hear from both members. Why is it so important for us to move forward with this ambitious legislation in order to tackle the interprovincial trade barriers now?

Hon. Graydon Smith: Thank you very much, and again, congratulations to the member for returning to this chamber. I'm honoured to receive your question, through the Speaker.

I would say that it's time for bold action. We can sit around and talk about and ruminate on things all day long, but, as we've heard again many times in this chamber today, what is working and functioning well in one province should be transferable to this province, especially in terms of skill and labour, and you can apply that to products as well—many, many products.

There's an opportunity before us. Sometimes it takes a change in circumstance to bring that opportunity into a little better focus and a little better clarity and realize that you need to reach out, grab that opportunity and run with it as quickly as possible. That's what we're doing for the people of Ontario, the communities of Ontario, the families and workers of Ontario.

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

Ms. Jennifer K. French: My question is to the member from Windsor–Tecumseh. As a member who represents a strong border riding, I am sure he would be interested in this issue that has been raised—and I know that my colleague from Humber River–Black Creek raised it—about the recent transition from MTO to ServiceOntario of the International Registration Plan, so about plates and licensing for the trucks that need to move across borders, whether internationally or interprovincially.

Since this recent transition, it's been a mess. We have raised the delays and inefficiencies. I have a constituent—we are all starting to hear it from people in the trucking business.

I guess my question, without getting in the weeds, is, when this government hears specific examples of problems that require solutions, when we reach across and are seeking help, where are we supposed to send that? Because so far, we haven't seen that kind of leadership.

Mr. Andrew Dowie: I want to thank the member from Oshawa for her question. There's always opportunity to do much better. I know there's already an initiative with ServiceOntario to streamline those services that have been referred to for the international licensing. So, stay tuned—a work in progress—and this is something that we're working hard to resolve.

1740

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Brian Saunderson): Member from Don Valley East.

Mr. Adil Shamji: Like the member for Windsor–Tecumseh, I belong to a regulated profession and certainly

would appreciate being able to move between provinces and territories more easily. I spent some time working in the Northwest Territories, where it was relatively easy to get licensed. Conversely, Nunavut, where I also tried, was prohibitively difficult, so I welcome these changes.

As we see in Ontario, morale and burnout amongst health care workers are at an all-time low. So as we work towards implementing these changes, how do we ensure that these changes do not actually lead to a net loss of health care workers in Ontario in comparison to the gain that we actually hope that it will deliver?

Mr. Andrew Dowie: I want to thank the member from Don Valley East for his question. And ultimately, yes, that's something that we face back home. We have competition from the United States for a lot of our regulated professions. But we offer a better quality of life in Canada. There's tremendous investment by the government in health care services right now. We're on the cusp of getting a new regional acute-care hospital which provides facilities that one can be proud of—they're not over 100 years old—with the latest equipment. I think if you have a facility where you feel confident you can do your best work, that's going to attract you. And so, the investments that the province is making in facilities all across Ontario are going to help on the hospital side. Obviously, there's far more health care practice beyond what's in the hospital, but the expansion of capacity gives those opportunities to make a living in Ontario, and I'm confident that we will be the most attractive jurisdiction to practise in once the changes that are in place are implemented.

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

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: It is a distinct honour and a privilege to be able to rise this evening in this House in the 44th Parliament on behalf of the residents of St. Catharines. I want to sincerely thank them for giving me the opportunity to represent them for another term here at Queen's Park. I am committed to be a fierce advocate for their needs and concerns, and I will continue to be their voice with dedication and passion.

Speaker, today, I rise to speak about the urgent and unpredictable trade war crisis and to speak to the Protect Ontario Through Free Trade Within Canada Act.

Two days ago, we heard the speech from the throne highlight the immediate need for bold action to protect Canada and Ontario and to ensure we can stand on our own. The threat of tariffs, the hostility, the back and forth that we're seeing from President Trump is leaving Ontario's economy, its workers and families in a very tough spot. Threat after threat, the tariffs are introduced and then paused over and over again. It is volatile, and we need to put political stripes aside, working together to best serve the industries, businesses and workers directly affected by the trade war.

