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Lundi
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Monday 2 November 2020

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 2 novembre 2020

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Good morning. Let us pray.

Prayers.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I wish to acknowledge this territory as the traditional gathering place for many Indigenous nations, most recently the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation.

This being the first Monday of the month, we will now have O Canada and the royal anthem.

Playing of the national anthem / Écoute de l'hymne national.

Playing of the royal anthem / Écoute de l'hymne royal.

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I recognize the member for Kiiwetinoong, who I understand has a point of order.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Meegwetch. Mino-gigizheb. It's a good morning.

Speaker, I seek unanimous consent of the House for me to make a brief statement in two minutes to speak about why I cannot stand for the singing of O Canada and God Save the Queen, which begin our months here at Queen's Park.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Kiiwetinoong is seeking unanimous consent of the House to make a brief statement now, two minutes in duration, explaining why he is unable to stand for O Canada and the royal anthem. Agreed? Agreed.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Meegwetch, Speaker. I am rising this morning to speak on why I cannot stand for the singing of O Canada and God Save the Queen, which begin our months here at Queen's Park.

I've had a chance to tell many truths through telling stories of the people of Kiiwetinoong. I tell stories about the children who leave our communities every year at the ages of 13 and 14 to attend high school hundreds and hundreds of kilometres away from their families, their language, their homes and their way of life, because most of the First Nations in the riding don't have high schools.

I tell stories of parents and grandparents who don't get to grow old because they don't have access to health care and their homes are filled with mould.

I tell stories about young people in their 20s, early 20s, who lived their whole lives in the communities without access to as basic a thing as clean drinking water. I tell stories of young people who have died by suicide because they felt they had no hope.

In those stories, Mr. Speaker, it is clear the promises of Ontario and Canada that are celebrated in anthems and written down in treaties are not being met.

Ontario was built on the foundation of Treaties 9, 5, 3, the Robinson Treaties, the Haldimand tract and others that cover what is now Ontario. So I will not stand in the Legislature and acknowledge these anthems until our people are treated equitably and our children have access to education, clean water and safe housing.

To my colleagues: I will stand when your governments honour these treaties they have signed. Until then, I will keep fighting for the future my ancestors imagined when they signed Treaty 9, knowing their spirits are with me as I work for the people of Kiiwetinoong and those who live in Ontario. Meegwetch.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. On the same point of order, the government House later.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Let me just say good morning to all my colleagues. To the member opposite, let me—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): You're rising on a point of order, I gather?

Hon. Paul Calandra: I'm rising on a point of order.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Okay, got it. Point of order.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Sorry—just to acknowledge what the member opposite has just said and to assure the member that we would, of course, always defend his right to do what he thinks is best for his community, even if that means, in this instance, that he chooses to make that decision through sitting through the national anthems.

In a week like this, Remembrance Week, we acknowledge the fact that so many fought so hard to ensure our rights, and that right includes the right of you, elected from your community, to—I don't want to say “protest”; that's perhaps a bad choice of words. But the appropriate word escapes me right now. We respect the decision that you've made.

As the government House leader—and I know all of my colleagues would feel the same way—although we feel differently, we would support and fight for your right to express your disappointment in how your community has been treated. I congratulate and commend the honourable gentleman for taking that step. Even if I disagree with him on this, I commend him and I can assure him that we will always stand up for you and your community and your right to express it in this House. That's what we're here for, so I commend you on that.

0910

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Technically not a point of order, but I thought it was appropriate to allow the

government House leader to reply to the important statement that was made by the member for Kiiwetinoong.

**PRIVATE MEMBERS'
PUBLIC BUSINESS**

PROTECTING VULNERABLE PERSONS
IN SUPPORTIVE LIVING
ACCOMMODATION ACT, 2020

LOI DE 2020 SUR LA PROTECTION
DES PERSONNES VULNÉRABLES
DANS LES LOGEMENTS SUPERVISÉS

Mr. Burch moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 164, An Act to establish a framework for the licensing of supportive living accommodation / Projet de loi 164, Loi établissant un cadre pour la délivrance de permis d'exploitation de logements supervisés.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Pursuant to standing order 101, the member has 12 minutes for his presentation.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Good morning. This bill requires persons who operate supportive living accommodations in specified circumstances to hold a licence issued by the minister. It provides a framework, to be supplemented by regulations, governing applications for and issuance of licences; the obligations of persons who operate a supportive living accommodation under the authority of a licence; inspections; and complaints.

I'd like to start today with a story from Karen Barry. In October of 2017, her father was discharged from a lengthy stay at Grand River Hospital. He was unable to return to his apartment and unable to live independently without assistance. Ineligible at that time for long-term care, he was placed in an unregulated group home in St. Thomas. The home assured Karen that he would be provided with support, trained staff, three meals plus refreshments and a snack daily. It sounded suitable for him until he could secure a room in long-term care.

What resulted was months of concern for his well-being, safety and security. Almost every cent of his pension was handed over to a for-profit supportive living organization that is operated by a "wilfully neglectful and absentee owner." The home was owned by Vishal Chityal. At the time, he was operating under an alias of "Charlie Duke." In this home, there were bedbugs, garbage piled up for weeks, and shortages of hot water. The basement beneath them was used for food storage but infested with rodents. Frequently, there would be shortages of food, and the list goes on.

In the words of Karen, "He lived in fear and neglect and he paid a significant amount each month to do so. What was supposed to be a supportive living accommodation for him ended up being a nightmare I can't forget, I don't think he can either."

Just this month, I brought the story of Gerald and his wife, Lucy, to this House. They're currently living in a supportive living accommodation also owned by Mr.

Chityal. Gerald and his wife have major health issues, including dementia, and are pensioners on a fixed income. Gerald's sister Loretta sent me a desperate email, along with pictures of unlivable conditions. Loretta said there have been bedbugs for at least a year, and the food that is served to residents is rotten. When Loretta raised the issue with management, the owners said this was the last time their management team would be dealing with the issues. If they had additional concerns, "feel free to move out."

Many people who have complex needs but don't qualify for or can't get into long-term care end up in these supportive living homes. Supportive living accommodations provide low-rent accommodation to vulnerable tenants who are considered high-need. Many of them are seniors. These shared rental accommodations traditionally include any combination of room, room and board, or room and board with additional levels of support which are paid for.

In many cases, SLAs serve as an effective response to affordable housing shortages across the province, while catering to high-need adults who may not necessarily qualify for long-term care. Many people end up there simply because they fall through the cracks. However, the lack of regulation and oversight of these services for our most vulnerable citizens have in some cases resulted in physical harm and, tragically, even death.

David MacPherson lived in a supportive living home in the city of London called People Helping People. Like the home Karen spoke about, it appeared to be a group home with additional supports. Many of the adults and seniors who lived there suffered from severe mental issues and physical disabilities. Despite this, Keith Charles, the operator of the home, was racking up infractions from the local fire department: The home was filled with people, broken smoke detectors and emergency lights, clogged hallways and propped open fire doors.

On November 3, 2014, the same day that local fire officials were meeting to put in a call to the Ontario fire marshal to close the property because of increasing numbers of complaints, the home was set ablaze. As a result, 72-year-old David MacPherson tragically died. David's death was completely avoidable and preventable.

Because these homes are privately run and operated, owners are accountable to no one and are free to operate the business however they please. Falling into a regulatory grey zone, their tenants are at an enormous risk. Over the past year, we've seen numerous reports of supportive living homes in my riding in Niagara being fined for non-compliance for fire-related charges. In November 2019, Beatrice Manor in Welland was fined \$35,000 for non-compliance with the fire code. Chief Brian Kennedy said they had five years to make the required changes, but they chose not to do so. It's the largest fine he's ever seen.

Some municipalities have started to regulate these homes. Following the death of David MacPherson, the city of London put bylaws in place. However, municipalities are asking for provincial regulation of these homes. This bill provides a framework for operators and sets minimum standards that must be met so that vulnerable tenants no

longer suffer from a broken system. The bill defines what a home is, requires home operators to be licensed—similar to retirement homes—and would set a framework for inspection and complaint protocols. Failure to have a licence is punishable for a fine up to \$1,000 per day.

This is not the first time this legislation has been presented to this Legislature. In 2017, my predecessor, MPP Cindy Forster, brought a bill forward after hearing complaints about supportive living homes from support workers, tenants and families in the region. MPP Forster worked with Welland city councillor Bonnie Fokkens and many other municipal officials to address this dire situation. Forty-four municipalities have come forward with their concerns and their support.

In January of this year, Port Colborne reaffirmed their support of the bill, passing a motion stating, “There is a need for regulating private supportive living accommodations to protect individuals requiring special care.”

Beyond municipalities, numerous stakeholder organizations have joined the call for provincial regulation of supportive living homes. Shaun Baylis, the CEO of Pathstone Mental Health in Niagara, stated, “Our vulnerable people are entitled to supportive living accommodations that will provide a reasonably healthy lifestyle that includes a place to live, quality food, and proper care.”

The International Association of Fire Fighters Local 485 and the Welland Professional Fire Fighters endorsed the bill. In a letter to my office, Mark Biggins, president of the Welland firefighter association IAFF Local 481, stated:

“Our members frequently attend some of these residences and are often appalled at the living conditions.... The issues that some assisted living residences may not meet the definition of a ‘care occupancy’ as defined in the Ontario fire code, thus precluding those buildings from complying with provisions that are more stringent. If the assisted living residence is not regulated as a long-term-care home or a retirement home, and does not meet certain care occupancy definitions, there is no oversight on how these homes are kept or operated.... Many residents who live in assisted living residences have cognitive disabilities and are incapable of living independently. Unfortunately, some assisted living residence owners/operations intentionally operate these residences in a manner that allows the homes to remain unregulated, likely done to avoid expenditures relating to maintenance. The WPFPA completely endorses this private member’s bill.... If there are those who are opposed to this bill, we encourage them to visit an unregulated assisted living home in their community. Following this visit, we are confident they will change their position on this matter.”

0920

Speaker, with the COVID-19 pandemic, there is a renewed importance to regulate these homes. Congregate living settings have been some of the hardest hit during outbreaks. Many vulnerable adults who are under the care of these private operators don’t have the capacity to advocate for themselves and are living in horrific conditions, receiving substandard care.

Reporting by Nora Loreto found that 82% of deaths from COVID-19 in Canada are linked to residential care facilities of various kinds. The difficulty with supportive living homes is that despite caring for the same clientele you would find in a group home or a long-term-care facility, they have no obligation to report outbreaks. They also have no method for complaints, inspections or regulation. We’ve heard reports of 30 residents or more sharing one bathroom in these facilities.

It’s estimated that Niagara has 19 supportive living homes—Niagara alone. The fear here is that there will be an outbreak, and there will be few options for containment and no ability for the public to know of the outbreak. It’s been very difficult, Speaker, for my staff and myself to monitor these homes during the outbreak, which underscores the need for a complaint protocol. We don’t know what’s been happening. It was horrific prior to the pandemic, and God only knows what’s been happening in these homes since COVID-19 began. Now is the perfect time to address this gap in policy and join other jurisdictions like Alberta in regulating these homes.

The last time this bill was voted on, it received all-party support. In fact, the now Associate Minister of Energy and the current Solicitor General spoke in support of this bill. Today we have the opportunity to fix a long-standing policy gap and join together to protect the most vulnerable in our communities. I hope this House will join me in this effort and pass Bill 164, bring it to committee and bring it into law.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate.

Mr. Lorne Coe: I’m pleased to participate in the second reading debate on Protecting Vulnerable Persons in Supportive Living Accommodation Act. Certainly everyone in this Legislature wants to ensure that people have safe homes that they’re living in, and if the person who owns the property is saying that they’re providing them with services and support, that it can actually be enforced, Speaker.

I know from my 13 years of municipal experience that while there are licensed rooming houses and group homes which are properly regulated, there are also landlords who quite carelessly fill up their properties, whether it’s with students or vulnerable people, simply to collect the rent. Whether they claim that they’re offering some additional services or not, we know that these facilities are often not well maintained, that the living conditions in them are not very good, that they’re overcrowded and that they are in fact often quite unsafe from the perspective of fire safety and security.

This bill would ensure, Speaker, that there would be oversight, province-wide, potentially, to ensure that these people are protected, as they should be, in their homes. It’s not about taking away the ability from anybody to speak or to set up this kind of housing; it’s simply to ensure that the conditions within it would be regulated and that there would be an enforcement mechanism.

I know that our government is committed to ending homelessness and has made a number of investments

towards good-quality supportive housing, investments that would fund supportive housing units that would, in some cases, take away from the need for vulnerable people to turn to these off-market housing situations. This bill, Speaker, requires these homes to be licensed and creates a framework for inspection and complaint protocols to protect some of the most vulnerable citizens.

I certainly know from my experience, both within the constituency office and again at the municipal level, that when a strategy is brought into place to help people who are homeless find a home with supports, it has an immediate impact. Because it's not just good enough to say, "Here's a room or an apartment," Speaker, and leave them to their own devices if these people are people who need supports. These programs are incredibly successful and incredibly helpful programs, and in many cases, particularly at the municipal level, truly help them to turn their lives around. I believe that that's what we all aspire to here in this Legislative Assembly.

Speaker, this piece of legislation could also assist to ensure that these people are not being taken advantage of, and that's certainly a goal we can all support as well.

I'm also happy to see in this bill that it's not meant to re-create licensing regimes which are already in place. I think that's an important distinction going forward. Those types of homes that are already covered by other licensing regimes—municipal licensing—wouldn't be subject to a secondary regime. With his own municipal experience, I know the MPP from Niagara Centre, who's bringing forward this bill, understands that, and I know that's why it's reflected as it is.

Speaker, I do think that when this bill does make it to committee, there certainly are questions that need to be answered about what conditions the minister might impose on a licence and what the enforcement provisions would be. We need to get more clarity on that. We need to get feedback from a cross-section of stakeholders going forward. I think that our experience has been within that particular setting, and it serves to strengthen the legislation as it goes forward. I offer that particular opinion from my municipal experience as well, where broad consultation has taken place over the years on this particular subject.

We also have to be mindful that we should be encouraging our municipalities to actually allow for licensing and zoning of more facilities and homes like these. That's going to take some discussion with the Association of Municipalities of Ontario at one level, particularly their policy group, but I think also with individual municipalities that comprise upper-tier government—I think it would also be helpful to engage with them, because not all of them are going to be able to participate in the standing committee forum. So as much as we can engage with those particular organizations now, I think it will serve us well as we move forward with this particular proposed legislation. Also, I think it's going to avoid creating barriers to creating this type of housing in various communities—because communities all have different pressure points across the province of Ontario, and I know those who have served in municipal government appreciate that distinction.

With that, I'd just like to conclude and say that the proposed legislation from the member from Niagara Centre is a good initiative, but we do need broader consultation on it in some of the sectors that I've discussed.

At the end of the day—and I said this earlier, and I believe this—we all aspire to protect the vulnerable in our society. I thank the member for the bill. I look forward to engaging in the committee setting.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: It truly is an honour to rise on behalf of the constituents of London–Fanshawe to speak to Bill 164.

I'd like to tell a story of what happened in London, which the member from Niagara Centre highlighted.

There was an apartment building on Oxford Street in London, Ontario, that housed vulnerable people—people who had mental health issues and people who had addictions. I would say that the majority of them, if not all of them, were on ODSP or some form of OW. Housing is very difficult to find at the best of times, but when you combine health issues, addictions and mental health, it's even more difficult. A gentleman named Keith Charles decided to run this apartment building like an assisted living facility, but he wasn't capable of running it at the professional level that it needed to be. In London, the fire department knew it was being operated that way; social workers knew it was being operated that way; ACT teams knew it was being operated that way; Fanshawe College knew, because they had co-op students go in to do their co-op job experience there. They did the best they could. The fire marshals were out there giving them constant violation infractions. But I think the hesitant piece of why this wasn't exposed and dealt with properly is, first of all, there were no regulations around this assisted living complex, and secondly, people were hoping that these problems would be fixed so that these vulnerable people—they had nowhere to go if they were to shut this building down. The conclusion of the story of what happened is there was a fire in the apartment building. David MacPherson, 72 years old, died in that fire.

0930

The coroner didn't instigate a coroner's inquest; they didn't feel it was necessary. But in other cities like Hamilton, they took the initiative to actually regulate assisted living around some bylaws. London tried to do that as well—not as strong as that could be. This is why this bill is very important: because it allows the province to do that work so that everything is the same. You go from one city across Ontario to another, and the assisted living homes are all treated the same, run the same, and the rules are the same. I think that's something we need to understand. When it's affecting all of Ontario, we need to have consistent legislation to protect the most vulnerable so that they're not taken advantage of.

Some of these people who run these assisted livings, they may have their heart in the right place, but we also need to have guidelines to protect the vulnerable citizens. Things can go wrong very quickly without anyone actually intending for that to happen.

I just want to end by saying there's another complex in my riding on Hamilton Road. Again, they offer room and board. There are people who are on ODSP and OW. I was visited by a person who lives there, and ODSP doesn't give the same housing allowance for someone if they live in a room-and-board situation. So she gets less housing benefit—accommodations—because she gets room and board, whereas somebody else living individually, they receive more for that piece. I think that needs to be corrected as well, wherever you're living. The ODSP and OW benefits do not help people living in poverty survive and have safe housing and have good food.

I'm going to end on that and encourage the government to support this bill and, like our member said, get it through the process and get it back here so that we can vote on this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

Mr. Mike Harris: This is the first time I have actually risen on a Monday to debate private members' business. I just wanted to take a moment to recognize all the work our government House leader has done to prioritize private members' business and make it possible to debate more bills and motions every week, like this bill that we have before us today from the member from Niagara Centre.

As I said, it is a pleasure to speak to the Protecting Vulnerable Persons in Supportive Living Accommodation Act. This is an important bill, and I want to thank the member for his work on it.

As we have all heard, this bill would require operators of supportive living accommodations that provide the activities of daily living to hold a licence issued by the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services. Like long-term-care homes, hospitals and retirement homes, group homes provide essential care to the province's most vulnerable. But unlike the facilities I mentioned before, not all residential living accommodations have a regulated licence.

Speaker, our Minister of Children, Community and Social Services is committed to improving the availability and quality of services in the developmental sector. Since taking on that role, he has been in constant communication with adults with developmental disabilities, their families and our service providers about what we can do to improve the current services. I know a key focus of his ministry's work on behalf of those with developmental disabilities is protecting, growing and improving the current supply of residential services.

I have met with constituents who have told me about their family's journey finding supportive living for their loved one. It is certainly a challenge, especially as parents who have been the primary caregiver for their child grow older and can't give them that same level of care anymore.

I have also had a chance to connect with some of my local service providers, like Elmira District Community Living. I've chatted with executive director Greg Bechard a few times and toured their facility last year. Their homes support residents with intellectual disabilities in the townships of Woolwich, Wellesley and Mapleton.

I've also connected with Sunbeam Community and Developmental Services in Kitchener. Sunbeam has provided supports and service to children, youth and adults with developmental disabilities in Waterloo region since 1956. They currently offer a range of residential programs, including 17 group homes and two overnight respite sites. I had the pleasure of joining the minister on his visit to Sunbeam Centre in early September on International Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder Awareness Day.

During his visit, the minister made a great announcement of \$3 million to increase resources, tools and strategies to support children with FASD. We also had a chance to meet with some of the board members and senior staff at Sunbeam, including those who work in the residential programs. The team there does great work caring for vulnerable people in our community, Madam Speaker.

But I know not all group homes out there provide the same high level of care that Sunbeam and Elmira District Community Living do. It's hard to believe, but there are some people out there taking advantage of families trying to find care and support for their loved ones, which is why I will be supporting this bill, because it is important to catch the bad actors and make sure Ontario's most vulnerable are taken care of.

But I also hope we can find a way to get those with ill intentions out of our system without overburdening those doing the good work in our communities. There needs to be a balance, so that those who provide a high standard of care can continue to do so and expand their capacity, instead of having to shift the focus of their staff to filling out paperwork and complying with duplicative regulations. I know in my community, capacity is a challenge, and it would be a shame to see service providers have to put additional money into administrative work, rather than supporting front-line services.

Thank you once again to the member from Niagara Centre for bringing this important bill forward. Protecting our most vulnerable, including those with developmental disabilities, is this minister's top priority, and I hope he will work with the minister and his team to find a way to achieve that balance.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

M^{me} France Gélinas: I'm so pleased to support the bill brought forward by my colleague from Niagara Centre. I want to also thank the previous MPP for this area, Cindy Forster, for making the House aware of what was going on. I hope that the second trial is a charm and it actually brings us results.

Protecting vulnerable people in supportive living accommodation—those are really often known as rooming houses. They fill a critical need in communities all over the province, including my community and all over the north, but leaving supportive living accommodation poorly regulated, with no minimum standard, has often resulted in suffering in deplorable conditions and sometimes even death, like the member shared with us. It is time to fix that and to make sure that supportive living accommodations are a safe option for people who need to live independently.

Before being an MPP, I was the executive director of the community health centre in Sudbury, and we ran the Corner Clinic. The Corner Clinic dealt with a way for people who experienced homelessness to have access to care. Often, the first thing we would do is to try to house them. You cannot be healthy if you don't have a place to call your home. Most of the people suffered from severe mental illness, other health issues, physical disabilities; they often dealt with addiction, and they became very hard to house. Those rooming houses were a place where we can get them back to health, and some of them do a very good job of this, but some of them are just taking advantage of vulnerable people who don't have a voice, and taking advantage of them in every possible way. You can let your imagination go down a really dirty hole and it's still not deep enough for what we have seen in some of those living accommodations.

All of this could change. We have the power right here in this House to change this by passing the bill from the member from Niagara Centre and putting things as simple as regulations, having minimum standards, having to report. Right now, most of the time, those people are thrown out of business through the fire department, because when all of the social agencies, when all of the health agencies, when everybody else—we know that what's going on in this rooming house is not okay; there is absolutely nothing we can do. So we phone the fire department. They will go in and do an inspection and find a way to shut them down through violation of the fire code. Really, Speaker, this is what we've come to in order to protect our most vulnerable? The government has a role to play. This is why we are in government: to make sure that we protect the most vulnerable in our community. For this area, there is nothing.

0940

It is high time that we pass this bill from Niagara Centre, to thank the good operators and to make sure the other ones are out of business.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Good morning. It's always an honour to be able to rise here in the House on behalf of the residents of St. Catharines, and I'd like to congratulate my colleague from Niagara Centre for bringing this motion forward.

There's rarely a week that goes by when a constituent doesn't stop me and talk to me about a problem they're experiencing within a nursing home in St. Catharines. Every so often, I have to pause the conversation to issue a point of clarification: "Long-term care" is used interchangeably with "retirement home" or "hospice" or, in some of the more shocking examples, the deplorable conditions from some of the supportive living accommodations. That is why I'm happy my colleague from Niagara Centre is bringing this legislation forward with Bill 164, protecting vulnerable persons. This legislation is shining a light on a housing issue during a time when we know all too well the risk of leaving vulnerable people in

deplorable conditions. You see, sometimes people can get caught up in this congregate care language.

We know in this chamber that when referring to nursing homes, we are referring to homes regulated by a particular set of rules—a particular piece of legislation, actually, with a particular minimum standard of care—except my constituents don't care about the difference or the language or the legislation. What they want is what we all want: a minimal standard for living conditions for older adults and vulnerable people, to ensure they are kept safe and with dignity, Speaker.

No one wants to see suffering, deplorable conditions and even death due to a person's housing or care situation. You know what, Speaker? It's time to fix that. The solution to dignity for all vulnerable people is to take the lesson of the pandemic and apply it. Private companies administering care to under-regulated or loosely regulated markets with little oversight is problematic. It doesn't work, which is why I support the member from Niagara's protecting vulnerable persons bill that sets a minimum set of standards for supportive living accommodations.

Speaker, I'm going to end with this note. The lessons of COVID-19 have shone a light on the travesties in long-term care: understaffing, homes with bedbugs and no cooling spaces during a heat wave of 40 degrees, to name just a few. If we still have problems with nursing homes that are being given the most attention right now, what does that mean for the other parts of the housing sector—think about that—like supportive living accommodations that are being given the least amount of attention?

Politics aside, this is not about private versus public or ideology or even money. This is about doing the humane thing, common-sense things to protect all vulnerable people in Ontario. This is about ensuring a minimal standard of care across this province and learning from a hard-taught lesson of the pandemic in the shadow of a difficult summer in Ontario. This is about doing the right thing.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

Mr. Mike Schreiner: It's my pleasure to rise and speak in support of Bill 164, protecting vulnerable persons in supportive living accommodations. I want to thank the member from Niagara Centre for bringing this bill forward. I'm reminded that last week we all came together and voted in support of legislation to provide a minimum standard of care for elders being cared for in long-term care. I think today is an opportunity for us to all come together and ensure that elders and adults with disabilities in community living living congregate care settings also have a minimum standard of care, are regulated, and are inspected to ensure that the most vulnerable in our society receive the care they deserve.

Speaker, I think many Ontarians would be shocked to learn that these congregate care settings are currently not regulated. While many of these congregate care community living spaces are well cared for, there are those that are not. Those bad actors should be held accountable. We should take preventive and proactive action to ensure that proper regulations, proper minimum standards of care, and

proper inspections are in place to ensure that all vulnerable people in our society have a safe place to live and a safe place to be cared for.

Unfortunately, I was reminded of this very early in the pandemic, in the spring, during the first wave of COVID, when I started receiving calls from people who lived in some of these community congregate care settings, saying that while the virus was spreading, they had no access to personal protective equipment, the staff coming in to provide care in these settings did not have access to personal protective equipment, and the proper public health measures were not in place. That is something, Speaker, that we cannot allow to happen again.

I believe Bill 164 is an important step to preventing those types of conditions and that type of situation from ever happening again. I'm hoping one of the lessons that we learn from this pandemic is that a society is measured by the way we treat the most vulnerable in our communities, that a society is measured by the dignity, care, standards and regulations that we provide the most vulnerable in our communities. We have to decide as a society what kind of values we uphold. For me, those values ensure that the most vulnerable in our society are cared for.

I hope we can stand together again and unite all parties in this House to establish a basic standard of care for the most vulnerable: elders and adults with disabilities in congregate care settings in our community.

Speaker, I just want to conclude by once again thanking the member from Niagara Centre for bringing this bill forward. I'm hoping all members of this House vote in favour.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): I now return to the member for Niagara Centre for his response.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Thank you to all of my colleagues on both sides of the House for their support. The member from Whitby mentioned his municipal experience; we have that in common. As he will know, at the municipal level, the partisanship really melts away. I want to assure him that I'm looking forward to working in committee. There is a lot of work to do on the bill, obviously, but I think it's doable, and I hope that we reward all the work that my predecessor, Cindy Forster, did and get this bill passed.

Thank you to my colleague from London–Fanshawe for relaying the story of the tragedy in London. I know the city of London and the fire services there will be very happy to see this bill moving forward.

The member from Kitchener–Conestoga: Thank you for mentioning the support of the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services, and for speaking to your own constituents about the bill.

The member from Nickel Belt mentioned her experience with the community health centre in Sudbury. I'm very grateful to have her as our critic for health care, and thank her for her support.

My friend from St. Catharines: As always, I know she'll be working with me on the issue in Niagara, where there are many supportive living homes.

And the member from Guelph: Thank you for reminding us that this is also a long-term-care issue and connected to the issue of dignity for seniors.

So thank you to all of my colleagues for their support. I look forward to working on this bill in committee and moving it forward.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): The time provided for private members' public business has expired.

Mr. Burch has moved second reading of Bill 164, An Act to establish a framework for the licensing of supportive living accommodation. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? That's carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Pursuant to standing order 101(i), the bill is referred to the Committee of the Whole House.

Mr. Jeff Burch: General government, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Is the majority in favour of the bill being referred to the Standing Committee on General Government? Agreed. The bill is referred to the Standing Committee on General Government.

Orders of the day? I recognize the member for Barrie–Innisfil.

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: No further business.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): There being no further business, this House stands recessed until 10:15 this morning.

The House recessed from 0951 to 1015.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

CURRICULUM

Ms. Jill Andrew: Education is a human right. It is through education that we learn about ourselves, our history, and we begin to envision our futures.

Black children have systematically been exposed to an erasure of their identity in Ontario's school curriculum. This is anti-Black racism upheld by the Ontario government. Black lives cannot be #BlackedOutHistory any longer. Black history curriculum must be mandatory in every Ontario school from K to 12.

The Ontario Black History Society sent the Minister of Education a copy of a 2016 grade 8 history textbook used to teach grade 8 students across Ontario. Of 255 pages, when non-Black history is blacked out, only 13 partial pages remain that mention Black history—13 mentions for 400 years of Black lives here.

The OBHS has asked the Minister of Education to immediately commence a review of the social studies, histories and geographies, and Canadian and world studies curriculum; work with Black educators and scholars to conduct the review and identify topics, themes and content to be integrated into the curriculum; include Black history and Black experiences as mandatory learning in the SSHG

and CWS curricula from K to 12 and in all subjects from K to 12; and provide consistent supports and resources to enable educators to effectively teach Black histories.

As a proud member of the Ontario Black caucus and the MPP for Toronto–St. Paul’s, home to Little Jamaica and Nia Centre for the Arts, which is building Canada’s first professional multidisciplinary Black arts centre, I wholeheartedly support the Ontario Black History Society’s call to action. Will this Minister of Education do the same, yes or no?

CANCER TREATMENT

Ms. Donna Skelly: I’m proud to rise this morning in the House to speak about our government’s \$25-million investment in the stem cell transplantation unit at Juravinski Hospital and Cancer Centre in Hamilton.

I spoke at the official opening of the unit on Friday. This is wonderful news for the world-class cancer care team at Juravinski and, of course, for their patients. It allows more cancer patients to receive treatment closer to home. This means that patients will receive care in the right place at the right time.

The investment will support a 15-bed in-patient unit for patients undergoing stem cell transplants and other complex malignant hematology cancer treatments. There will be additional treatment bays for oncology day services and a renovated pharmacy to support the growth of the expanded stem cell transplant program.

Hamilton Health Sciences is renowned for its work in life-saving cancer care and stem cell transplant. The stem cell unit builds on the extraordinary history of cancer treatment in Hamilton. This investment also builds on our government’s commitment to reduce wait times for critical cancer treatment.

The talented and dedicated professionals at Juravinski should be proud of their many achievements; I certainly am.

COLLEGE STANDARDS AND ACCREDITATION

Mr. Chris Glover: As the critic for colleges and universities, this morning I sent an email to all members of this House urging them to not support the accreditation of Canada Christian College.

In Bill 213, the government is granting the college and its owner, Charles McVety, the ability to offer arts and science degrees in Ontario. This is despite Mr. McVety being well-known for espousing hateful and bigoted views.

Mosques in Toronto have received threats and called on this government to combat Islamophobia, yet this Premier supports a man who is vocally anti-Islam.

The LGBTQ2+ community has fought hatred for years, yet this Premier supports a man who has made absolutely vile statements against the LGBTQ community.

The Premier states that this is an independent decision, but if that were the case, he would not be using this bill to bypass the independent accreditation process.

It’s been revealed that Mr. McVety and his son have taken personal loans from the college of over half a million dollars, and his wife, a vice-principal of the college, awarded herself the title of doctor despite having no credentials.

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Regulatory authorities have consistently challenged the academic integrity of the college and rejected graduates due to suspicious academic transcripts and degrees being conferred before coursework was completed.

Bill 213 attacks Ontario’s communities and undermines our accreditation process. I strongly urge all members of this House to vote against Bill 213.

ACCESSIBILITY FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Mr. Lorne Coe: We want everyone, especially people with disabilities and seniors, to be able to fully participate in everyday life in communities.

The government’s public education campaign launched last week by the Minister for Seniors and Accessibility will help foster understanding and encourage cultural change towards accessibility needs. This campaign is intended to help people learn more about accessibility, inclusion and, most importantly, hiring people with disabilities. This campaign is part of the government’s ongoing work to create a more inclusive and accessible province through the Advancing Accessibility in Ontario framework.

The government is continuing to work with stakeholders like the Abilities Centre in Whitby, partner ministries, broader public sector organizations, businesses and other non-profit organizations to achieve these goals, and in the process, help people of all abilities participate fully in their community’s recreational, social and economic life.

DIABETES

Ms. Peggy Sattler: November is Diabetes Awareness Month, and on Saturday, people around the world marked 100 years since Sir Frederick Banting’s remarkable 25-word idea scribbled at 2 a.m. in his small bedroom above his medical practice on Adelaide Street in London, now the home of Banting House National Historic Site. That idea would lead to one of the greatest triumphs of modern medicine, the discovery of insulin in 1921, saving millions of lives and making Banting the only Canadian and the youngest person ever to win the Nobel Prize in physiology or medicine.

While amazing progress has been made in the century since Banting’s idea, COVID-19 has reinforced how much more we have to do. It has revealed the urgency of addressing poverty, food insecurity and other key health inequities to improve health outcomes. Ontarians most at risk of COVID-19 are often those most at risk of diabetes: those who struggle with poverty, who are racialized or Indigen-

ous, who are food-insecure, who live in crowded conditions, who work in low-wage essential jobs. They also face a significant economic burden, with high deductibles for the Trillium Drug Program, unable to afford proper foot care, unable to access continuous glucose monitoring systems, unable to pay for essential diabetes supplies, lacking private insurance plans or with limited coverage.

This centenary, what better way to honour Banting's legacy than by implementing a comprehensive provincial diabetes strategy, one that includes universal pharmacare and provides funding for all necessary supports.

VÉRONIC DICAIRE

M^{lle} Amanda Simard: Une de nos plus grandes fiertés chez nous à Embrun c'est notre chère Véronic DiCaire, notre chanteuse-imitatrice à nous, reconnue sur la scène internationale et admirée partout à travers le monde—et oui, elle aussi, originaire d'Embrun. En fait, nous avons grandi dans le même rang, le bon petit rang Saint-Joseph.

C'est notre superstar, Véro, et la semaine dernière, elle a remporté un prestigieux prix Félix au Gala de l'ADISQ, son tout premier, tout un accomplissement.

For my colleagues and Ontarians who do not yet know our Véronic, she's an international sensation, and for good reason: an incredibly talented impersonator, singer, actress and TV host. She's well known to re-create with outstanding accuracy the greatest voices of Canada, the United States and Europe.

She rose to international fame after being discovered by Céline Dion, who's also my distant cousin—small world, I know—and René Angélil in 2008. She performed the opening act for Céline's Taking Chances tour for the Montreal and Quebec City shows, and the rest is history.

Félicitations, Véronic, pour ton prix, mais surtout pour tout ton succès. Tu nous rends si fiers. Continue d'être la best des best. Comme de vrais groupies, on te suit, on t'aime, on t'appuie. Félicitations.

WOMAN ABUSE PREVENTION MONTH

Mr. Stephen Crawford: It's an honour to rise today in the House and bring attention to an important virtual event that is happening in my riding as we speak. November is Woman Abuse Prevention Month.

Abuse can either be a threat of violence or an actual form of violence. Sadly, many women experience the most common form, which is physical and sexual violence. In my riding, we have dedicated organizations to help women overcome their experiences with violence. Women who need help can rely on services and resources provided by SAVIS of Halton or Halton Women's Place. Both SAVIS and Halton Women's Place have changed the lives of many women here in Oakville and Halton, and they will continue to for the years ahead.

Today at 10 a.m., in honour of the victims who have suffered intimate partner violence, the Halton Women's Place and Halton regional police board are joining together to host a virtual event to unveil a beautiful memorial

that will be located at the headquarters of the Halton regional police. The Halton police, under the great leadership of Chief Stephen Tanner, go above and beyond to keep the residents of Oakville safe. They are working diligently within Halton to protect women from human trafficking and domestic violence.

Even though I cannot attend this virtual event, it's still important to recognize the victims of partner violence, especially during Woman Abuse Prevention Month. We all have a role to play and need to take a stand to end violence against women. No woman should have to live in fear about whether they will face abuse. Education, prevention and early intervention are critical in putting an end to women's abuse.

TREATIES RECOGNITION

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: This week is Treaties Recognition Week in Ontario. I would like to stand here and say good words about how Ontario respects and honours treaties, but I cannot. We have a problem. Ontario continues to fail to live up to the terms, agreements, spirit and intent of the treaties. So today, I recognize just a couple of failures.

Neskantaga continues to be under a boil-water advisory, as it has been since February 1995. Ontario signed treaty number 9 with Neskantaga and the crown.

Multiple First Nations across Ontario are taking legal action against Ontario to uphold their treaty rights under Bill 197. The signatories of the Robinson Superior and Robinson Huron treaties of 1850 are also in court with Ontario. Ontario has failed to increase the annuity payments for the use of lands and resources, as was written in the Robinson Treaties. There has been no change in the annuity since it was set at \$4 per person in 1874. In the Six Nations territory, they have asked for a process to address the historical land claims with the federal and the provincial governments, with no answer.

Most importantly, I recognize and honour the resilience of those who are speaking up to make our communities better and the justice that they work towards. We've been here for generations. We are here today. We will be here tomorrow. Honour the treaties.

COMO FOUNDATION

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: Last week, the Premier and I had the privilege of welcoming Sarah and Max from the Como Foundation to Queen's Park to thank them for their hard work during this difficult time. This September, we were honoured to attend a ribbon-cutting ceremony at their new 9,000-square-foot facility. This facility, owned by CEO Bob Murray from McRae Imaging, has now moved most of their operations to making masks. By collaborating with the Como Foundation, they were able to produce the mask that I wear every day for the deaf and hard-of-hearing community.

As the Premier has mentioned, their operations all started back in March on their dining room table. A few weeks later, the Como Foundation announced a \$5-million

donation to Trillium Health Partners. The donation is part of a total commitment of \$25 million over the next five years, providing a meaningful step closer to building a new hospital for Mississauga–Lakeshore.

This collaboration and generosity reflect the true character and spirit of Ontario. It makes me proud to be their MPP and makes me proud to be Canadian. I hope that it will inspire us as we confront the second wave of COVID-19, because it is only through the creativity and generosity of ordinary Ontarians like Max and Sarah that we will win this battle and ensure Ontario comes back stronger, more prosperous and more united than ever.

1030

VETERANS

Ms. Amy Fee: This morning, I rise as we begin our month of remembrance and want to acknowledge just how grateful we are for the immense sacrifice that tens of thousands of brave women and men have made to ensure that we have the freedoms we have today.

This weekend, Canadians across the country felt the pain of the loss of a 29-year-old soldier who died in a live-fire training accident at the Canadian Forces base in Wainwright, Alberta. Corporal James Choi of BC has been described as one of the most dedicated members of his unit and was well respected by all of his comrades.

Like many families, many of my relatives died in service for our country. My mom's aunt, Lena Forestell, was a Silver Cross Mother at the National War Memorial in 1958. She lost three of her sons in the war effort: Warrant Officer Class II Daniel Forestell died in 1943, and her sons Warrant Officer Class II Thomas Forestell and Flying Officer Robert Forestell both died in 1944. My great-uncle Lieutenant William Dall also died in 1962 when his plane went down on a training mission just outside of CFB Trenton. My cousin Paul Trimble retired this past summer after 28 years of service with the Royal Canadian Navy. He and his family have scars that will last a lifetime—the months spent apart, the nights worrying, and losing numerous close friends in Afghanistan.

It is for these amazing men and women and their families that we are modernizing the Soldiers' Aid Commission in Ontario to expand assistance to veterans of all ages and their families who are in need of financial support. Mr. Speaker, may we honour them and may we remember them every day.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. That concludes our members' statements for this morning.

SIKH GENOCIDE

Mr. Gurratan Singh: I rise today to ask for the unanimous consent of this House for a moment of silence to remember the thousands of Sikhs who were murdered by the Indian government in the November 1984 Sikh genocide. Lest we forget.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Brampton East is seeking unanimous consent of the House for a moment's silence. Agreed? Agreed.