From agriculture to manufacturing, from small businesses to auto and the steel sector, every corner of this province is feeling the consequences. Our farmers are losing access to key markets. Ontario small businesses,

especially those reliant on cross-border supply chains, are being squeezed by the rising costs, disrupted logistics and uncertain futures. Canadian e-commerce retailers are seeing shipping delays and increasing fees that they can't pass onto already overburdened consumers. Their livelihoods are at stake. The cost of living continues to climb. Consumer goods, groceries, household items are becoming more expensive every day. Inflation is hitting working families the hardest, and this trade war is making it—an already bad situation post-COVID—10 times worse, I would say. Just as Ontarians and businesses have recovered, they're hit yet again out of nowhere.

We cannot allow our communities to bear this burden alone. Now it is time for leadership, true leadership, not partisanship. I'm calling on every member of this Legislature to stand together. As the official opposition, we have made it quite clear that working together is the only option and we have offered this government an all-hands-on-deck approach.

The official opposition has launched an advisory council on tariff response and economic security because we understand that this is a priority—a priority for all Ontarians. As the speech from the throne pointed out, we must work hand in hand with the federal government, with our municipal leaders, with our business communities and our labour unions to deliver a clear and united message: Canada is not for sale, and Ontario will not back down.

We must invest in support for affected workers and industries. We must create provincial relief programs that are accessible and immediate. As the official opposition, we have committed to introducing emergency funding for trade-exposed industries, protecting workers after we have already seen an increase in unemployment rates all across Canada. In Niagara and in St. Catharines, the unemployment rate rose to 6.5% in March. This is up from 6% just last month, in February. As a tourism-driven economy, Niagara is more susceptible to consequences of the ongoing trade war and support needs to be in place.

As we continue to navigate the economic turbulence caused by the trade war with our closest neighbours, it is important that we recognize that this isn't a temporary inconvenience; this is a real, true disruption to Ontario's economy. We are witnessing first-hand the vulnerabilities that come when the province is so closely enmeshed with a single foreign market, one that has chosen to impose steep and sweeping tariffs on industries that form the backbone of our economy.

Let's take a closer look at the automotive sector, not just as a symbol of Ontario's industrial strength, but as a practical example of what this trade war means for real people in Ontario. The General Motors powertrain plant in St. Catharines has been a pillar of employment for our community for generations, for families have relied on these stable, skilled manufacturing jobs to build their lives and contribute to the local economy. Are they next to be laid off? Will the plant have to shut down temporarily? They are living day by day and trying to plan through an impossible situation.

Now those jobs are on the line. US tariffs on imported Canadian vehicles and components have dramatically increased costs, pushing American companies to reconsider sourcing from Ontario. GM has already announced slowdowns of production volumes. These are not just numbers on the balance sheet; they are livelihoods. They are my neighbours. They are family members. They are feeling this crunch.

When the line shuts down or a shift is cut, that means groceries are not being bought, mortgage payments are possibly being missed and local businesses are losing dedicated customers. It becomes a ripple effect that devastates the entire community. And let me tell you, Speaker, St. Catharines has seen its fair share of this ripple effect with the closing of plants—GM plants—Hayes-Dana and the papermills. Hayes-Dana moved to Kentucky. The story, I'm sure, is the same in Windsor, Oshawa, Ingersoll and other parts of Ontario where the automotive industry drives employment.

It's also hitting our parts suppliers, many of which are small and medium-sized enterprises. These businesses operate on tight margins and rely on cross-border supply chains. A delay at the border or a spike in parts costs can push them from a thriving business to having to lay off hundreds of workers in a matter of weeks.

This isn't unique to auto. Our steel mills in Hamilton and Sault Ste. Marie are feeling the strain. The construction industry is seeing budget issues because structural steel and aluminum are more expensive, and retailers across Ontario are watching customers cut back spending because the cost of goods is rising faster than their wages. It is affecting the very fabric of our province of Ontario.

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And yet, the only way through this will be together. We cannot afford to let partisanship delay the coordinated response that Ontario needs. I am urging Premier Ford and all of the members of this Legislature to come together, using industry experts, union leaders, municipal officials—invite them all to the table. Let's craft a unified Ontario response that includes targeting economic relief, support for re-skilling workers, emergency funding for vulnerable sectors and aggressive strategies that ensure we're using Canadian manufacturers and businesses effectively.