The House observed a moment's silence.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much.

The member for Timmins has informed me he has a point of order.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I would seek unanimous consent in order to stand down our leads to wait for the Premier's arrival.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I would have thought that by now we wouldn't be making reference to the absence of any member, for obvious reasons.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: This has been done since I've been here.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Timmins is seeking the unanimous consent of the House to stand down the lead questions of the official opposition. Agreed?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Agreed.

The member for Orléans, I think, has a point of order maybe.

Mr. Stephen Blais: On a point of order, I'm seeking unanimous consent of the House to withdraw schedule 2 of Bill 213 to stop the preferential treatment of one of Ontario's most well-known bigots, Mr. Charles McVety.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): That's not a point of order.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Speaker made a mistake. There was not unanimous consent to stand down the leads of the official opposition.

But I'm once again going to remind all members, especially in these current times, when we can see what's happening and what we have to do in this House to maintain physical distancing, to please stop making reference to the absence of other members.

The member for Orléans is seeking the unanimous consent of the House to remove a schedule from—schedule what?

Mr. Stephen Blais: Schedule 2 from Bill 213.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Agreed? I heard several noes.

It is now time for oral questions.

QUESTION PERIOD

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My first question this morning is for the Premier. Last Wednesday, in his daily campaign news conference on COVID-19, the Premier claimed, "We see the curve going down." Since then, health officials have reported three of the worst days that Ontario has ever seen in terms of new cases of COVID-19, and today the

Ontario Hospital Association is sounding the alarm bells because acute care wards are already operating above capacity in dozens of hospitals in our province.

It's clear to everyone that we are still dealing with the consequences of the Ford government's failure to prepare properly for a second wave. Does the Premier think that declaring victory is going to have the thousands of new cases appearing daily just disappear?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Deputy Premier and Minister of Health.

Hon. Christine Elliott: What I would say to the leader of the official opposition is we have prepared. We have a comprehensive fall preparedness plan that anticipated an increase in the rise of COVID cases, and we've prepared for that and we've prepared our hospitals for that as well.

What I would say is, first of all, we're very grateful to them for stepping up and the incredible front-line workers that show up to work each and every day. The hospitals have even gone above and beyond what their normal capacity is, and many of them have gone into our long-term-care homes when they've needed assistance. But we have provided them with expansion availability. Right now, they are close to 100% capacity because they're dealing with COVID-19 cases, but they're also trying to catch up on the backlogs of surgeries and procedures that we had to postpone during the first wave.

We don't want to have that happen again. We want to be able to keep those surgeries happening as well, because as terrible as it is to lose someone to COVID, it's equally terrible to lose someone to cardiac or cancer problems, so we have to keep that moving forward.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The supplementary question.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Well, after the first wave of the pandemic, labs and health units were left begging for funding to prepare for the second wave, and now we're in a situation where, in the city of Toronto, we don't know where 65% of cases are actually coming from, while hospitals are facing huge deficits and operating above capacity.

Will the Premier stop pretending that this pandemic is going to go away on its own, and start making the investments needed to catch up to where we should be?

Hon. Christine Elliott: The reality is that we have been investing money. We have since the beginning of the COVID pandemic, both in terms of case and contact management. We're investing over \$1 billion in testing facilities and case and contact management facilities so that we are able to trace where these contacts are coming from, and when someone comes down with COVID, that we can contact-trace and find out who they've been in contact with. Right now, we're at about 85% to 90% of contact management within 24 hours of someone being diagnosed with COVID.

But we've also made significant investments in our hospital sector. We've invested \$935 million in additional money in the sector this year. It's a 5.5% increase—the biggest increase in a decade—and we've made hundreds

of millions of dollars in additional investments since then, which I can discuss in the next supplemental.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Leader of the Opposition.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Parents, seniors, small business owners and all Ontarians are paying the price now for the Premier's failure to prepare for the second wave. The Premier could admit that and make the overdue investments that are necessary to get testing and tracing to where it should be and to ensure that our hospitals, schools and small businesses have the support that they need to get through these next couple of months, but instead, the Premier is ignoring the evidence—and apparently, so is the minister—while members of his own caucus are ignoring public health advice.

When will the Premier stop making things up as he goes, start making sure his caucus members are following the rules and start making the investments that should have been in place months and months ago?

Hon. Christine Elliott: In fact, we do have a comprehensive plan, one that is called Keeping Ontarians Safe. It anticipates all of the issues that the leader of the official opposition has just mentioned: case and contact management; making sure that we can be prepared for surges in COVID cases, as well as keeping our surgeries and procedures going to keep Ontarians healthy.

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We've invested \$341 million to create an additional 500 acute care beds and 100 critical care beds. That was at the beginning. It was supplemented by more money that went into 139 more critical care beds and 1,349 additional beds and, recently, by an additional \$116 million that created an additional 766 beds in 32 hospitals across the province.

As things stand now, since the start of this pandemic, we have created 3,131 new hospital beds to deal with the increase in both patients with COVID, with flu—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you. The next question?

LONG-TERM CARE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is actually for the Premier as well. The government's failure to prepare for the second wave is especially devastating in long-term care—and I think we all know that—where, now, at least 509 residents currently have COVID-19. In the face of this unprecedented disaster, the Ford government has dithered and delayed on action that was needed to save lives in long-term care. We know that's the case; that's what the commission heard in terms of testimony.

Why is the Ford government moving so slowly, Speaker, and when will they start moving quickly, because we all know that the lives of seniors in long-term care are truly at stake here?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Minister of Long-Term Care.

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: Thank you, Speaker, and thank you to the member opposite for the question. I can tell you that all of us feel very concerned about our long-

term-care-home residents and staff. That is why we have acted swiftly since the very beginning, making sure we created the regulatory flexibility for our long-term-care homes with the regulatory amendments for emergency orders, \$243 million to make sure that our staffing had support and infection control, ongoing measures to make sure there were rapid deployment teams from their hospital, integrating that response to our homes.

The vast majority of our homes, 94% of them, right now have no resident cases. There are outbreaks, but I want to remind everyone that an outbreak means one resident case or one staff case as a minimum, and that staff case can be isolating at home.

We are making sure that all the measures, including the \$540 million to back up our homes a few weeks ago—making sure that every measure is taken. We will continue to—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you. And the supplementary question?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: It's unfortunate that the minister's talking points don't include that 509 seniors are infected, as we speak, with COVID-19.

In new testimony that's happening at the long-term-care commission, government officials were struggling to try to explain why staffing studies sat on the Premier's desk, literally for months, while seniors died during the second wave.

At one point, the lead commissioner raises the issue of the urgent need for four hours of daily hands-on care. Here's what he said: "We're in the middle ... of Wave 2.... There is an immediacy to this, a sense of urgency...."

"But what you're describing doesn't seem urgent."

With so many lives at stake, how can this government fail to appreciate the urgent need for action on four hours of hands-on care?

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: Thank you again for the question. The sense of urgency has been consistently there, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Even as we started as a new ministry in summer 2019, to understand the staffing capacity, we created the expert advisory panel to give a comprehensive understanding of what needed to be done, and that report will be completed with a strategy. The report has been received; the strategy will be in December. We have committed to doing that.

Not only have we been doing that, we've been working urgently to shore up the staffing in our homes, using every measure possible, whether it's looking at the Red Cross, community paramedics, the integration with the hospitals and the acute care sector, the IPAC teams. This has all been ongoing with a sense of urgency from the very beginning, and we will continue with that same sense of urgency—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. Final supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, that is certainly not what the commissioner said, so something doesn't add up here.

It's literally a matter of life and death we're talking about, and the Premier's response quite clearly has been to

dither and delay. In testimony at the long-term-care commission, made public late Friday, the government admits that, "It isn't government policy that there can't be three and four residents in a room." It isn't government policy.

Well, we know that for-profit homes with massive outbreaks, like Extencicare Starwood in Ottawa and many others, have had three residents sharing a room. The government promised to change that, just like they promised to change the staffing levels. They promised action, but everybody is asking for urgent action. People don't want the government to delay any longer. It's time to fix the problem.

When are they going to get around to banning more than two residents per room in long-term care?

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: Thank you once again to the member opposite. Making sure that we were absolutely transparent about the ward room issue as soon as that was identified in wave 1, we have been working with Public Health Ontario, Ontario Health and medical officers of health within the public health units, looking at measures we can take to address the ward rooms using every possible measure—and all the while understanding the balance that must be had in the acute care sector to create capacity in long-term care and create measures that allow our hospitals to stay functional and serve those individuals who have cancer, who have heart disease and who require urgent treatment. All of this has to be an integrated effort.

I want to thank the commissioners for hearing the testimony. They did hear about the staffing issues. Those, of course, have been ongoing. We as a government have acknowledged that and are working feverishly to address that. And I want to thank the thousands of people who are working around the clock all during this terrible, unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic. Those people are making a difference—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you. Next question.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Ms. Marit Stiles: This question is for the Premier. Throughout this pandemic, parents have tried to make the right choices to keep their kids safe while also making sure they aren't set back a year in their learning. But thanks to a staggered and piecemeal approach that left class sizes too big and buses too crowded, thousands of students across this province never returned to school at all. In Toronto, 5,500 students didn't return; in London, a thousand. In Hamilton, the public board reports it's missing 1,756 kids.

Speaker, we all know the way education is funded in Ontario, and that means that dollars follow students. Enrolment has been completely disrupted by the pandemic and by this government's inconsistent policies. The corresponding drop in funding for those students will mean millions of dollars budgeted for schools will vanish unless the Premier acts. Will he?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The government House leader.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I appreciate the question from the member opposite, but the member opposite knows that the Minister of Education and the Premier have committed significant—in fact, historic—amounts to education. Obviously, this is a challenging time, not only for the people of the province of Ontario and for our students, but for school boards who have done, frankly, a spectacular job in helping assure that the funding that we have set aside for schools during the pandemic is getting to the students.

I know from my own experience in my board and with my kids—one in the Catholic system, one in the public system—the experience has been nothing short of spectacular. I want to—I guess opposite of what the member is saying—congratulate the teachers and the two boards that I have been fortunate enough to work with. They've done a great job. Students are learning. It is certainly different, Mr. Speaker, but they're getting the job done. I want to thank our educators for that.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The supplementary question.

Ms. Marit Stiles: If boards and schools are doing such a great job, keep the money there. Give them the assurance they need.

Repeating the same numbers from back in August is not going to make these problems go away. The minister needs to listen to families, listen to front-line workers in our schools. Many have taken to social media, using the hashtag #OntEdReality to share what's really happening. One teacher wrote that as families were trying to make Halloween as fun for their kids as possible, he was busy rearranging classrooms once again to accommodate even more students, as classes are collapsed and class sizes continue to grow. Others are asking, "Where are these new custodians?"

Speaker, Ontario's COVID cases are breaking records every few days. We can no longer wait to see how this will all pan out. We need urgent action to protect our students and keep schools open as long as possible. Will the Premier take action now?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Of course, we have continued—right from the beginning of the pandemic, we took very swift action to ensure that our students were safe. We did that by working with not only our school boards, but with our education partners, the union leaders, to make sure that we rolled out a system that worked as best as it could for the students in the province of Ontario.

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Will we continue to invest in students? Absolutely. We've done that right since our first budget. We are the only government to make significant investments in education in such a short period of time, and I'm quite proud of that.

This is a very challenging time, obviously. Surely to goodness, the member opposite can appreciate how difficult it has been to bring forward online learning, to bring forward protection for our students, those who want to go to school, and for the teachers. We've been able to do that. It has been a success. Does that mean that we stop? No. Of course, we redouble our efforts, because parents will want

different things and students will want different things. This government will be prepared for whatever our parents and whatever our students want by working with our teachers and our educators to make sure we get it right.

MANUFACTURING JOBS

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: My question is to the Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade.

Last week, the minister joined me, the Premier and the MPP for Barrie–Springwater–Oro–Medonte to meet with Wolfgang, a German tool-and-die maker, and his wife, Ingrid, who co-founded Napoleon in the late 1970s in Barrie. As we heard, they are now North America's leader when it comes to manufacturing quality fireplaces, grills, furnaces and air conditioners, all because Wolfgang tried to impress his father-in-law by making a wood stove. That led, of course, to them stepping up to the plate like so many manufacturers when, during COVID-19 and as we're still in it, Napoleon workers put the grills on hold and they started to make medical equipment. They're an example, along with their sons, Christopher and Stephen, of manufacturers that have really stepped up to the plate.

I'm looking for the minister to tell us in this House how we're supporting manufacturers like Napoleon and what our government is doing to help manufacturers thrive.

Hon. Victor Fedeli: Thank you to the member from Barrie–Innisfil for her question.

Let's start with a shout-out to Ingrid, Wolfgang, Stephen and Chris Schroeter for hosting us at Napoleon Home Comfort. Their 1,100 employees prove that Ontario is indeed a manufacturing powerhouse.

In September alone, Ontario saw an increase of nearly 52,000 manufacturing jobs. That means that 17,000 more people work in manufacturing now than did pre-COVID-19. That proves that even in times of pandemic, we can make anything right here in the province, and we should be proud of that. By purchasing Ontario-made products, we can put billions of dollars back into our economy and lead our province down the road to recovery.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The supplementary question.

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: Thank you, Minister, for that answer.

As stated in Plant magazine, "Not even COVID-19 can douse the sizzle at Napoleon."

Our government continues to be a leader and champion when it comes to highlighting and supporting Ontario-made businesses. Several months ago, of course, we launched the Ontario Made program that helps support manufacturers, through the Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters, by highlighting our businesses and, of course, creating the Ontario Made logo, which you can proudly support—onto our Ontario-made products so that people know, when they go to the stores, what products they can buy that are made in Ontario.

In a recent poll, we have seen that 73% of Ontarians want to buy local-made product and, in fact, 56% of

Ontarians wish they could purchase more domestic products.

So I'm asking the minister if he could share with my constituents and all Ontarians what new developments we have for the Ontario Made program.

Hon. Victor Fedeli: The Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters launched the Ontario Made program, but that was only the beginning. Today, we're excited to announce the launch of the second phase of Ontario Made. So when you see that Ontario Made logo, it's easier for shoppers to tell what products are actually produced right here in Ontario. To date, 4,600 products are registered with that logo, from 1,200 Ontario manufacturers. That's 4,600 quality Ontario Made products supporting local jobs.

It was great to see the Ontario Made logo on Beauti-Tone paint when I dropped by the Ferris Home Hardware in North Bay this weekend. So, we urge people to go to supportontariomade.ca for a complete directory of these 1,200 companies.

COLLEGE STANDARDS AND ACCREDITATION

Mr. Taras Natyshak: My question is to the Premier. Speaker, we all know that the Premier has a close personal relationship with Charles McVety. He is even trying to grant him his own version of Trump University North; I cringe at the thought of what an ethics degree from McVety U would look like.

But Speaker, it appears that he's not McVety's only friend in the PC Party caucus. In now-deleted photos from McVety's lavish birthday party last November, we see a special video greeting from the Premier and also appearances from the chief government whip, the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions, and the Minister of Finance. Mysteriously, these photos have all disappeared from their website as of last Thursday night.

Speaker, do any of the ministers who attended that party know if Canada Christian College's accreditation was discussed, and if so, why have those photos disappeared?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): To respond for the government, the Minister of Colleges and Universities.

Hon. Ross Romano: I am glad to have this opportunity to rise and address this important matter. Any time any organization or any individual applies for any type of a licence or a designation, it's incumbent upon legislators—people in quasi-judicial functions—to ensure that there is fairness and there is accountability in the process.

The main way to ensure accountability is through transparency, things like having bills debated openly in this House. The main way to ensure fairness is to ensure that there is a process.

There are three ways for any designation of this nature to be granted: one, through a private bill. It goes directly to committee, tabled by any member this House; it does not come into this House for open discussion. It's a very sheltered process. The second option is through ministerial consent; I'll speak about that in the supplemental. The

third option is through a legislative process, once again, that gets debated in this House.

What we chose to do, Mr. Speaker, was to blend a ministerial consent and a legislative process to ensure transparency, to ensure accountability, to ensure fairness, and to ensure a process.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary question?

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Speaker, despite concerns coming from his own PC Party members, the Premier has spent weeks defending his favour to Charles McVety by claiming it's all above board and following due process. But we now know that McVety had unrestricted access to the Premier's cabinet ministers and closest advisers at this event. Nobody can know for sure what was said at McVety's birthday bash, but I don't think anyone would believe that government business never came up.

Speaker, were any of the members of the Premier's cabinet who were present at that party lobbied at the party, or are they just really such good close allies of Charles McVety?

Hon. Ross Romano: Again, to ensure a fair and accountable process, what we have done, and what we have endeavoured to do, and we will always do on this side of the House, is making sure that fairness, process and accountability are adhered to. These are principles of the rule of law that I certainly take very seriously, and we on this side of the House take very, very seriously.

If you look at the private bill option, which I discussed in the earlier question, that option goes directly to a committee. It's a very sheltered process. It would not have been debated in this House; it would not have been a very transparent process.

Ministerial consent, Mr. Speaker, is something that is traditionally done in a minister's boardroom and signed off on. We converted that in the last red tape bill last October, where two other universities, OCAD University and Algoma University, were part of that as well. We ensured that that process went directly to an independent review board, being PEQAB.

What we've done here with this particular legislation—the same as we did before; the same as we'll do again—is we made sure that it was all combined in a blended, open, transparent process.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mme Lucille Collard: My question is for the Minister of Long-Term Care. Speaker, I need to keep on asking these questions because I keep on hearing from people in my riding that the situation in our long-term-care homes is far from being resolved.

I receive updates from the administrators of these for-profit long-term-care homes. While they're trying to be reassuring, it's really easy to read between the lines. In fact, they are trying to tell us that everything is under control by saying they have a very comprehensive infection prevention and control program, and say in the same letter that they are working with the hospital team to

develop procedures to manage the outbreak because they can't control anything.

I have heard from family members and caregivers, and there are still delays in getting tested and getting results while the virus continues to spread.

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My question is: Will the minister ensure that testing is improved and prioritized in the long-term care homes?

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: Thanks again to the member opposite for the question. This is something I want to emphasize is ongoing: making sure that our homes are getting the staffing they need and the PPE support that they need. There are no critical situations with the homes. There are no critical staffing shortages. The homes are working—in some cases it's voluntary management contracts or mandatory management orders with the hospitals involved. In the Ottawa area, there are four homes that have resident cases. The others do not, even though they are considered in outbreak, and that's because of the definition that I keep mentioning.

Also, making sure that there's communication with families: I think that that is something that is one of those lessons learned, that we are making sure that those homes have the ability to communicate with their loved ones. Looking at making sure that we have the infection prevention and control measures in there, these homes are all partnered with hospitals across the province to make sure that they have the necessary expertise.

I thank you for your question.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The supplementary question?

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Again to the Minister of Long-Term Care: I do want to congratulate the minister on the paramedicine program that I've heard of. Based on the consultations that I've done around long-term care and based on my own experience of having my mother living with us, I believe this can go a long way in helping our loved ones and those who look after them. Essential caregivers are indeed a very important part of the solution for providing much-needed support to the system, and it's really important that they have access to their loved ones in long-term-care homes, to provide much-needed support.

We need to realize that more often than not these essential caregivers are seniors themselves, looking after a relative or a spouse. The Champlain family council reached out to me and to the minister to make us aware that the obstacles to getting tested have undermined their role as caregivers.

My question on behalf of all the family members who are taking care of loved ones in long-term care is: Will the minister ensure that rapid testing will be given ongoing priority in long-term-care settings and that it includes caregivers?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Minister of Health.

Hon. Christine Elliott: I thank the member very much for the question. Testing is very important for caregivers, because we recognized through wave 1 how important these caregivers are. They provide in some cases up to

80% of the care that their loved ones receive in long-term care. It's very important for their mental functioning and physical functioning. We have allowed for that with opening up pharmacies for asymptomatic testing. It can be family members who can go in to pharmacies, receive a quick turnaround and receive a quick answer about not having COVID and being able to see their family members.

But we're also looking at the new strains of testing that are coming forward, some of which are point-of-care testing. We're going to give them in priority to both residents of long-term-care homes and staff members, as well as essential caregivers, because you're absolutely right: These essential caregivers are truly essential to be there with the ones they love during COVID-19.

LAW ENFORCEMENT

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: My question is for the Attorney General. Constituents in my riding need to know that their government supports local efforts to prevent and fight crime in their community. They appreciate the work our government is doing to support the work of local police, prosecutors, victim services organizations and other community partners who are working together to stand up for law-abiding citizens, support victims of crime and dismantle the criminal network that preys on the profits of young and vulnerable people in our community.

Speaker, we know human trafficking has targeted Ontario communities, and our government has established a comprehensive and province-wide approach to fight these crimes. What is the government doing to hold criminals accountable and keep communities safe from human trafficking?

Hon. Doug Downey: I thank the great member for Mississauga–Lakeshore for the question and for the opportunity to tell Ontarians what our government is doing to support victims of crime. Just last week, I announced that our government is reinvesting cash seized from criminals to help fight heinous crimes like human trafficking across Ontario. Our government is investing a total of \$2.5 million through the Civil Remedies Grant Program to support 33 local crime-fighting projects that will make communities safer. This year, we focused on investments in helping communities fight back against human trafficking. Money collected from proceeds of crime will be reinvested into support programming and will also go towards crisis counselling and public education.

In fact, in the member's riding, we invested nearly \$100,000 in Project Haven with the Peel police service. Project Haven will use technology and surveillance equipment to locate and support victims of human trafficking and ensure those responsible for exploiting them are identified and prosecuted.

We are taking money out of the hands of criminals and putting it directly back in the hands of those who will make an important contribution to support victims of crime.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary question? The member for Sarnia–Lambton.

Mr. Robert Bailey: My question is to the Attorney General, as well. Minister, while the news of funding is welcome, Ontarians need certainty that the government is providing resources to get at the roots of criminal activity like human trafficking so that there are fewer victims. Ontarians and the constituents in my riding need to know that, unlike the Liberals and the NDP, this government will support our law enforcement so they can do their job and prevent crime like human trafficking from occurring.

Can the Attorney General commit to this House that this funding is more than a band-aid solution to a problem that impacts so many and that it will, in fact, provide direct support to law enforcement in the prevention of crime?

Hon. Doug Downey: I'd like to thank the member from Sarnia. Let me make it clear to all members: Under our government, crime will not pay. Much of the \$2.5-million investment in the Civil Remedies Grant Program will go directly to funding law enforcement programs that fight back against human traffickers, by supporting the efforts of local police and prosecutors to dismantle the criminal networks that prey on and profit from young and vulnerable people in all of our communities.

In fact, in the member's riding, we're providing over \$75,000 to the Sarnia Police Service to ensure they have the training and surveillance equipment they need to locate and prosecute those involved in human and drug trafficking, as well as aid the victims of crime.

I'd also like to highlight that our government has made it harder for criminals to hold onto proceeds of their crimes through the Smarter and Stronger Justice Act passed in this House. It was passed just this summer.

By strengthening the civil forfeiture laws and catching up with the rest of Canada, we've taken real action to hold offenders accountable, support victims of crime and build safer communities.

COLLEGE STANDARDS AND ACCREDITATION

Ms. Jill Andrew: This is to the Deputy Premier. The Deputy Premier went to great lengths to try to distance herself from Charles McVety. On Thursday, she told the media she was uncomfortable with the suggestion that this government stands for racist or homophobic behaviour. The Deputy Premier is more worried about the reputation of her government than the lives of queer and trans people, and of Muslim Ontarians and others attacked on a constant basis by Mr. Charles McVety.

Why is the Deputy Premier more worried about the brand of her party than the lives of queer and trans people constantly attacked by the hateful and bigoted Charles McVety?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Minister of Colleges and Universities.

Hon. Ross Romano: Thank you, Speaker. I'm very happy to rise and address this question. We believe in the rule of law. I've indicated that. We believe in the charter. Perhaps my background—as a lawyer myself, I dealt with issues around the charter all the time: section 7 of the

charter, which guarantees fundamental freedoms to us all; section 15, guaranteeing equality under the law—guaranteeing equality for all.

We want to ensure that we have fair processes for all; fair processes that ensure that any individual, any organization, when applying for any kind of a licence or a designation, has a fair and transparent process. It is not for any one individual to determine how a single individual will be weighed in these processes. What's important is that we have a fair process. We have that.

We have taken a ministerial consent process, we've taken a legislative process, and we have married those two processes together. We've done it before. We did it with Algoma University, we did it with OCAD U, and we've done it with three institutions in this legislation right now.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

The supplementary question.

Ms. Jill Andrew: Again to the Deputy Premier, hoping she'll answer this time. Charles McVety claimed in 2010 that sex education would lead to queer adults preying on children. He said, "they want to proselytize your children and mine, our grandchildren and turn them into homosexuals." He suggested every queer person is a pedophile, and he spewed all of that vile hate while taking for himself and his son nearly \$1 million from his college.

If the Deputy Premier is really worried about the brand of her party, she should be worried with the fact that Charles McVety's college requires members to sign a form proving that they're homophobic and transphobic.

Will the Deputy Premier vote against this legislation to give Charles McVety an even bigger platform to spew his hatred and bigotry against queer and trans people, yes or no?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'll ask the members to please take their seats.

The Minister of Colleges and Universities to respond.

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Hon. Ross Romano: Again, Mr. Speaker, I can respect the question; I can respect where it comes from, because we can all respect the importance of equality. We can all respect the importance of ensuring that we have processes that are free of hate.

But processes, when any individual is applying for licences or designation, require procedural fairness. They require that the rule of law be adhered to. They require a process that everybody can have an opportunity to have a part in, state their beliefs, state how they feel about it. That gives us the opportunity to make good, judicious decisions.

We are here, Mr. Speaker, following a process. We are following the most transparent process there possibly is: open debate in this House. We are following an independent review process. There is no other process that exists that is more fair and accountable than the process we are following.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Mr. Stephen Blais: Mr. Speaker, about a month ago, the Premier said that his plan was working, while the medical officer of health in Ottawa was saying that there was an impending health care crisis in the nation's capital. A week later, of course, the Premier put Toronto, Ottawa and Peel into enhanced social and economic restrictions.

Last week, the Premier told Ontarians that we would see new modelling and that modelling would show good news: that cases were going down, that the curve was going down, Mr. Speaker. Of course, his medical team the next day showed us that, in fact, cases are going up.

How can Ontarians trust what is said when every time the Premier speaks on the status of COVID-19 in Ontario, he is almost immediately disputed by his own medical experts?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Deputy Premier and Minister of Health.

Hon. Christine Elliott: I thank the member very much for the question. The reality is that COVID has taken many turns in the province of Ontario. We've gone through wave 1; we're clearly in wave 2. Our numbers are high. For a period of time, it looked as if the numbers were lowering somewhat, in the Ottawa area in particular, but the numbers have gone back up. That is what happens. The Premier spoke at the time, and that's the way that it was. But the numbers have gone back up.

All we can ask of Ontarians is to please continue following those important public health measures: maintain physical distancing, wear a mask if you can't do that, make sure you follow complete hand hygiene and stay home if you're feeling ill. That is the number one rule for dealing with COVID. Make sure that you do everything that you can to follow that. That's how we'll truly get the numbers down, and that's what we're asking all Ontarians to do.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The supplementary question.

Mr. Stephen Blais: My supplemental is also for the Minister of Health.

Clear and concise information from the government is paramount during an emergency, Mr. Speaker. In some cases, the Premier tells us he's taking his advice from medical experts; at other times, he takes his advice from elected MPPs and mayors. One day he is telling us that cases are going down; the next day his own medical experts are saying, "No, cases are going up"—one day later, Mr. Speaker.

There doesn't seem to be any objective measure, criteria or basis for some of the decisions the Premier is making. There's no strategy, there's no thought, and it seems that he's just whacking away at problems: "I'll do something over here today, something over here tomorrow."

When will the government come clean with the people of Ontario, become transparent in their decision-making and how they're choosing winners and losers in this economy, and stop taking a whack-a-mole approach to COVID-19?

Hon. Christine Elliott: In fact, there is a very comprehensive, measured approach that we're taking to dealing with wave 2 of COVID-19. It's all part of the fall preparedness plan that has been available to all members of this House and the members of the public for weeks now. It has six pillars, and we're following each one of those pillars. We want to make sure that people follow the health measures. We want to make sure that people can still have their procedures and surgeries done. We're ready for an increase in COVID cases or in flu cases. We're ready for all of that. That is the path that we're following. We are sticking with the plan, because it is working.

We haven't had the huge mass upticks in COVID, as we witnessed around the world, but our numbers are still higher than I think any of us would want to see. We're taking the public health approach that we need to take to deal with that.

The Premier has been very clear from the beginning of this pandemic that he's going to take the advice of medical experts, Dr. Williams, the public health measures table and the many other people who are providing advice, giving clinical advice, scientific—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much.

The next question.

MINING INDUSTRY

Mr. Vincent Ke: My question is for PA Smith. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought uncertainty to many industries across the province. In Ontario, the mining sector employs over 72,000 workers at mining sites, as part of the mining supply chain, and here in Toronto, the mining investment capital of the world. Can PA Smith tell this House how our government is supporting the critical mining and mineral development sectors during this difficult time?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The parliamentary assistant and the member for Peterborough-Kawartha.

Mr. Dave Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and through you, I'd like to thank the member from Don Valley North for that question. In 2019 alone, our mining industry produced more than \$10 billion—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I hate to interrupt the member. It's inappropriate to direct a question to a parliamentary assistant. Did you intend to give it to a minister or—

Interjections.

Mr. Vincent Ke: Minister of energy and mining.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Okay. So you intended to put the question to the minister responsible for mining, and the parliamentary assistant, the member for Peterborough-Kawartha, will reply on behalf of the government.

Mr. Dave Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I was saying, in 2019 alone, the mining industry produced more than \$10 billion worth of minerals, almost a quarter of all that was produced in Canada. Time and time again, Ontario's exploration and mining companies have led the

way in corporate social responsibility and sustainability. This has never been more apparent than during COVID-19.

I want to thank the entire mining industry for its rapid and compassionate response to the pandemic, for sharing our commitment to protecting the health and safety of everyone. Because of their commitment, we were able to act quickly and decisively to designate the mining and minerals industry as essential during COVID-19.

Protecting the health and safety of those workers while protecting those important jobs will continue to be our priority.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The supplementary question.

Mr. Vincent Ke: Thank you to PA Smith for the answer. I also want to appreciate all of Ontario's corporate champions who share our commitment to protecting the health and safety of workers during this COVID-19 pandemic.

Can PA Smith elaborate on other initiatives our government is taking to support the mining and mineral sector at this time?

Mr. Dave Smith: Ontario is continuing down a path of economic recovery by reducing administrative burdens on industry. The latest iteration of our red tape reduction bill, the Better for People, Smarter for Business Act, if passed, will improve the administrative efficiency of the Mining Act. The proposed changes will clarify and update the mining lands administration system to fill gaps and create a better user experience for proponents. These proposed changes will also ensure the minister can respond swiftly to future global or provincial crises.

While our work is far from over, I'm confident that Ontario will continue to take our rightful place as a leading jurisdiction for global mining innovation and investment, helping to fuel our economic recovery while supplying the world with critical minerals that will power the technology of tomorrow.

FLU IMMUNIZATION

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour la ministre de la Santé.

The request for flu shots from Ontarians is really great. We all understand that we have our part to do to get rid of this virus, and to get a flu shot is a step in that direction. Unfortunately, the government seems really ill-prepared. I have an email that Caroline Family Health Team sends to their patients on the wait-list for a flu shot:

"We placed an order for 1,500 shots with public health. This request has been declined...."

"Supply was, and continues to be, the major impediment at this time. Unfortunately, this is completely out of our control. Public health has not given any confirmation of future flu shot supply, if any."

This is the same thing all over, Speaker.

1120

I agree with the minister that vaccines have always been delivered in batches, but we knew when the next batch was

coming and we knew how many doses we would get. What's happening?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Minister of Health.

Hon. Christine Elliott: Thank you very much for the question. In fact, we started this flu season wanting to have the largest flu campaign in Ontario's history, and it's happening. I'm very, very grateful to the people of Ontario who have gone out to get their flu shots. Last year, long before the pandemic ever was thought of, we ordered 5.1 million doses, which was 700,000 more than we had ordered the year before. We were then able to obtain another 350,000 doses with the assistance of the federal government: 5.45 million doses.

I can tell you that as of today, just at pharmacies, over one million doses have already been given to people, whereas this time last year it was 150,000, and we almost had to beg people to come in to get the flu vaccine. Over one million doses already. So this is a very successful flu campaign. As I said, I'm very grateful that the people of Ontario are coming forward to get their flu shot.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): And the supplementary question.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Caroline Family Health Team is not the only one. In my riding, City of Lakes Family Health Team wrote to the minister: "Our family health team was notified by public health that flu shots would be quite limited this year and that pharmacies would be getting more than in previous years. So we phoned" the pharmacies.

For Shoppers Drug Mart in Hanmer, their flu shot tool "says, 'Flu shot not available,' so we" called the pharmacist. "She advised us that they do not have any."

Guardian pharmacy in Chelmsford: They do not have any. Same thing with the high-dose.

IDA pharmacy in Leveck: They do not have any and do not know when they will get more.

Rexall is cancelling booked flu shot appointments.

What is going on, Minister? We both know that if access to flu vaccines is too difficult, people will simply stop trying and a pillar of our pandemic response will collapse with the consequences we all fear. How can things that Ontario always did well in the past go so wrong?

Hon. Christine Elliott: Actually, things are going right. As I indicated, a record number of Ontarians have come forward to have the flu shot. We also prioritized our most vulnerable populations: people in long-term-care homes and retirement homes, other places of congregate living. We want to make sure that those people can be protected, and people who are in hospitals, as well.

We've also, as part of our fall plan, set aside another \$28.5 million in the event that we needed to purchase more flu shots. I can advise you that I have already been in contact with the federal Minister of Health, Minister Patty Hajdu, to inquire about their flu shot reserve. They do have a reserve of shots. We are trying to procure some from that. We're also dealing with those global manufacturers

directly to procure more supplies from places around the world.

Because people still want to get the flu shot, we are working to get those additional shots that people have indicated they want. But this is the biggest flu campaign Ontario has ever had in its history.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Mr. Randy Hillier: My question is to the Minister of Health. There's a difference between theory and practice. Last week, Dr. Paul Roumeliotis, eastern Ontario medical officer of health, complained to the media, "I'm getting" too much "criticism from doctors who are experts in infectious diseases, epidemiology," immunology "and intensive care."

Real doctors, those who treat patients, disagree with this dangerous theoretical experiment you and your overpaid public health doctors are practising. Tens of thousands of doctors in Ontario and around the world are using science, facts and their first-hand experience to challenge the lockdown narrative from public health.

Minister, you can delegate authority, but in a democracy you cannot abdicate responsibility. When will you acknowledge, like all those doctors, that your lockdown experiments are doing far more harm than they are good?

Hon. Christine Elliott: Thank you for the question, but we have from the very beginning indicated that any decisions that are made with respect to COVID-19 are going to be based on science and facts, as you refer to it, and that's what we're using: clinical evidence. What is going to respond to this epidemic? How are we going to keep the people of Ontario safe? That's what we've done every step along the way.

Now, there are many doctors out there. There are other public health doctors. Not everyone is going to be of the same opinion. However, we have a very competent Chief Medical Officer of Health, Dr. Williams, and very competent people at Public Health Ontario and around the Public Health Measures Table. Those are the people who provide us with recommendations, based on the facts, based on the science, on what's going to keep the people of Ontario safe. That's the advice we've been taking throughout this entire pandemic.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The supplementary question.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Again to the Minister of Health: You stated that you're using clinical evidence, but that's not quite true, is it? You're using bureaucratic opinion.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Please withdraw the unparliamentary comment.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Withdraw.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Place your question.

Mr. Randy Hillier: It's not just practising doctors and specialists who see that your approach is causing damage and injury. Ontario's and Manitoba's former public health officers, Dr. Richard Schabas and Dr. Joel Kettner, are opposed to these dangerous lockdowns as well. Real doctors, who treat patients, and specialists oppose this as well, but

you don't listen. You don't even listen to the caucus and other—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Make your comments through the Chair.

Mr. Randy Hillier: You only listen to Dr. David Williams.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Make your comments through the Chair, or I'll cut—

Mr. Randy Hillier: When will you start to listen and stop the suffering?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'll remind all members to make their comments through the Chair.

Minister of Health to reply.

Hon. Christine Elliott: I would invite the member—through you, Speaker—to consider what would have happened if we didn't do anything in Ontario. We could very well be in the same situation that Europe is in right now—hundreds and hundreds of thousands of cases, with our emergency departments, with our hospitals being overwhelmed. We had to take some action.

We know these measures will work. We're seeing the numbers starting to go down—not to the level that any of us would like to see, but they are maintaining at a plateau. I would like to see them go lower, as would you, but we don't have—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I apologize to the Minister of Health.

The member for Lanark–Frontenac–Kingston will come to order.

The Minister of Health can reply.

Hon. Christine Elliott: Thank you, Speaker.

We are relying on the evidence of front-line doctors. There's Dr. Williams, there's the Public Health Measures Table—but there are many, many doctors behind that who give them their response as well. It's not just one or two doctors. We are consulting with many doctors across the province—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you. The next question.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Mr. Faisal Hassan: My question is for the Premier.

Last week, Canada's top public health doctor released a report on community COVID-19 outcomes outlining what we in York South–Weston already know and have been speaking about for months now: When it comes to getting hit with COVID-19, your postal code matters as much as your genetic code. Data shows that socially and economically disadvantaged groups—with seniors, women, disabled people, immigrants and marginalized workers who deliver essential services bearing the brunt of the pandemic.

Will the Premier finally recognize the regional inequities like those that exist in Toronto's northwest seriously and deliver the resources and support our community so desperately needs and has been asking of this government?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Minister of Health to reply.

Hon. Christine Elliott: I thank the member very much for the question.

You're absolutely right: There are some regional areas where there are inequities, where there are a number of people who aren't coming forward to be tested. We know that when we started taking testing by appointment at the assessment centres, many of these groups weren't coming forward. So what we are doing is going to them. We have opened up some pop-up centres, some mobile testing units. Some of the hospitals are doing a great job in reaching out. Michael Garron Hospital is doing a great job. Unity and UHN are already reaching out through some of the community partners that are already providing services. They're the people many recent people to Ontario trust. They go there for their other health services. So this is a really important, trusting relationship. They can go and be tested. When we have a vaccine, that's also going to be important, when we come forward with that—to have those trusted relationships so that people will get the vaccine, too, when it's available.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The supplementary question. The member for Humber River–Black Creek.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: My question is to the Acting Premier.

Again, Toronto's northwest neighbourhoods continue to be amongst the hardest hit in our province. My neighbourhood is one of them. So is the Premier's. The reasons are socio-economic, they are structural, and we need targeted solutions.

1130

Something that would help would be the establishment of community liaisons, to fight COVID-19 on the ground, to address language barriers by working with different communities in their own languages, making sure the information that could save lives is heard and followed by everyone. Their strategies would be tailored to each neighbourhood. I raised this at the Select Committee on Emergency Management Oversight, and the Solicitor General said this request was indeed reasonable.

Acting Premier, our communities are counting on us. Will you commit to funding the establishment of community liaisons to help the neighbourhoods that have been hardest hit?

Hon. Christine Elliott: What I can definitely commit to is that we recognize the issues that exist in some neighbourhoods. We are providing that support. We are making sure, first of all, that people can be tested, and that when the vaccine comes forward, they will be able to get the vaccine as well.

But I think that overall, what we're trying to do—very similar to what you mentioned—is making sure that we can wrap around people with their health care services. That's why we undertook the transformation in the first place: the creation of Ontario Health and the local Ontario health teams that contain not just the local health service providers, but the social service providers as well so that they will know if they are dealing with a patient who has

some health needs, that maybe they also have a food security problem or are having a problem paying rent. A lot of the socio-economic factors that we keep talking about wanting to bring into health, that's what we're trying to do with this transformation. And that is going to be of the greatest help to these communities in need.