In the face of this trade war, we must take this moment not only as a warning but as a wake-up call—a true wake-up call—to rethink how we grow and protect our economy. And that begins with a renewed, unshakable commitment to supporting Canadian-made.

For far too long, we have grown accustomed to supply chains that stretch across borders, dependent on low costs rather than long-term resilience. We have seen everything from machinery to medical supplies produced outside of our borders, leaving us vulnerable in times of crisis.

The trade war, much like the global pandemic before it, has made it clear: When supply chains are threatened, local capacity is everything. It's about isolating ourselves from unpredictable foreign policy decisions beyond our control.

Ontario has skilled workers and a rich history of innovation and productivity. We manufacture world-class steel, pharmaceuticals, consumer goods, food products and high-tech electronics. Our farmers grow the best produce. Our bakers bake. Brewers and butchers are second to none here in Ontario.

And yet, for too long, we have seen Canadian-made products crowded out by cheaper, imported alternatives. That sends a message to the business owners and consumers: that profit is more important than supporting our local economy.

If we want to understand the stakes of this trade war and what happens when we do not prioritize domestic production, we can take a good look at Biolyse. Biolyse is not just another business on the map; it is a lifeline—a Canadian-owned pharmaceutical manufacturer. It's based right out of my own riding; it's practically in my backyard. St. Catharines has Biolyse right there, right here in Ontario, with a proud history of producing oncology drugs. Biolyse represents what we can accomplish when Canadian science, manufacturing, skilled workers and compassion come together.

For years, they have been providing essential medication to cancer patients both here at home and abroad. And during the pandemic, when needed, they stepped up. They stepped up for local hospitals when they were desperate. Yet despite their capabilities, they have been left fighting a battle all alone. This government has not paid attention.

I have worked with Biolyse for four years now and I have brought their voices right here to this House, to this floor, many times. And yet, the company is at threat to have to move their operations out of Ontario, overseas, because our procurement processes here in Ontario have favoured low-cost, foreign-made products. This is a shame.

We have to really make sure, Speaker, that we pay attention to what we have right here in Ontario. We can't lose them to foreign countries. We cannot sit by and ignore key Canadian players any longer.

The loss of Biolyse would not just be a blow to our economy of St. Catharines and the loss of hundreds of highly skilled jobs; it would be a failure of this provincial responsibility. If we lose a company like Biolyse, it means that Ontario cannot rely on itself and its own investments in times of economic uncertainty.

You know, in the middle of the tariff war, it is easy to say, "Support local," but where was the government, two, three, four years ago, when we were sounding the alarm bells, asking for intervention to save Canadian goods and companies like Biolyse? Where were you? Let's make sure we work together and we bring the support to local businesses.

Working with other provinces and territories across Canada is absolutely critical; I don't disagree with that. When our economy is under threat, we should be coming to the drawing board and rethinking creatively to best support ourselves, our people and the people across Canada.

We have heard from organizations like unions like CUPE that have been quite clear in their messaging: We

cannot allow the dismantling of workers' protections in the name of fighting Trump. Absolutely, let's bring skilled workers from across Canada to areas that need support the most, like our hospitals. What about our health care sector? But there's a fine line. There's a fine line in maintaining the protection and the safety standards that we have right here in Ontario.

We've got real challenges right now. Ontario needs 26,000 registered nurses, and over two million people across Ontario do not have a family doctor right now, 140,000 of them being in Niagara alone.

Like I said, union groups are waving some of the red flags. They're not against trade. They're not saying do nothing, but what they are saying is the situation is nuanced. A lot of what this government is referring to as a barrier are actually important protections—things like workplace safety, public health rules, fair hiring practices and local job protections. Trucking regulations in BC are stricter than in a province like Saskatchewan, for example, for good reason. You've got windy roads, steep mountains to climb in BC. You have chains on your tires and a lot tougher weather. If we're not careful with this piece of legislation, then we're risking applying the lowest standards across the board, and that could be a recipe for disaster.