COLLEGE STANDARDS AND ACCREDITATION

Mr. John Fraser: My question is for the Minister of Colleges and Universities.

Speaker, Charles McVety has demonstrated over the years his Islamophobic, homophobic and transphobic views. These hateful views are really well documented. I'm not going to recite them now because we all know them. And yet, under the COVID-19 Economic Recovery Act, this government is returning favours and about to give Mr. McVety a special deal, a very special deal indeed.

Supporting Mr. McVety's special deal is an endorsement—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member knows full well he can't impute motive. I ask him to be very careful with his language.

Mr. John Fraser: Thank you, Speaker. I'll withdraw.

Supporting Mr. McVety's hateful views I see as a direct endorsement, and it says a lot about our Premier and his party's priorities during this pandemic.

Speaker, through you to the minister: Can the minister explain why he thinks that Mr. McVety's hateful views have any place in any Ontario school?

Hon. Ross Romano: The member opposite knows very well that our Premier and our entire government's number one priority throughout this entire pandemic has been the health and safety of every single individual in this province. We have done an exceptional job combatting this pandemic. I am personally very proud of the work of our Premier, of our Minister of Health and all of our caucus and all of our colleagues in cabinet in the work we have done during this pandemic. Do you know what, Mr. Speaker? I believe the people of Ontario also feel the same way about that. We've done an exceptional job, and that is just an inappropriate reference from the member opposite.

With respect to the issue that has been canvassed here today and over the last few weeks, this has absolutely everything to do with fairness and transparency, accountability and the rule of law, making sure that when any individual, any organization makes an application for some type of a licence or designation, that there is a fair and transparent process. That's what we have here. Thank you.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary question.

Mr. John Fraser: It's not about process, not at all. It's not about process. The whole thing just stinks. We all know it. I can see it when I look over there. You know too. You all know, and the Deputy Premier said as much last week in a scrum. You know.

Quite frankly, I'm surprised that the government is hell-bent on moving forward with this. Given the financial revelations of last week, it kind of looks like it might be a bit of a piggy bank.

I don't understand why you are so fixed on moving forward with this. Case counts are rising. Serious outbreaks are happening in long-term care. Testing and tracing is not where it needs to be. So I don't understand why this is such a priority for this government. There are so many other things we should be talking about right now.

Quite frankly, I'm embarrassed—Speaker, embarrassed—that I have to ask this question in 2020: Will the Minister of Colleges and Universities do the right thing and tell the Premier to withdraw schedule 2 of Bill 213?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Again, I would ask all members to make their comments through the Chair.

The Minister of Colleges and Universities to reply.

Hon. Ross Romano: Under the former government—that member, who was a part of the former government—a process to obtain this type of a designation would take over three years in some cases.

Last year, in our fall red tape bill last October, we introduced a simplified ministerial consent process where applications went directly to PEQAB, an independent reviewing agency. Additionally, we put in legislation for OCAD University and Algoma University, to bring it forward into legislation, along with that independently reviewed PEQAB process.

Now, in this particular legislation we have here, three institutions are coming forward in the exact same process: a transparent, open, accountable process; one that is being followed to a T; one that we followed in the past; and one that ensures that people have fairness—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you. That concludes question period.

This House stands in recess until 1 p.m.

The House recessed from 1136 to 1300.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

CRIME PREVENTION WEEK

SEMAINE DE LA PRÉVENTION DU CRIME

Hon. Sylvia Jones: It is my distinct privilege to rise in this House today in recognition of Crime Prevention Week. Crime Prevention Week is an annual event held during the first week in November, in partnership with the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police. It provides us with an opportunity to highlight the successful partnerships our dedicated police have been able to create with local community organizations across the province to prevent crime and increase the safety and well-being of our communities. This year, Crime Prevention Week runs from November 1 to November 7. Crime Prevention Week also serves as an important reminder about what we can

do individually and collectively as citizens to keep ourselves and our neighbourhoods safe.

2020 has been an incredibly challenging year for everyone. The COVID-19 pandemic has profoundly affected our lives, creating new challenges and placing an enormous strain on every member of our society unlike any seen in many generations. But even through these difficult months, and like the thousands of other essential front-line workers we are so fortunate to count on, our police have kept working relentlessly to serve and protect Ontarians. They have played and continue to play an essential role in supporting the enforcement of the public health measures our government has put in place to curb the spread of COVID-19 while also continuing to face the unrelenting pressures of gangs, organized crime and individuals exploiting the COVID-19 situation. Online fraud and door-to-door scams, or porch pirates, as well as acts of hatred towards members of our communities are only some of the threats that our police and our communities have had to deal with during this pandemic.

We also know that the pandemic has changed the nature of criminal activity across Ontario. Our partners in policing have told us that while most people are staying home to stop the spread of COVID-19, many criminals are not. Stunt-driving and street-racing have increased on our streets, creating dangerous conditions for all of those on our streets and within our communities. That is why our government recently announced an investment of \$6 million over three years to help expand CCTV surveillance systems throughout the province. This investment will further support our police in their efforts to combat aggressive driving, which has been linked to gun-and-gang-related violence and organized crime activities.

There have also been increasingly concerning reports of an uptick in domestic violence. To combat these heinous crimes and provide support to victims and survivors, our government announced an investment of more than \$6 million over three years through the Proceeds of Crime Front Line Policing Grant. This investment helps police services target local actions and makes our communities safer.

Crime prevention is a substantial part of what our police services do each and every day to protect us and our families from these and many other types of criminal activity. In fact, their work to prevent crime and address its root causes is as important as their efforts to enforce the law. But crime prevention should not and does not rest on the shoulders of our police services alone. It is essential that community organizations, social services providers, educators, parents and active groups of concerned citizens, like Crime Stoppers and Neighbourhood Watch, continue to get involved, work together and build constructive partnerships with our police.

This year's theme, "Serving Ontario, Protecting Communities," speaks to this shared responsibility. This collaboration amongst partners to prevent crime and address the underlying risks in the community also aligns with Ontario's modernized approach to community safety and well-being. The approach addresses local crime and

complex social issues on a more sustainable basis by shifting to more proactive and collaborative approaches that focus on social development, prevention and risk intervention. Collaboration is key to crime prevention and, ultimately, making positive changes in the community. That is why we are working with our municipal partners to continue developing their community safety and well-being plans.

Individuals, too, hold a key piece of the puzzle. Every Ontarian should feel empowered to help prevent crime and be engaged in the safety and well-being of their communities now more than ever by reporting suspicious activity, talking with neighbours, sharing information on community social media channels, and learning how to protect ourselves from cyber crimes, online scams and identity theft. These are just some examples of the simple actions that individual citizens can do to contribute to crime prevention and overall community safety and well-being. Our society is at its best when we work together and collaborate. It certainly takes an entire community to ensure everyone is safe from harm.

Again, I would like to commend the many police officers across Ontario who go above and beyond to keep us safe in these extraordinary times. They don't hesitate to put their own lives on the line in service to the people of Ontario, and for that we will be forever grateful.

I would like to thank Chief McNeely of the Kingston Police service and the current president of the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police for her support and partnership on this week's initiative.

I'm looking forward to working with our policing partners across Ontario to share the important message of this year's Crime Prevention Week: "Serving Ontario, Protecting Communities."

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Responses?

Mr. Kevin Yarde: "Serving Ontario, Protecting Communities" is the theme to this year's Crime Prevention Week, which runs from November 1 to November 7. It provides a unique opportunity to increase awareness about crime prevention and how we can all work collaboratively to keep our neighbourhoods and communities safe.

The theme is supported by the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police, the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services, as well as all police services across Ontario. During the week, many police services will feature a social media campaign that will focus on certain crimes that are on the rise in different regions, as well as safety tips and prevention measures to help residents from falling victim to crime.

We all know that it is not always possible to prevent a crime, but when it happens, we need to make sure to contact the police, as reporting an incident and providing relevant information will allow authorities to track trends and help them to identify suspects and solve investigations.

Preventing crime before it happens is a goal that we should all share. Being informed of crime trends allows police to proactively patrol neighbourhoods in efforts to reduce crime and keep communities safe, so if you witness a crime in progress, you're encouraged to call 911.

Crime Prevention Week also provides an opportunity to share the successful collaboration efforts between services and the community partners as they work towards a common goal of preventing crime and creating a safe and resilient community. This year's theme will allow precincts to promote benefits through a holistic community approach and address local crime issues related to safety and well-being.

The police are not alone in this initiative. During Crime Prevention Week, collaboration with other partners is key. Some of the community partners include the Canadian Mental Health Association, Medical Alert, the Canadian Anti-Fraud Centre and Neighbourhood Watch, just to name a few.

Also important is the showcasing of internal initiatives, such as discussing important crime prevention ideas with members of human trafficking units and recruiting and traffic units.

During Crime Prevention Week, we also hear about body-worn pilot project initiatives from different cities and the challenges around that. Crime Prevention Week should also encourage dialogue with the community around these pilot projects, so it should be an informative week.

Crime Prevention Week provides an opportunity to showcase a successful collaboration between communities and the police, as well as municipalities as they work together towards a common goal of preventing crime and creating safe, resilient communities across Ontario.

1310

Of course, with the ongoing circumstances surrounding COVID-19, police services and other front-line service providers are currently facing competing and challenging priorities in their communities, and it is important for them to continue to work together to enhance the safety and well-being for Ontarians to have a positive impact on the community.

Crime Prevention Week raises awareness and promotes the message that everyone plays a role in preventing crime and keeping Ontarians safe. In accordance with COVID-19 restrictions, police services across the province will be using the hashtag #CPWeek2020 to promote their local initiatives. This is an annual provincial event. It highlights how residents and police can work together to make communities safer.

one thing I need to mention is the NDP and our policy here. New Democrats believe, as part of our call to action, our justice system must focus on keeping people safe and fighting crime by addressing the causes. We believe in doing so by addressing the causes that lead to crime, and that means investing in communities.

Fundamental change to community safety cannot be successful without centring the voices of communities most directly impacted and ensuring that alternative supports, as well as traditional supports, reflect their current and future needs. The province should also support municipalities in ensuring that vulnerable communities, like Toronto Community Housing residents, for example, are able to form their own safety plans.

To that end, representatives must dedicate resources to engage in robust and comprehensive community consultation and create accountability mechanisms to community. The province should also invest heavily in programs and supports that improve quality of life by considering and addressing the social determinants of health—social and economic factors that influence people's health—and use an anti-racist, anti-oppression framework and seek out community-driven, community-led solutions to community safety and well-being.

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Community safety is a concern for constituents across the province. Our communities are places where we can find social circles, support and solidarity.

Tout le monde veut se sentir en sécurité dans son quartier, et chaque parent veut savoir que ses enfants rentreront sains et saufs à la maison à la fin de la journée scolaire.

Ces derniers jours, nous avons été témoins de violence et de criminalité dans de nombreuses régions du pays, et même à l'international. Je veux prendre un moment pour reconnaître l'horrible tragédie qui a eu lieu à Québec cette fin de semaine. Je tiens à exprimer mes sincères condoléances aux proches de François Duchesne et Suzanne Clermont. Mes pensées vont également aux cinq autres blessés, et je leur souhaite un rétablissement complet. Nos coeurs sont avec les Québécois alors qu'ils se relèvent de cette attaque horrible et insensée.

In Ontario, many communities also experienced different kinds of crimes over the weekend. Also on Halloween, small businesses in Ottawa were vandalized and robbed, so not only do they have to face the effects of the pandemic, but now they have to worry about costly repairs and increasing security.

Crime prevention is most effective when law enforcement, community partners and individuals are able to work together to protect communities. As we examine our law enforcement practices in the wake of too many tragedies resulting from law enforcement intervention that took a bad turn, it is important to recognize the social determinants of crime.

Given the fact that many of those tragedies could probably have been avoided with an appropriate and adapted response, we should seize the opportunity to be responsive and review how we prevent crimes and how we protect our communities. Also, those who become criminals, what they really need is support.

Our prison system is overcrowded with individuals whose behaviour needs more understanding and more proactive actions upstream. What is needed is access to education and access to social services to assist all the families that cannot cope with the problems and mental health issues of their family members. No one is born a criminal, and the fact that so many people are in jail should strongly motivate us to intervene.

Challenges that people are experiencing with access to housing or insufficient or no income to be able to feed themselves and their family can drive anyone to criminality. Investing in social programs with the aim of preventing crimes takes long-term, consistent and patient

action, but it improves communities for generations to come.

This Crime Prevention Week, I want to thank the many sectors of law enforcement that work every day to prevent crime, that have adapted to remain present in our neighbourhoods and that allow us every day to feel safe in Ontario.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: It's my pleasure to rise and speak to Crime Prevention Week. This year's theme is "Serving Ontario, Protecting Communities." I think that is an apt theme. I want to thank the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police for highlighting the absolute need to take a holistic approach to community safety and well-being.

I also want to thank all front-line police officers and all first responders in Ontario for the work you do and the way in which you serve our public to keep our communities safe. You enter into dangerous situations and put your lives on the line to protect and serve. My heart goes out to everyone who has been injured, traumatized or, worse, lost their life in this line of work. We need to ensure that all first responders have the mental health supports to deal with the impacts of the work they do.

I want to thank all the volunteers who are part of Crime Stoppers and Neighbourhood Watch and other community well-being efforts.

I also think it's essential that, as a society, we tackle the root causes of crime and apply some upstream thinking to keep everyone safe in the first place. Crime doesn't happen in a vacuum or without context, and we must address the social determinants of crime: lack of secure housing, unemployment, mental health and addictions challenges untreated, poverty and systemic racism.

The truth is, Speaker, that good government policy that addresses social and racial justice, that addresses the social determinants of crime, is an essential part of our ability to reduce crime in the first place and to support those first responders.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Timmins has a point of order.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Mr. Speaker, I believe we have an agreement with the government House leader to revert back to introduction of bills for a short period to allow a member to reintroduce a bill.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Timmins is seeking the unanimous consent of the House to revert back to introduction of bills to allow a member to introduce a bill. Agreed? Agreed.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

HARVEY AND GURVIR'S LAW (PROVISION OF INFORMATION RESPECTING DOWN SYNDROME), 2020 LOI DE 2020 DE HARVEY ET DE GURVIR (FOURNITURE DE RENSEIGNEMENTS CONCERNANT LA TRISOMIE 21)

Ms. Singh moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 225, An Act to amend the Regulated Health Professions Act, 1991 respecting the provision of information respecting Down syndrome by regulated health professionals / Projet de loi 225, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1991 sur les professions de la santé réglementées en ce qui concerne la fourniture, par les membres d'une profession de la santé réglementée, de renseignements concernant la trisomie 21.

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

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Would the member for Brampton Centre care to explain her bill?

Ms. Sara Singh: Yes. Thank you, Speaker. People with Down syndrome and their families have historically faced discrimination and have been victims of eugenics. Discrimination often begins with the prenatal diagnosis of Down syndrome, when families are provided outdated, incorrect or biased information based on antiquated models of disability. This misinformation reinforces negative stereotypes and can cause undue stress and hardship for families.

That's why, in honour of Canadian Down Syndrome Week, we are tabling Harvey and Gurvir's Law to end the bias and stigma associated with a prenatal diagnosis of Down syndrome. The bill amends the Regulated Health Professions Act, 1991, to require that the minister ensure that up-to-date, evidence-based information relating to Down syndrome is made available to members and the public.

The act is further amended to require that members share this information with the expectant parent or parents when they communicate a prenatal diagnosis of Down syndrome, and that they refrain from recommending any further testing or treatment in relation to the diagnosis of Down syndrome for a 48-hour period unless explicitly requested or unless the member is of the opinion that the performance of the testing or treatment is absolutely necessary.

1320

I want to thank all of the advocates across the province and across this country who have endured those realities when given that diagnosis, and I'd like to thank Sarah Valiquette-Thompson and her family for bringing this bill forward to this Legislature.

PETITIONS

GASOLINE PRICES

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank Pamela Charrier from Garson in my riding for these petitions. They read as follows:

"Gas prices.

"Whereas northern Ontario motorists continue to be subject to wild fluctuations in the price of gasoline;

"Whereas the province could eliminate opportunistic price gouging and deliver fair, stable and predictable fuel prices;

"Whereas five provinces and many US states already have some sort of gas price regulation;

"Whereas jurisdictions with gas price regulation have seen an end to wild price fluctuations, a shrinking of price discrepancies between urban and rural communities and lower annualized gas prices;"

They petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

"Mandate the Ontario Energy Board to monitor the price of gasoline across Ontario in order to reduce price volatility and unfair regional price differences while encouraging competition."

I support this petition, will sign it and send it to the table.

SMALL BUSINESS

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Ontario's downtown businesses have experienced much of the negative economic impact of COVID-19; and

"Whereas our downtown businesses are small mom-and-pop shops, employ local citizens and invest in our communities; and

"Whereas our main street businesses have faced unique challenges through the COVID-19 pandemic; and

"Whereas in that same vein, these businesses face particular challenges such as costs associated with acquiring personal protective equipment and expanding their e-commerce capabilities; and

"Whereas if passed, the Main Street Recovery Act, 2020 would offer a grant of up to \$1,000 for eligible main street small businesses, connect them with Ontario's 47 small business enterprise centres, help them grow their businesses online, and establish Ontario's small business recovery web page to provide single-window access to small business supports;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Legislative Assembly of Ontario vote on and pass Bill 215, the Main Street Recovery Act."

I affix my signature and give it to the usher.

DRIVER EXAMINATION CENTRES

Mr. Michael Mantha: I have a petition: "Improve DriveTest Services in Northern Ontario

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas northern Ontario residents and businesses experience a historic and significant shortage of DriveTest centre services;

"Whereas DriveTest centres in northern Ontario have been significantly understaffed and underfunded;

"Whereas winter clinics are rarely scheduled during the winter months;

“Whereas motor vehicles are the only means of transportation in many of the smaller, rural and isolated areas of northern Ontario; and

“Whereas DriveTest service shortages and disruptions gravely affect the lives of families, workers, seniors and students in northern Ontario;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

—To call on the Ford government and the Minister of Transportation to expand DriveTest services, Travel Points and clinics in northern Ontario;

—To demand the Minister of Transportation and DriveTest offer more hours and locations of service in northern Ontario;

—To provide Travel Point clinics all year round, including the winter months; and

—To call on the Ministry of Transportation to re-evaluate its assessment of services offered to northern Ontario communities that has led to current cuts in services and staff shortages.”

I wholeheartedly agree with this petition and present it to the ushers to bring down to the Clerks’ table.

OPTOMETRY SERVICES

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: I’d like to thank the local optometrists in Parkdale–High Park for this petition titled “Petition to Save Eye Care in Ontario.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Ontario government has underfunded optometric eye care for 30 years; and

“Whereas optometrists now subsidize the delivery of OHIP-covered eye care by \$173 million a year; and

“Whereas COVID-19 forced optometrists to close their doors, resulting in a 75%-plus drop in revenue; and

“Whereas optometrists will see patient volumes reduced between 40% and 60%, resulting in more than two million comprehensive eye exams being wiped out over the next 12 months; and

“Whereas communities across Ontario are in danger of losing access to optometric care;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“To instruct the Ontario government to immediately establish a timetable and a process for renewed negotiations concerning optometry fees.”

I support this petition and will affix my signature to it.

MAGNA CARTA DAY

Mr. Michael Parsa: A petition titled “Magna Carta Day in Ontario”:

“Whereas the Magna Carta is a revolutionary document that influenced the English system of common law and was a precursor in the development of England’s—and later, Canada’s—constitutional monarchy; and

“Whereas the Magna Carta was instrumental in placing limits on the monarch’s power to overrule the law and protected the rights of ordinary people; and

“Whereas the document introduced key principles that hold true in democratic societies today, including equal justice for everyone, freedom from unlawful detention, the right to a trial by jury, and rights for women; and

“Whereas it is important for the Magna Carta to be honoured and remembered as a document that changed the course of history. The fundamental traditions of equality and freedom that characterize our democratic society—particularly that nobody, not even the crown, is above the law—originated in this important document;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“Acknowledge the importance of this revolutionary document by proclaiming June 15 each year as Magna Carta Day in the province of Ontario.”

Speaker, I agree with it, I will add my name and hand it over to one of the pages.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS IN CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES

Ms. Jill Andrew: This petition is entitled “Give Prisoners Access to Free Phones Now!

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, the House of Commons, and Bell Canada:

“Whereas Bell acts like a champion of mental health, they jeopardize the well-being of prisoners and their families by putting up barriers to communication;

“Whereas Bell has a monopoly over the federal and provincial prison phone systems in Canada and Ontario;

“Whereas phone calls cost hundreds or even thousands of dollars per month for prisoners and their families, and collect calls can only be made to land lines;

“Whereas disconnection and isolation can result in poverty, mental health challenges, and suicide—and creates barriers for community reintegration upon release;

“Whereas phone companies like Bell and the province of Ontario profit off of the most marginalized among us; and

“Whereas Bell’s contract with the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services is up for renewal in 2020;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, the House of Commons, and Bell Canada to ensure free calling for prisoners; direct calls to cell phones and lines with switchboards; and no 20-minute cut-off on calls.”

Thank you very much. I support it and I’ve signed my signature.

OPTOMETRY SERVICES

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I have a number of petitions to save eye care in Ontario.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Ontario government has underfunded optometric eye care for 30 years; and

“Whereas optometrists now subsidize the delivery of OHIP-covered eye care by \$173 million a year; and

“Whereas COVID-19 forced optometrists to close their doors, resulting in a 75%-plus drop in revenue; and

“Whereas optometrists will see patient volumes reduced between 40% and 60%, resulting in more than two million comprehensive eye exams being wiped out over the next 12 months; and

“Whereas communities across Ontario are in danger of losing access to optometric care;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“To instruct the Ontario government to immediately establish a timetable and a process for renewed negotiations concerning optometry fees.”

I support this petition, will sign it and deliver it to the table.

1330

WASTE REDUCTION

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: This petition is titled “Ban Single-use Consumer Plastics.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Ontario is known around the world for its iconic, pure and pristine waters;

“Whereas 85% of marine litter affecting beaches and waterways worldwide is made up of plastic waste material. Plastics are also littering Ontario’s beaches and waterways, polluting our ecosystems and fisheries, affecting our health, tourism and industry;

“Whereas throwaway single-use plastics, including foam food containers, plastic bags, cigarette butts, plastic beverage bottles, plastic straws and stirrers, plastic packaging and wrappers, and plastic bottle caps, are by and large the most frequently polluted items found littering our beaches, rivers and waterways;

“Whereas the amount of plastic debris that litters our shorelines has increased drastically in recent decades and efforts thus far have failed to curb pollution;

“Whereas throwaway plastics like plastic straws, stir sticks etc. are used once then sent to landfills;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to develop consumption reduction targets, establish life cycle obligations for producers, and ultimately implement a complete ban on consumer single-use plastics by 2024.”

I support this petition and will affix my signature to it.

SMALL BUSINESS

Mr. Vincent Ke: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Ontario’s downtown businesses have experienced much of the negative economic impact of COVID-19; and

“Whereas our downtown businesses are small mom-and-pop shops, employ local citizens and invest in our communities; and

“Whereas our main street businesses have faced unique challenges through the COVID-19 pandemic; and

“Whereas in that same vein, these businesses face particular challenges such as costs associated with acquiring personal protective equipment and expanding their e-commerce capabilities; and

“Whereas if passed, the Main Street Recovery Act, 2020 would offer a grant of up to \$1,000 for eligible main street small businesses, connect them with Ontario’s 47 small business enterprise centres, help them grow their businesses online, and establish Ontario’s small business recovery web page to provide single-window access to small business supports;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the Legislative Assembly of Ontario vote on and pass Bill 215, the Main Street Recovery Act.”

I will sign this petition and give it to the page.

WINTER HIGHWAY MAINTENANCE

Mr. Michael Mantha: This petition comes—guess what? It’s snowing outside. This comes from the people in Manitouwadge, Dubreuilville, Chapleau, Wawa, Pic Mobert, and Michipicoten First Nation. It reads:

“Improve Winter Road Maintenance on Northern Highways.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Highways 11 and 17 play a critical role in the development and prosperity of northern Ontario;

“Whereas the former Liberal government introduced private winter maintenance contracts, and the current Conservative government has failed to improve winter road conditions in northern Ontario;

“Whereas injuries and fatalities are twice more likely to occur on a northern highway than on a highway in southern Ontario, per capita;

“Whereas current Ministry of Transportation classification for winter highway maintenance negatively impacts the safety of drivers on northern highways;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to:

“Classify all 400-series highways, the QEW highway and Highways 11 and 17 as class 1 highways;

“Require that the pavement on class 1 highways be bare of snow within eight hours of the end of a snowfall.”

I wholeheartedly agree with this petition and remind this government that it’s snowing in northern Ontario.

ANTI-VAPING INITIATIVES FOR YOUTH

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank Becki Craggs from Hanmer in my riding for these petitions called “Protect Kids from Vaping.”

“Whereas very little is known about the long-term effects of vaping on youth; and

“Whereas aggressive marketing of vaping products by the tobacco industry is causing more and more kids to become addicted to nicotine through the use of e-cigarettes; and

“Whereas the hard lessons learned about the health impacts of smoking, should not be repeated with vaping, and the precautionary principle must be applied to protect youth from vaping; and

“Whereas many health agencies and Physicians for a Smoke-Free Canada fully endorse the concrete proposals aimed at reducing youth vaping included in Bill 151;”

They “petition the Legislative Assembly ... as follows:

“To call on the Ford government to immediately pass Bill 151, Vaping is Not for Kids Act, in order to protect the health of Ontario’s youth.”

I support this petition, will affix my name to it and send it to the Clerk.

LONG-TERM CARE

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank Diana Smith from Capreol in my riding for these petitions. They read as follows:

“Time to Care....”

“Whereas quality care for the 78,000 residents of (LTC) homes is a priority for many Ontario families; and

“Whereas the provincial government does not provide adequate funding to ensure care and staffing levels in LTC homes to keep pace with residents’ increasing acuity and the growing number of residents with complex behaviours; and

“Whereas several Ontario coroner’s inquests into LTC homes deaths have recommended an increase in direct hands-on care for residents and staffing levels, and the most reputable studies on this topic recommend 4.1 hours of direct care per day;”

They “petition the Legislative Assembly ... as follows:

“To amend the LTC Homes Act (2007) for a legislated minimum care standard of four hours per resident per day, adjusted for acuity level and case mix.”

I fully support this petition, will affix my name to it and send it to the table.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

SOLDIERS’ AID COMMISSION ACT, 2020

LOI DE 2020 SUR LA COMMISSION D’AIDE AUX ANCIENS COMBATTANTS

Ms. Dunlop, on behalf of Mr. Todd Smith, moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill 202, An Act to continue the Soldiers’ Aid Commission / Projet de loi 202, Loi prorogeant la Commission d’aide aux anciens combattants.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

Hon. Jill Dunlop: I’m happy to rise this afternoon and speak to Bill 202, the Soldiers’ Aid Commission Act, 2020. I will be sharing my time with the member from Kitchener–Conestoga.

This bill is very important to many of us here in this House and very important to my colleague the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services and the proud member for the Bay of Quinte, which is home to CFB Trenton, Canada’s largest air force base.

This bill is a practical way for all Ontarians to thank our veterans for their service beyond the sentiments and gratitude we express on Remembrance Day. The Soldiers’ Aid Commission is the only provincial agency in Canada that delivers financial support directly to our men and women in uniform and their families. Each year, the commission provides support to eligible veterans, their spouses and dependent children.

The commission has funded countless requests, whether it is helping applicants get new hearing aids or dentures, supporting them with home repairs or getting access to a new furnace in the dead of winter. With each and every successful applicant, the commission is helping support veterans and their families.

I’ve met with several service members, along with their families, and I can only imagine how difficult it can be to re-enter civilian life. This bill is our chance to honour them and thank them for their service.

Speaker, I would like to take a moment and speak to a bit of history, specifically, how we got to where we are today and what is driving our desire to modernize the Soldiers’ Aid Commission. This is an institution that is over a century old. In fact, the commission predates Remembrance Day, or Armistice Day, as it was originally known.

Created in 1915, the Soldiers’ Aid Commission was designed to help support Ontario veterans and their families returning from the First World War. It was later expanded to support those who had served in the Second World War and the Korean War.

The commission’s mandate has remained largely unchanged for almost 50 years. Of the more than 230,000 veterans currently living in Ontario today, 93% do not have access to the important support the commission provides. It’s time for that to change. Our government is ready to move forward, and the commission is ready to support this modernization.

A renewed Soldiers’ Aid Commission would continue to stand proud and tall among other agencies and groups dedicated to helping veterans, including Veterans Affairs Canada, which has primary responsibility for veterans, and the Royal Canadian Legion, one of the most important organizations in Canada when it comes to supporting our veterans.

1340

There are over 400 Legion branches and 100,000 members throughout Ontario. In my own riding of Simcoe North, there are nine Legion branches and one Army, Navy and Air Force Veterans club. I was pleased to visit with the Royal Canadian Legion Branch 80 Midland this past week to kick off the poppy campaign. They provide direct local support to veterans through programming, including assistance for homeless veterans.

There are also a number of non-profit community organizations that dedicate their time to providing

supports to veterans and their families across Canada and Ontario—organizations like VETS Canada, Wounded Warriors, True Patriot Love and Together We Stand, who work with at-risk veterans to help reintegrate them into civilian life. These are just some of the organizations that work alongside the Soldiers' Aid Commission to ensure our veterans receive the support they need.

On behalf of the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services, I would like to quickly take the time to thank the members of the Standing Committee on Social Policy and each of the presenters who took the time to speak to why this bill and the expansion of support to all veterans are necessary. When these organizations came forward, we knew the feedback would be invaluable to the commission and our legislation.

During the public hearings, a few themes developed that I think are important to touch on here in the Legislature. The committee heard from organizations like True Patriot Love about the importance of mental health supports for all veterans. I'd like to thank Nick Booth, the CEO at True Patriot Love, for his presentation, and all members of the organization for the work that they are doing to break the stigma around mental health for our servicemen and women. We know veterans report suffering from chronic conditions at rates greater than the civilian population: 21% report depression; 15% report anxiety; and 14% report post-traumatic stress disorder. They also have a higher risk of suicide than the average Canadian.

Supporting our veterans' mental health is vital to ensuring they are eligible to adjust to the differences between military service and civilian life. That's why an expanded Soldiers' Aid Commission would provide mental health supports so veterans can see a psychologist or access therapy programs.

We also heard from presenters about other supports that are key to helping our veterans make the most of their skills as they transition to new careers following their military service. This includes employment supports, which will help address chronic issues, including unemployment and underemployment. We know in their first three years transitioning to civilian life, veterans have lower incomes compared to their final year in the Canadian Armed Forces. Over the past 12 months, our government has provided funding for programs such as Elevate Plus Military and Soldiers In Tech, which are providing job training to Canadian Forces members to help address this issue and ensure veterans have access to the training they need to transition into good-paying jobs.

A modernized commission will also include employment readiness services, providing another avenue for veterans to access these types of supports. Through the commission, veterans will be able to apply for a whole range of supports, including clothes for an interview, supplies or equipment for a new job, or tuition for a program so they can successfully prepare for their next chapter. Canadian Forces members are well known for their leadership, teamwork and dedication, and our province and our country need those skills to be put to good use. To not do so is a waste of human potential.

Another important theme that came up repeatedly during public hearings was how important it is that the commission's support goes beyond our veterans themselves. One third of veterans with families reported that their release was also difficult for their spouse, partner or children. The Soldiers' Aid Commission has long recognized the contributions of the family members of armed forces members, including their partners and children, by ensuring that they are also eligible for support.

To share one example of the impact of this support, I can share the story of how the commission assisted a widow of a World War II veteran who needed assistance to make her family home more accessible. The individual's mobility had begun to falter and she was struggling to get up and down a flight of stairs in her home, restricting her to the upstairs portion of the home, where her bedroom was. As a result, she was no longer able to get down the stairs safely and go outside.

She submitted an application, and after reviewing the application the commission was able to provide a grant for \$2,000 that went directly toward the purchase and installation of a chairlift in her home. This directly led to an enhancement in her quality of life, as she was now able to safely move down the stairs and outside with the help of the new chairlift system.

I know, and our government knows, about the important and often unseen work that partners, children and other family continue to do each day to support our armed forces members. That's why a modernized commission will continue to recognize their contributions and provide support to address the issues they are facing.

I can tell you that the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services and I are both very excited about the opportunity to expand the support to a whole new generation of veterans and their families under a modernized Soldiers' Aid Commission.

For me personally, my parents always taught me the importance of thanking and supporting our veterans. As I mentioned, Simcoe North has nine Legion branches and we have a large veteran population. I think of my memories from Coldwater Public School, and I'm sure many of you had the same opportunity as I did growing up. Back in school we used to do the poster competitions in elementary school in the early grades, and then you moved up to do the poems, and then in grade 6 to grade 8 we had to do speeches. I remember fearing that part of the year, doing the speech in grades 6, 7 and 8. We did our speeches in the classroom, and then if you were successful there, you went on to the gym, and if you were successful there, you went to the Legion branch and presented to the Legion members there. I look back at that as being a stressful, horrifying time in my life, trying to get up and do that speech. Well, thank goodness I was forced to do so at that time, because look where we are here today. So thank you to my Legion for taking me out of my comfort zone in preparing that.

We must act now to equip this commission for a new era of support and service to our vets. The sad reality is that, with each passing year, the number of living veterans

who served in the two world wars and the Korean War decreases. The last of the First World War veterans have long been laid to rest, and according to statistics from Veterans Affairs Canada, the average age of Second World War veterans is 94. The average age of Korean War veterans is 87. While we must continue to support those veterans, we have the capacity to support many, many more.

Currently, younger veterans who served elsewhere are ineligible for support. This would include the long list of Canadian men and women in Ontario who served their country throughout the later decades of the 20th century and into this century. We must not forget our brave military members who have served in UN peacekeeping missions in the Balkans, Somalia, Rwanda and elsewhere, including the many who have fought in Afghanistan.

For more than 12 years—longer than both world wars combined—Canadian Forces have operated in Afghanistan. Over 40,000 men and women of the Canadian Armed Forces were deployed, the largest deployment since the Second World War. Many were deployed more than once, and many of them were from Ontario. For those who have served and returned home, their lives will never be the same.

As we have seen in the aftermath of wars before our time, injuries experienced in service can show themselves at later times in life. Whether they are physical or mental injuries, these can lead to unexpected financial needs for veterans that deserve special attention. This is what the Soldiers' Aid Commission should be there for.

Ontarians of every generation have stepped up to serve their country with the same duty, passion and commitment of those veterans who have gone before. After they have completed active service, whether they are 25 or 55 years old, we will be there for them.

The point is that we can and must do more to support our veterans, not out of charity but in the firm conviction and belief that veterans are entitled to and deserve post-service support. Our veterans never asked for this guarantee of support in writing before signing up. They did not ask to see the terms of their post-service life in detail. They trusted that Ontario and Canada would protect them, as they protected us. We cannot break that covenant with them.

1350

The choice we have made to modernize the commission is both practical and symbolic: practical in that we know the need for support is there, but highly symbolic in that it's a sign that our government will stand with those who have served and protected us.

It's also very significant that we would like to achieve this goal through new legislation and not just bringing forward new regulations. With new legislation, we can clearly demonstrate to our vets that we've got their backs for the long haul and show them that we're planning for the future. It will show Ontario's strong and concrete commitment to veterans and their families, and symbolize the importance of supporting our vets, who have made tremendous sacrifices for the country and our province.

We know the impact the Soldiers' Aid Commission has made on Ontario veterans over the last century. I can't wait to see how that impact grows over the next century.

Next week, we will all be participating in Remembrance Day ceremonies across the province. Of course, this year is going to look quite different. I've always been particularly impressed in my own riding—as I said, I have nine Legions, so we have many parades and dinners and time together—when the school kids come together, and even on weekends, when I see families bringing out their children to the parade and the cenotaph. How important it is that we keep that memory alive.

I'd also like to thank the ladies' Legion auxiliaries. Each year at the dinners, they present a cheque to the Legion for thousands of dollars for things like upgrades to the roof or new windows etc. That money represents a lot of cookies at bake sales, a lot of crafts at the craft sales, many fish-fry dinners and many spaghetti dinners, so I'd like to thank the ladies' auxiliary for their work in the Legions.

Also to our air and sea cadets: In my area, these young people, men and women, are at every event, helping to volunteer, serving at the Legions and being part of Remembrance Day services, so I'd like to thank them for their work as well.

In the lead-up to this solemn day, the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services has been conducting tours and virtual meetings with serving personnel in several branches of his Royal Canadian Legion. He's visited Legion Branch 58 in Hamilton, Legion Branch 551 in Waterdown, Canadian Forces base Petawawa and Legion Branch 148 in Renfrew. Through the next couple of weeks, the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services will be meeting with Legions and military bases in Kingston, Barrie and Trenton. If Bill 202 is passed, I hope all MPPs will start reaching out to their local Legions and veterans' organizations so we can raise awareness about the services and supports offered through the commission.

Speaker, this is the time of year when Canada honours its veterans, because our veterans stepped up, because our veterans answered the call, because our veterans served and protected us. But we must remember that every day beyond November 11, our veterans face challenges as they adjust to post-service life.

Bill 202, if passed, would extend the reach and benefits of the Soldiers' Aid Commission to all Ontario veterans and their families who need financial assistance, regardless of where and when they served. Bill 202 would, if passed, modernize and re-equip this wonderful agency to help new generations of veterans and their families, no matter where and when they served. It's a fair thing to do. It's the right thing to do for our veterans and their families.

With that being said, I would like to take a moment to address the amendments made at the Standing Committee on Social Policy and how they have improved the bill that is before the Legislature today. The four amendments, taken together, help to clarify family members who are eligible to serve on the commission and how family

members eligible for financial assistance through the commission will be prescribed through regulation.

Section 6 of the act will now include a list of family members of veterans who may be counted towards the majority of commission members. That includes a parent, spouse, child or sibling of a veteran. This amendment means that families and agencies will no longer need to refer to the regulations to find this information. Veterans and their family members bring a deep understanding of the issues our service members face to the table, and I am confident that having their voices at the table will ensure the increased investment and expansion of services is put to good use.

Separately, under section 11 of the act, we have reaffirmed that family members eligible for services through the commission shall be prescribed by regulation. Our intention is to expand to support all veterans regardless of when and where they served. This measure includes our Canadian Armed Forces members who have completed basic training and were honourably discharged, in addition to their spouse or common-law partner and dependent children.

Speaker, Canada is a diverse country, and that is no less true for our military down through history. Canadians from all backgrounds have been proud to don the uniform, going back to the earliest days of our country, and fought for this land even before Canada came to be. Black Canadians fought on the side of the British during the American Revolutionary War and in the War of 1812, long before Confederation. Fast-forward to World War I and Black Canadians had to fight not only the enemy, but also segregation in their own military to serve. But serve they did, and they distinguished themselves in doing so.

Attitudes were somewhat more enlightened as Canada entered the Second World War and Black Canadians fought alongside their fellow Canadians in integrated units in the army. Black military service carried on strongly through the Korean War, Afghanistan and Canadian peacekeeping efforts around the world.

Canada's Indigenous peoples have also answered the call to military service in great numbers and with great distinction. More than 4,000 Indigenous community members fought in the First World War—a tremendous response to the call to arms and several years before First Nations even received the right to vote. Indigenous soldiers earned at least 50 decorations for bravery during the war. Similar enthusiasm to serve existed in the Indigenous community in the Second World War and the Korean War and into today's modern military.

The price, as always, is high and measured in blood. It is estimated that as many as 500 of the 12,000 First Nation, Métis and Inuit people who served in the wars of the last century lost their lives. So it is essential to understand that the tradition of military service is ingrained in this country. Bill 202 would honour the call to service and encourage more to do so.