The bottom line is, yes, let's make it easy to work, move and do business across Canada. We need progressive

policies, but we've got to make sure we're not giving up what matters most just to move a little faster.

I do want to touch on schedule 1 of this bill, the proposed Buy Ontario, Buy Canadian Day. It is a welcome and a long-overdue idea. Designating the last Friday of June each year to celebrate and promote Canadian-made goods is a fantastic way to spotlight local businesses, boost customer awareness and encourage people to shop local, especially at a time when many small and medium-sized enterprises are still recovering from the pandemic, related debt and now Trump's tariffs. This kind of initiative can make a real difference and can be a chance to rally public support for Canadian-made products and recognize the incredible value, quality and innovation our country has to offer. But if this day is going to have a real impact, it needs more than just a random date on the calendar; it needs a strong, strategic marketing plan from this government working with the other side, the opposition. A strategic marketing plan—imagine that. We have to—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Brian Saunderson): As it is now 6 o'clock, this House stands adjourned until Tuesday, April 29, 2025, at 9 a.m.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Brian Saunderson): I wish everyone a very happy Easter weekend with your families and loved ones, however you choose to celebrate that event.

The House adjourned at 1800.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

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

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

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
McGregor, Hon. / L'hon. Graham (PC)	Brampton North / Brampton-Nord	Minister of Citizenship and Multiculturalism / Ministre des Affaires civiles et du Multiculturalisme
McKenney, Catherine (NDP)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	
McMahon, Mary-Margaret (LIB)	Beaches—East York	
Mulroney, Hon. / L'hon. Caroline (PC)	York—Simcoe	President of the Treasury Board / Présidente du Conseil du Trésor
Oosterhoff, Hon. / L'hon. Sam (PC)	Niagara West / Niagara-Ouest	Minister of Francophone Affairs / Ministre des Affaires francophones Associate Minister of Energy-Intensive Industries / Ministre associé des Industries à forte consommation d'énergie
Pang, Billy (PC)	Markham—Unionville	
Parsa, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (PC)	Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill	Minister of Children, Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et des Services sociaux et communautaires
Pasma, Chandra (NDP)	Ottawa West—Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest—Nepean	Deputy House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjointe de l'opposition officielle
Piccini, Hon. / L'hon. David (PC)	Northumberland—Peterborough South / Northumberland—Peterborough-Sud	Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development / Ministre du Travail, de l'Immigration, de la Formation et du Développement des compétences
Pierre, Natalie (PC)	Burlington	
Pinsonneault, Steve (PC)	Lambton—Kent—Middlesex	
Pirie, Hon. / L'hon. George (PC)	Timmins	Minister of Northern Economic Development and Growth / Ministre du Développement et de la croissance économique du Nord
Quinn, Hon. / L'hon. Nolan (PC)	Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry	Minister of Colleges, Universities, Research Excellence and Security / Ministre des Collèges et Universités, de l'Excellence en recherche et de la Sécurité
Racinsky, Joseph (PC)	Wellington—Halton Hills	
Rae, Matthew (PC)	Perth—Wellington	
Rakocevic, Tom (NDP)	Humber River—Black Creek	
Rickford, Hon. / L'hon. Greg (PC)	Kenora—Rainy River	Minister of Indigenous Affairs and First Nations Economic Reconciliation / Ministre des Affaires autochtones et de la Réconciliation économique avec les Premières Nations Minister Responsible for Ring of Fire Economic and Community Partnerships / Ministre responsable des Partenariats économiques et communautaires pour le développement du Cercle de feu
Riddell, Brian (PC)	Cambridge	
Rosenberg, Bill (PC)	Algoma—Manitoulin	
Sabawy, Sheref (PC)	Mississauga—Erin Mills	
Sandhu, Amarjot (PC)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Sarkaria, Hon. / L'hon. Prabmeet Singh (PC)	Brampton South / Brampton-Sud	Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports
Sarrazin, Stéphane (PC)	Glengarry—Prescott—Russell	
Sattler, Peggy (NDP)	London West / London-Ouest	
Saunderson, Brian (PC)	Simcoe—Grey	
Schreiner, Mike (GRN)	Guelph	
Scott, Chris (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	Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative Deputy Speaker / Vice-présidente
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	