In more recent times, the demographics of our Armed Forces have changed considerably, something we are proud of. As we remain on guard against all forms of

racism, which can cast a long shadow, we know today that we must continue to honour those of all heritages and ethnic backgrounds who bravely enlist and who command our Armed Forces.

The face of today's veterans showcases how much Canada has changed and how much Canada has actually diversified and, more importantly, how it's reflected through the men and women who serve our great country. It could be a 30-year-old single mom or a young man entering university or college, younger than most of us here in this House. We have some very young veterans in this province and in this country. As a matter of fact, there are about 230,000 veterans living in Ontario right now.

With the additional investment of \$1.3 million per year, we will be supporting more veterans than ever with financial assistance, health-related supports and resources that may assist with a transition to a new career.

To our veterans, their families and current service personnel, on behalf of all Ontarians, I want to thank you for your service. Thank you for answering the call to service and protecting our country.

Now it's our turn, in this House, on behalf of all Ontarians, to support our veterans and their families as they build new and successful post-service lives in communities across Ontario. We honour our brave men and women who gave their lives protecting others. For those who are fortunate enough to come home, their lives will never be the same—for many of them didn't come home safe. And we have seen, in the aftermath of wars, some injuries might manifest many months and years after an individual has returned home from war. Whether they're physical or mental injuries, this can lead to unexpected and unanticipated financial stress for veterans that deserves special attention. That's why the Soldiers' Aid Commission should be there. But it has lately only been able to help what is now a small group of veterans—that group of veterans who fought in the Second World War and the Korean War.

1400

Ontarians of every generation have always stepped up to serve Canada with the same duty, passion and commitment of those veterans who have gone before them. That's why our government is taking this opportunity to extend the reach and benefits of the Soldiers' Aid Commission to all Ontario veterans, regardless of where and when they served, and their families, which is a key part of this. We know that the post-service adjustment can be very difficult for our vets, and that's why we must not only honour their brave sacrifices, but we must be there for them when they return home.

I feel that it's important to reiterate our government's commitment to expand exempting financial assistance received through the commission for the purpose of social assistance. This means that receiving these funds would not have any impact on the support an individual may receive through programs like Ontario Works and the Ontario Disability Support Program. Income exceptions like these are regularly made through regulation. Currently, there are more than 40 income exemptions listed for ODSP and OW in regulation. This includes existing

exemptions for all donations received from religious, charitable or benevolent organizations and a gift or voluntary payment for any purpose up to \$10,000 in a 12-month period. Recipients accessing OW and ODSP, as well as service providers and family members, typically look to the regulations under each act governing our province's social assistance programs to find the complete list of these types of exemptions. In order to ensure clarity for people, the government will move forward with exemptions in the same manner.

As I mentioned earlier, next week we honour those who fought for the rights and freedoms that we have today. I'm not entirely sure what ceremonies in each of our communities may look like this year. With gathering limits set for our safety, we do know that it will look very different at the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month.

Every year on November 11, all Canadians do a tremendous job honouring the veterans who served and protected us, and we need to remember that every day our veterans face challenges as they adjust to post-service life.

For more than 100 years, the Soldiers' Aid Commission has supported veterans of both world wars and the Korean War. Now it's time that we extend that reach to all Ontario veterans.

To sum up, the reasons for passing this bill are simple: Our veterans answered the call, and it is because of their sacrifices that we have sustained the very chamber of freedom and democracy that we gather in today. Through the mud of Flanders, the rolling waves of the North Atlantic, the beaches of Normandy, the skies over occupied Europe and the tough fighting in Korea, our veterans preserved our freedom.

In more modern theatres of conflict such as the UN peacekeeping missions in the Balkans, Rwanda, Somalia and elsewhere, and of course the war in Afghanistan, our veterans continued to serve and continued to distinguish themselves.

Now it's our turn to renew the Soldiers' Aid Commission for a new generation so it can support our heroes and their families as they build new post-service lives in their communities across Ontario. We hope the work that we're doing here today in modernizing the Soldiers' Aid Commission will mean that it lives for another 105 years doing just that.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): I recognize the member for Kitchener–Conestoga.

Mr. Mike Harris: I am very honoured and happy to rise today to speak to Bill 202, the Soldiers' Aid Commission Act, 2020.

Let me begin by saying that I am pleased to see our government making support for veterans such a priority. These legislative changes build on the important investments we have made over the past few years, including new employment and training programs mentioned by the associate minister, as well as supports for Legion halls, including changes to ensure that they pay no property taxes.

I know the minister and all our government is committed to improving post-service quality of life for our veterans. The minister is a passionate advocate for our military

members, both active and retired, and their families. I think this bill offers us in this House a chance to think about things a little bit more, as Remembrance Day approaches—and what a great way for us to say, “Thank you for your service,” in a very practical way, by being here debating this bill today.

As the Associate Minister of Children and Women's Issues has mentioned, our government faced a choice of continuing to leave the Soldiers' Aid Commission stagnant, serving fewer and fewer veterans each and every year, or modernizing it to support a whole new generation of veterans and their families. The answer was obvious. We recognized immediately that the province has an important role to play in supporting our veterans.

The minister has previously used the word “covenant” to capture what we really owe our veterans, both now and throughout history. I think this communicates our responsibilities to our veterans perfectly. We must protect them as they protected us. When we hear the stories of how the commission helps in a very practical way, we can be assured that these will be public resources that are prudently and strategically invested.

One thing I know about our veterans is that they are very grateful for the support. The Soldiers' Aid Commission receives countless thank-you notes, cards and letters from successful applicants every year. This means that the applicant has taken the time to write a handwritten note—and I think we know how rare those are these days, Madam Speaker—thanking the commission for its support, explaining how the funding helped them in their day-to-day lives. The commission has collected hundreds of these thank-you notes over the years and proudly displays them in the Soldiers' Aid Commission boardroom to highlight the veterans and the families behind the requests that they receive. But really, Speaker, it is all of us who should be grateful and thanking them.

This is one of those times in government when each of us can stand and vote and make a change that we know will have a significant and meaningful impact on families who serve our country through their military career. It is important to remember that the commission supports veterans and their families, and it is getting close to Remembrance Day, a time when we remember those who have served and gave the ultimate sacrifice for our freedom.

One of the greatest honours I have as the member of provincial Parliament for Kitchener–Conestoga is taking part in seven Remembrance Day ceremonies, when I lay the province of Ontario wreath at the cenotaphs in Elmira, Linwood, New Hamburg, New Dundee and Kitchener, as well as during—and sorry to the interpreters—Volkstrauertag, which is German Remembrance Day; obviously, in Kitchener, we have a very large German population. It really hits me, that it is because of the sacrifice these brave men and women have made that I now have the privilege to be able to stand here in this role and represent my constituents.

While things are going to be different this year for me, this would also typically mean going to dinners hosted by

our Legions in Elmira and New Hamburg, where veterans would share some of their stories with our community. It's unfortunate, but every year, fewer men and women who have served in the Second World War and the Korean War are able to join us, so more and more of the veterans I meet at these dinners are part of the next generation that this bill would make eligible for assistance from the Soldiers' Aid Commission.

I had the pleasure of being part of the Standing Committee on Social Policy's hearings for this bill. We heard from incredible organizations that support those who have served, including Legions from across the province and also from Together We Stand and True Patriot Love. These organizations focus on supporting not only our veterans but also their families, Madam Speaker. We heard from them about the need to make more families eligible for this assistance, about the world of difference that that would make for military families in this province. Because the loved ones of our servicemen and women also sacrificed to support their family members in uniform.

I hope the House will indulge me if I share a few stories of what the support from the Soldiers' Aid Commission has meant to some of these veterans and their families. The widow of a Second World War veteran woke up one morning to find there was a leak in her basement in her family home. Upon further inspection of that leak from a contractor, it was determined that the water was coming into the basement through a crack in the foundation. As a result, she was facing a very hefty bill in order to have this problem fixed. The cost of this project to repair her foundation would have been way too much for her to pay on her own. After reaching out to the Royal Canadian Legion, she put together an application to the Soldiers' Aid Commission. The commission reviewed her application and decided that it could help. As a result, \$2,000 was issued to the applicant and went directly towards helping her fix the foundation of her home. This meant that she did not have to face this immense challenge on her own and the commission would be able to help her move forward.

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I have one more story to share about how the Soldiers' Aid Commission can improve post-service quality of life for veterans' families. This time, a widow of a Second World War veteran had applied to the Soldiers' Aid Commission requesting a new mobility scooter so that she could better move around outside of her home. It would allow her the opportunity to get outside and enjoy her community, as she was no longer able to do so on her own. The Soldiers' Aid Commission reviewed her application and helped her by providing funding that she could use to purchase, of course, a new mobility scooter. But that's not where this story ends. About a year and a half later, the commission received a new application from this very same woman. It turned out she was using her scooter so regularly that the batteries were no longer charging for her to leave the house for long periods of time. The commissioners once again reviewed the application and were able to assist her in purchasing new batteries for her scooter. So not only was the commission able to help her once, but they were able to help her twice.

Speaker, these stories hit home with me, and I'm sure they will hit home with all members of this House. We all have veterans and their families in our constituencies, and recognizing their sacrifice needs to go beyond the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month. We have a golden opportunity here to act on behalf of a grateful province. We know the level of public support that veterans and their families enjoy.

As this House knows, I grew up in North Bay, which is home to an air force base known as the 22 Wing. The base opened on September 1, 1951, and in its almost 60 years, countless men and women from not only Canada, I want to add, but also from the US have served there. Growing up, I had the chance to get to know some of the military families who lived nearby. And through junior kindergarten and kindergarten and grade 1, the son in one of those families was one of my best friends. These families were always proud to say their loved ones served our country, but certainly it was not easy for them when Mom or Dad was deployed or when they had to move.

Communities like North Bay and other parts of our province, like the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services' riding, where CFB Trenton is located, are not shy about showing their support for those who have served. The history of our province has been to support their service. Indeed, that is how the commission came to be more than 100 years ago.

In her remarks, the associate minister painted a picture of Canada's development of veteran supports that we enjoy today. She pointed out how essential and even innovative the creation of the Soldiers' Aid Commission was in 1915. I think it's a mark of pride for all of us, as members of the Ontario Legislature, to recognize that this was the first body in Canada to support our veterans and to recognize the need to make sure that we are doing our part to support them upon their return to civilian life. The Soldiers' Aid Commission predates Veterans Affairs Canada, and its legacy carries on as the only provincially funded financial assistance program in Canada specifically for veterans.

In the 19th century, the social safety net of this province was largely informal and made up of the good intentions of family and neighbours, as well as religious institutions.

In August 1914, Britain and its dominions, along with France and other allies, went to war against imperial Germany and the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The fever of the times was matched by optimism that the war would be over by Christmas. As we know, that certainly was not the case. European battlefields of the First World War were to become the scene of the highest recorded casualties in human conflict at that time. Overall, nearly 10 million combatants died and three times that number were wounded, missing or imprisoned. It was brutal and bloody combat that even included the use of poison gas.

Ontarians stepped up and joined in huge numbers, Madam Speaker. Ontario soldiers numbered over 230,000 out of Canada's force of about 538,000. With only 31% of Canada's population, Ontario contributed over 43% of Canada's soldiers.

The Canadian Expeditionary Force, as it was known then, played a key role in some of the major battles of that war. Successes at Vimy Ridge and Passchendaele cemented their reputation as one of the most effective forces on the Western Front, but the cost and personal sacrifice of the soldiers and their families were severe and on a human scale never seen before. By the end of the war, soldiers were left with not only visible physical injuries and amputations, but also what was then referred to as shell shock, which we better know now as PTSD, or post-traumatic stress disorder.

With the return home of the wounded, the vocational branch of the Soldiers' Aid Commission became busy with re-education, convalescent care and occupational therapy. We can see clearly in hindsight now that the Soldiers' Aid Commission was just a small piece of a much-needed safety net.

Tragically, the First World War wasn't the last war that Canadian soldiers would fight in Europe. All through the 1930s, countries in Europe fell sway to fascist governments and dictatorships bent on military expansion, and with the Nazi invasion of Poland in September 1939, the Second World War was under way. For the second time in a generation, Canada was once again at war. With a total population of fewer than 12 million people at the time, over one million Canadians enlisted in the fight against tyranny and fascism. That is truly an outstanding fact: 12 million people lived in Canada and a million enlisted to fight.

Canadians and Ontarians fought in almost every theatre of war: northwest Europe, Italy, Hong Kong, North Africa, the North Atlantic and, of course, the skies of occupied Europe. They played an integral role when they landed on Juno Beach, one of the five beaches in Normandy the Allies stormed in the D-Day invasion in 1944. By the time victory was achieved in 1945, Canada boasted the fourth-largest air force and fifth-largest navy in the world. We made enormous contributions to the Allied cause, including the sobering loss of more than 42,000 servicemen and women and 55,000 wounded. Once again, the Soldiers' Aid Commission was there to cushion the blow and help with the transition of our veterans to post-service life.

After the Second World War, Canada would join the newly formed United Nations to put down the threat of aggressive communist forces on the Korean Peninsula, and they stayed there right up until the armistice in 1953. But after the Korean War, none of the men and women who served this country were eligible for financial assistance through the Soldiers' Aid Commission. One of the consequences of fewer veterans being eligible for the support is that the awareness of the program was diminished as well. As we've heard, this support can make huge differences in the lives of veterans and their families.

What is an absolute shame is that more people are not aware of the great work this commission does. This seems like such a common-sense thing that we can all agree on here in this Legislature: that if we are going to continue to uphold and honour this important program, one that

Ontario has had for over a century now, we need to make sure we're recognizing all of our veterans.

We must recognize our veterans who served not just in the Second World War and the Korean War, but our veterans who served on peacekeeping missions around the world, our veterans who served in Afghanistan, all of our veterans who continue to play a key and active role in making sure that Canadians are safe and that Canadians can continue to count on the values we hold dear to be protected and upheld.

As our servicemen and women from the First and Second World Wars and Korean War pass on, veterans from these conflicts and their families are finding themselves in need of ongoing support. Soon the widows of peacekeepers are going to find themselves in need of mobility devices and emergency home repairs, and I know that all of the members in this House agree that we should be there to support them. Regardless of where and when they served, and even those who were not deployed but were honorably discharged, we want to ensure they can be eligible for support as well, as they grow older.

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Another part of expanding the number of veterans eligible for support is raising awareness about the supports available themselves. As I mentioned, awareness of this program has diminished considerably. Our Minister of Children, Community and Social Services is going to be working with local Legions and veterans' organizations to grow awareness about the supports that are available.

Along with raising awareness, we're also increasing investment in the Soldiers' Aid Commission to more than \$1.5 million, which is a huge increase from the current allocation of only \$253,200. One of these other aspects of this change to the Soldiers' Aid Commission that I think is truly significant is that we're expanding the eligibility of services to include employment services so that veterans could receive funding to take a course that might allow them to gain new skills and help them get into the workforce once they've left the service. Often, that can happen earlier than many of us might think: when our veterans are young and still able to start another exciting career.

The employment readiness program would also include assistance in preparing for job interviews, and I think each one of us in the House knows how stressful an interview can be sometimes. Now imagine being a veteran going for your first civilian interview. Even small things like getting clothes for your interview can be stressful, and these employment readiness supports will cover all of those things. When we think of servicemen and women, we think of disciplined leaders that could be a benefit to any sector, so getting them ready to enter the workforce will also be a huge benefit to the job creators of this province.

During our standing committee hearings on this bill, I heard the minister speak about the challenges that veterans can face transitioning into civilian life, and I want to repeat some of those statistics that were mentioned: 21% of our veterans reported depression, 15% reported anxiety following their discharge and 14% reported post-traumatic

stress disorder. An expanded Soldiers' Aid Commission would provide mental health supports so that our veterans could see a psychologist, get access to therapy programs and be better supported as they transition out of service. I think that's a great thing for all of us to be proud of, and it's the very least that we can do for our veterans. Again, I thank those men and women.

Veterans will tell you that returning to civilian life can be a very bureaucratic process: filling out forms, answering questions, waiting for their pensions and health care to kick in. A lot of veterans have said, as soon as the uniform comes off, they can feel invisible. It is a busy world out there, and we don't always know who needs the help, but the Soldiers' Aid Commission knows, and it knows that the need is growing.

I'd be remiss if I did not mention the work our Legions do to support our veterans. Along with the Soldiers' Aid Commission and Veterans Affairs Canada, the Royal Canadian Legion also provides financial assistance for veterans in need. One of their biggest fundraisers, the poppy campaign, is under way. Not only does the poppy campaign at my local Legion support the veterans in our community, but they also raise additional funds to support our local hospitals and community care providers. The Elmira Legion typically raises over \$40,000 during the poppy campaign. The New Hamburg Legion raised over \$23,000 last year to distribute to veterans and worthwhile causes in our community.

While things are difficult, to quote Ross Eichler, poppy chair for Branch 532: "We are not letting the COVID-19 pandemic stop us from continuing" that work. The Elmira Legion has set a goal this year of raising \$30,000, and I'm going to be encouraging all of my constituents and members of the community to ensure they are supporting their Legions this year during these very difficult times. As we have heard, even with our government's increased support for them it has been a particularly hard year.

Our veterans chose to dedicate their lives to protecting our freedom, Madam Speaker, and the least we can do is ensure they are taken care of when they return home. So let us revitalize and modernize this great organization to serve a new generation of heroes.

The need is out there, greater than ever, and Bill 202 is a great response to that need. I'm excited that, if this bill gets passed, we can use the month of November to let our veterans and their families know that Ontario is saying thank you in a very real, tangible and practical way. We'll be able to share this news with them and share with them that the Ontario government has made the decision that we are going to continue to uphold this important program, the Soldiers' Aid Commission. I believe it is something that we as legislators want to continue to support, and it speaks to the kind of society that we want to be. It speaks to the kind of world that our veterans went out to preserve and to protect.

This is our chance to do the right thing. It's a chance to take a moment and say, "Thank you for putting your lives on the line." Bill 202 is worthy of the support of this House

and it is an honourable way to keep the covenant and protect those who have protected us.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Questions?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: This is a good bill. It was long overdue, mind you, the increase. A little while ago it was at, the member said, \$253,000. It's gone up to \$1.5 million, so that's welcome, of course, to anyone who is a veteran and who is in need of economic relief or their family members.

My question is: Many vets, as we've talked about and the member mentioned, have challenges transitioning back into civilian life. I'd like to ask the member if vets who are collecting benefits such as OW and ODSP, would this government look at, if they qualify for this Soldiers' Aid Commission fund—that they wouldn't claw that back, and to make that part of the legislation so that ODSP and OW aren't affected adversely?

Mr. Mike Harris: Thank you very much to the member opposite for the question. As we heard from the associate minister, we will be rolling that part of the Soldiers' Aid Commission Act out through regulation. She mentioned that there are already about 40 regulations that interact with Ontario Works and ODSP, and we'll look forward to having those provisions rolled out through the regulations of the bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Questions?

Ms. Donna Skelly: Thank you to my colleague for his presentation this afternoon. I'm so proud that we're bringing this forward.

My grandfather served in World War I. I still have his World War I diary. It's pretty cool. He mentions Nelly in it, and Nelly was the name of his horse. He was over in Belgium and in France when he was serving.

So I recognize the value, and I have deep respect for the members of our military. As a former journalist, I worked in Kingston and Pembroke and dealt with members of the Canadian Armed Forces on a regular basis.

One of the things, however, is that as wonderful as this proposed legislation is, how do you spread the message? How do you share that this is available for people who are our Canadian veterans? Maybe you can share with the Legislature how our government and how you in particular will be doing that.

Mr. Mike Harris: Thank you to the member from Flamborough–Glanbrook for that question. She's right, and I mentioned that several times during my debate, that this program isn't widely known about. In my mind, that's a shame. I think we, as members of the government and the opposition, and any members in this House, need to be able to go out there and spread the message to our local community organizations and our local Legions and the navy club and the air force club and all of the different philanthropic groups that often help out veterans and other folks in our local communities.

I had mentioned that the minister will be doing some more liaising with Legions and those service clubs. I think that we owe it all to our veterans to be able to go out there, spread this message and talk about the good things that are happening with the Soldiers' Aid Commission.

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The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Questions?

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: It's an honour to be able to say a few words today and support the Soldiers' Aid Commission Act. I believe that it is our duty as a province to support veterans, and to remember that our duty to support them extends to caring for them once they're back home, and to ensure that those who made extraordinary sacrifices for us receive extraordinary care in return—and that care goes for all veterans, because there are no second-class veterans.

This legislation is much-needed. It has the support of all parties. But the effectiveness of this commission will depend on the government and the regulations that they will bring forward. So my question to the member is, will you commit to moving forward with this in a timely manner and to finally providing the veterans with the help that they need?

Mr. Mike Harris: Thank you to the member for Parkdale–High Park for her advocacy for veterans—and, of course, this bill.

The answer from my perspective is, yes, we want to see this move forward as quickly as possible. It has already had a chance to move through committee. There are some members who were here—the member from St. Catharines and I were on that committee. We heard some really great deputations in favour of this, and there were some amendments that we made out of those deputations as well. So I'm looking forward to getting this through, and we'll see where it goes from there.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Questions?

Mr. Lorne Coe: Thank you to the member for Kitchener–Conestoga for taking the time in the presentation he just completed to talk about some of the challenges that veterans incur with mental health.

I'd like to ask the member to share his thoughts on our government adding mental health supports as one of the services accessible now through the Soldiers' Aid Commission.

Mr. Mike Harris: Thank you to the member for Whitby for that question. I know that he's very, very involved with his local Legions and military veterans' service clubs and that he's really in tune to what's happening in Durham region and, of course, other parts of the province.

I think this is a huge step in the right direction. Quite frankly, it's something that probably should have been done a long time ago. We see more and more veterans returning from conflict without those visible injuries that you would have seen from the First World War and Second World War. I have a lot of friends and family members who have served. The member from Kitchener South–Hespeler, in a member's statement this morning, was talking about some of her family and the impacts that it has had. I think that mental health supports are absolutely critical to this when we move forward.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Questions?

Mr. Percy Hatfield: I applaud the government for this bill and for opening up and updating the restrictions that were buried in the original Soldiers' Aid Commission.

My question is, if we're limiting the aid for a couple of thousand dollars after all other avenues of funding have been exhausted, and we're talking, say, about mental health counselling—seriously, what is \$2,000 going to do for the long haul of dealing with somebody who has a problem with mental health and addictions?

Mr. Mike Harris: Thank you to the member for that question. I know he was listening intently to my debate.

This is often used as a last resort, but it's often used as a bit of a bridge—the Soldiers' Aid Commission—until more longer-term services can be put together through Veterans Affairs Canada. So, if you will, that \$2,000 is meant to help in the meantime while other services can be wrapped around. When we've seen some of the changes that we've made with Ontario Health and looking at a more holistic approach for people here in the province who are needing health care and, of course, mental health and addictions services—this is just part of the package that our government is putting out to try to help people with those issues.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Questions?

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Thank you to the member for discussing this very important legislation. It sounds like there's pretty unanimous consent here in the House, which is good to see.

Obviously, the number of World War II and Korean War veterans is declining each year. I think in the last year there were only 53 veterans that benefited from this.

My question to you is: I know the commission has been advocating for some of these changes for a number of years, and I'm just wondering why it took until now to actually make this happen?

Mr. Mike Harris: It's a very good question, actually, to the member from Oakville. I think there is—I'm never one to really throw the previous government under the bus too, too much, but I'll maybe take an opportunity to do that now. They had a lot of opportunities to go ahead and reform and modernize this, and they chose to do other things. It's a shame that this wasn't a priority for them, but this is a priority for our government.

That's why we've gone ahead and opened this up, gone through the modernization. The most important part of this is making our veterans of some of the peacekeeping conflicts, the war in Afghanistan, and non-serving members that have been honorably discharged from the military, the Canadian Forces eligible for this. So I'm glad that we're here doing this now, and I'm very excited to be part of it.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): We don't have time for another question or response.

Further debate?

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: I'd like to say that it's always a privilege and an honour to be able to rise in this House and speak on behalf of the residents of St. Catharines, but today, it's especially an honour to be able to rise to speak on behalf of the veterans—traditional and new, modernized veterans—across Ontario, as well as in my community of St. Catharines.

I would like to again stand and take a moment to applaud and thank the veterans, veterans' services and Legion organizations for their advocacy on pushing this program to be modernized. Expanding the criteria for the Soldiers' Aid Commission to younger veterans would be described by organizations pushing for this change as common sense. Legislation created in 1960 should have, by now, adapted. It should have been more inclusive. It is a promising start to see this expansion in the third reading here today.

It is the strength of the military veteran community and the tireless work of individuals that I would like to acknowledge today, as I will speak about later on, in my community of Niagara and St. Catharines. We have so many individuals and organizations that work to support veterans struggling with homelessness, mental health, addiction issues. Some of this great work is undertaken by veterans who themselves have defined, identified needs, and now strive to make a difference. They do this on their own time, often using their own resources. They have picked up the hatchet of honour and fairness to chip away at hurdles confronted by some of our military men and women when they return home after years of honourable service.

Other great work is being performed by local community partners that help to do the work to eradicate all poverty, mental health and addiction issues. These organizations do not discriminate for military service, and yet work with veterans in my community all the same, helping them move the dial forward in the name of fairness, in the spirit of humanity and for the eradication of poverty.

Of course, the noble work of our Legions and military provincial organizations across Ontario is what sparked this change in the first place. These folks that are in the trenches—a figurative, appropriate turn of phrase that applies just the same to the work they do now to help combat poverty as it applied when they were soldiers protecting the values of Canadians across the world—to the hard-fought victories they created both on this file and more broadly for their service, I am extremely grateful, and I thank you. That is why I'm grateful. As the official opposition's critic for veterans, Legions and military affairs in Ontario, I will continue to ensure that this program is delivered as it is promised here today.

Almost a year ago today, I spoke in this assembly in support of the advocacy of veterans to get the Soldiers' Aid Commission expanded. I spoke about my son, who is an active service member, and how unfair and unjust it was to have his exclusion from this program. I questioned, why do we have one set of programs for one set of veterans and then another set for the younger set of veterans? I spoke about the spirit our province upholds when it comes to respecting and honouring the service of men and women of the Canadian services.

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When I stood in the House last year, requesting the Soldiers' Aid Commission program be expanded, I was standing on the shoulders of all the veterans across this

province, using my voice to amplify the concerns of our veterans and their advocacy. All veterans and advocates should feel the sense of victory when this legislation is passed. When I asked this question, the initial response to my question from the member from Markham–Stouffville was to point out that this government has committed to creating a memorial wall. It is why I see this as a promising start. This part is important, because while I continued asking questions in the following weeks here in the Legislature, veterans' organizations continued to have conversations about the soldiers' aid program.

It is clear to me that the results have delivered another step forward for supporting our veterans. It is about time. It is why we are talking about expanding the criteria for the program support. It is why we are in third reading today. It is why this will pass and put much-needed support in much-deserving hands. I am hopeful this is a first step to provide more tools to allow Soldiers' Aid Commission programs to become a modern and viable option for veterans who require emergency needs.

I will bring this up later in the House, but it is important to note that I will endeavour to continue to have a watchful eye on the proceedings. I will stand vigilantly to ensure this legislation is passed in a way that creates substantive change that is fair and just. Especially in these tumultuous times, it is more important than ever that we provide support for the most vulnerable in our community and that we do it quickly. It is vital that we get the emergency support in the hands of veterans that need it as soon as possible.

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to job loss, a health crisis, precarious housing conditions and a melting pot for mental health anxiety. As the days are getting shorter and the weather is getting colder, it is so important that we get the funding delivered as soon as possible. For these reasons, moving quickly on emergency support is more important this year than any other year before.

In my community, the question around shelters for individuals who are struggling with housing and homelessness is always top of mind as the snow starts to fall. I am committed to seeing this program push through as soon as possible so that no veteran in St. Catharines or in the Niagara region or across Ontario has to struggle with homelessness when we could have a support program available for them right now, today.

The previous iteration of this program shamefully left 60% of the commission's annual budget remaining unspent year after year. It was obvious that that money is needed to reach more families. It is a positive step to see priorities of this government to include access to more veterans, because this program never should have been an exclusive VIP club. This is a program designed to support our veterans, who have already sacrificed so much, by modernizing the legislation that assists in doing just that. This support needs to happen as soon as possible. Once it passes third reading, we must pressure to expedite the process in regulation.

At this very moment, there are almost certainly veterans who need assistance paying for new eyeglasses or

prescription drugs or dental. They might need a new roof on their home because theirs is leaking. They might need help paying for a walker or even child care. They might require some support or a helping hand to get off the streets and into a safe place, especially during the pandemic. Recognizing the changing circumstances today, these are just a few examples of the items veterans can seek assistance in paying for, in full or partially. Like I said, this is a good step. Again, I commit—and I think we can agree in this chamber that we all commit—to the importance and the urgency of ensuring this program is delivered quickly, as promised.

This is personal for me. I am a mother to a son who is actively serving in the Canadian Forces, specifically as first-class petty officer in the Royal Canadian Navy. When I think about how I can best honour his service, how I can best honour the sacrifices of not just him but of my daughter-in-law and my two beautiful granddaughters, how I can best honour every veteran just like him, it is by being relentless in ensuring that promising starts and first steps translate to real actions that are delivered quickly and justified.

I appreciate the work that the commission does. The commission operates at an arm's length from the government with respect to the provisions of assistance. They execute a mandate for the Soldiers' Aid Commission to administer applications for financial assistance made by veterans and their dependent relatives. The individuals who do this work are tireless, and care. In short, they are a big part of the advocacy for the veterans that helps expand support for those in need, helping those who sacrificed so much and honouring that sacrifice with gratitude for their time served in the Canadian Armed Forces.

In fact, according to Veterans Affairs Canada, there are 17,000 veterans across Ontario who served in the Second World War and the Korean War. That number, 17,000, was the original amount of veterans that this program had served. That is definitely a large number of veterans who can benefit from the commission's mandate. However, the reason we are here today is that this was never good enough, not in 2020. When you have a 60-year-old piece of legislation that supports an agency that is over 100 years old, well, advocates and members of Parliament like me have been pushing for modernization and change for a long time. It might seem odd to say we need this change done swiftly and now, except I would argue that this is exactly the reason it is now that we get it right. It is now that we see this support get delivered quickly.

In a moment, I want to discuss the state of homelessness and mental health of veterans in my community, St. Catharines and the Niagara region. However, before I do that, I want to point out that there is a reality where the amount of money allocated to the Soldiers' Aid Commission with the new eligibility might not be enough money. If this is the case, then we should work together to ensure that we get it right, and that we get it right the first time. I hope we all commit here today to revisiting this matter if it turns out that this is the case. Getting it right is so important. We all know first-hand the work the provincial

veterans' organization has done to support the community and its members when they are in need.

I've had the pleasure to tour the Royal Canadian Legion Ontario Command in Aurora. I'd like to thank Pamela Sweeny, Garry Pond and their entire team for their advocacy. They are part of a larger community that can claim victory in getting this legislation put forward. Thank you for making this possible today and for the heart that the entire Royal Canadian Legion Ontario Command team brings to the front line, and thank you for all the work that is done by this organization's staff to eradicate homelessness for veterans in our province, Ontario.

Our province, Ontario, needs to be commended. Ontario Command has a robust program to outreach and support veterans with their Homeless Veteran Assistance program. I would like to connect the work that they do with this program, and why it is so important that we get this right.

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Ontario Provincial Command created a program called Operation: Leave the Streets Behind in 2010. It was created to assist homeless veterans, near-homeless veterans or those at risk of potential homelessness. They partnered with various agencies that provided funding towards peer support for veterans who are transitioning from the streets to an actual, livable housing situation. Similar to all homeless initiatives, it is this transition piece that helps provide a safe environment and permanency.

From many of the conversations I have had with organizations, and again from their presentations at committee on Bill 202, Operation: Leave the Streets Behind has assisted close to 900 veterans in 173 locations in Ontario. The list of supports includes getting people back onto their feet with first and last month's rent. It includes transportation to get to a new job. It includes food vouchers to support military families or veterans who are struggling to fill their needs, as well as many other fixed costs and quality-of-life supports, like storage, utilities, apartment starter kits and so on and so on. According to them, the Royal Canadian Legion of Ontario Provincial Command and Legion branches have provided almost \$3 million in support for items like these.

It is a complex web of programs that works together to gather available funds to help support the veterans and their dependents, like the Ontario Provincial Command's benevolent fund, which is used for items from wheelchairs and hearing aids to roof replacement support. Generally, these requests total thousands of dollars.

When they receive applications for a request, they bring extensive subject matter expertise. They often source several areas of funding to cover the costs. An example is when a veteran requires a wheelchair, an item that can cost anywhere up to \$6,000. They would start the hard and dedicated work of gathering the funds from the national, provincial and local Legions and organizations. Can we take a moment and reflect on the resilience of these front-line staff, who make this needle-threading work?

If they fall short, it is at this point that they would reach out to the Soldiers' Aid Commission for the balance of the

outstanding amount, so they can provide a complete solution for the needs of the veterans who they are helping here in Ontario.

Last year, I stood in the House to amplify the voices of organizations like this to expand the commission's criteria to include younger veterans—veterans who had served in the Gulf War and various peacekeeping missions around the world in Bosnia, Croatia and in the Afghanistan War. We cannot forget all who are currently serving. They were often stuck in a tough place to find that extra support.

That was prior to the introduction of Bill 202. Before, they would not have bothered contacting the Soldiers' Aid Commission—it was not really heard of—with a request for those veterans. Now they can, and while that is promising, there still are important matters to evaluate.

It is important that we create legislation that works together with the veterans' organizations across the province, like Ontario Command, to help contribute to their work in a meaningful way. It is important that we work with them to find solutions in the same way that they work so well with each other.

This is where I want to talk about intent and goals. It is important that we have an intent to re-evaluate this program if what we have provided was not enough to support the emergency needs of all veterans. This makes it so important that we commit to lofty goals to expand the spirit of this legislation.

In this same vein, while the province's commitment to an increase to the fund to the tune of \$1.3 million is substantive, the Soldiers' Aid Commission now covers a disproportionately higher number of veterans. Basically, this will not be enough of an increase in money for the amount of new veterans who will now be eligible. I'm not asking the question here about how the government arrived at this increased dollar figure. Instead, I am assuming that it is irrelevant so long as there is a clear intent to re-evaluate this amount if it turns out it is significantly not enough. Federal, provincial and local entities have done hard work to ensure they thread the needle to cover the veterans. It is important that we make the commitment to ensure we stand alongside them, to make sure no veteran is ever left behind. What if the amount of eligible veterans has exhausted this bucket of money halfway through the year or two thirds of the way through the year? It could then be surmised that maybe we need a little bit more. This commission is a last resort for our veterans in an emergency situation. After this, they have nowhere else to go. We need to ensure that if this program fails in assessing the needs—the commitment that more will be readily available.

It is important that we create decisive goals for this legislation that mirror the work of the veterans and their organizations. The eradication of homelessness and poverty is an important goal to have for any legislation, especially one like this that honours our traditional and modernized veterans who served on our behalf for this country. It is my hope that this legislation, in regulation, will be ambitious and that it will be unrelenting in striving to set a goal towards the eradication of homelessness and poverty for veterans in Ontario.

Language is so important. Even though stated goals for legislation may not come along with legislative and bureaucratic teeth, it is still important that we set lofty goals. It is through clearly stated goals from the province that combine demonstrative intent that we will ensure that if we create such programs and we find they do not do enough to accomplish our stated goals, that we are committed to adjusting them, making it work together.

Eradication of poverty should be one of those goals. It should be clearly stated and woven into the intent of the modernization of this legislation—it is that our lofty goals, the language we use to set them, is so very important for this to work. Are we not committed to the eradication of homelessness and poverty for our veterans? Members of Parliament across the spectrum of political parties would nod their heads yes that any veteran forced into a situation of poverty is definitely not an outcome any one of us wants.

In order to confirm that we get this right, it is important to be transparent. It is to ensure this is right. This is where I take my role as the critic for veterans, Legions and military affairs very seriously. This is one of the components of this program that I will continue to watch very closely and ask the questions to ensure the end result is right.

I do not want this to come off as overly critical, because it's not; it is making sure that we have a clear commitment that no veteran will have to deal with homelessness or be put in an emergency situation and have absolutely nowhere to turn.

I want to make sure we have a commitment that this legislation will not be a public relations one-off during Veterans' Week by the government, passed and forgotten about, that we have to blow the dust off later. We cannot wait another 60 years to get this legislation and these programs right.

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Now, I know there is an intent to get it right. It is a promising start that this legislation is in front of us today. If there is a question down the road about how far these dollars stretch to help our newly eligible younger veterans, I hope everyone in this House here is committed to ensuring we get that support dollar figure right and adjust accordingly if we do not have it.

Another reason I stood up alongside veterans last year, pushing this Legislature to consider passing legislation supporting veterans and expanding the criteria for the Soldiers' Aid Commission, was not just personal considerations due to my son in active service or because of the impact of my critic portfolio for veterans, Legions and military affairs. It is because in my community, I have seen first-hand the impact of mental health and homelessness on veterans. This legislation is about providing resources to improve the lives of veterans. When you see the great work some community members are doing in my community of St. Catharines and across the Niagara region, it is clear that this should be considered a first step. No veteran—no veteran—should have to experience homelessness, especially after serving our country and fighting for our freedom.

In St. Catharines, Pastor DeGuire from Working the Streets Niagara has been working to combat homelessness, alongside many other organizations in my community: St. George's church and Silver Spire, organizations combatting homelessness like Start Me Up Niagara, and also organizations that are working to combat addictions, like Positive Living. These groups work together to find ways to protect and support the more vulnerable in my community.

Pastor DeGuire is a veteran of a different kind. He has been doing this work for a long time. Last month, he spoke to the St. Catharines Standard, a local newspaper, about his work as an outreach worker in our community. His observations ring true for the work that is being done to ensure veterans who are homeless find support. I'd like to quote Pastor DeGuire: "Every one of these people is an individual, and you have to use different tools to get them ... into stable housing. None of these people fit in one box."

This is why, within my community, there are so many active individuals that are finding ways to identify, reach out to and support veterans that are struggling with homelessness and mental health issues. This is because there is not one solution that fits everyone. Some of these solutions come from individuals that are trying to fill the gaps in our current support structure for veterans, like the previous gap that only included our traditional veterans and excluded support for our younger, modernized veterans through the Soldiers' Aid Commission.

In fact, currently, a local veteran in Niagara region, Garrick Halinen, is spearheading an effort to raise funds for other veterans in need. He sees the gaps, especially given the pandemic of COVID-19 and the reduced amount of donations coming in to our local Legions. Retired Sergeant Garrick Halinen was stationed in Germany when the Berlin Wall came down and served 18 years in a Royal Canadian Armoured Corps.

Sergeant Halinen was diagnosed with PTSD and was able to get support through non-government programs offered by VETS Canada, a volunteer-based non-profit organization run by veterans. He is now paying it forward by working with the team to put together live Jazz for Veterans with the Jimmy Stahl Big Band. This is an event I will be contributing to personally on Sunday, November 8, at 3 p.m., at Greg Frewin Theatre.

When he was on the local radio station recently, he commented, "My fellow soldiers who encounter difficulty after service due to traumatic stressors are developing PTSD at an alarming rate. Some so severe they cannot cope or take care of themselves. In most extreme cases this leads to homelessness."

When asked last week, Sergeant Halinen reported that there are at least 23 known veterans without housing in the St. Catharines area. Can I pause here? In St. Catharines, there are 23 known veterans right now without housing. I think it is fair to say that one homeless veteran is too many, and 23 is an atrocity.

I applaud the work of these initiatives. The money raised during the events will be used to support non-profit efforts to help homeless veterans and other veterans facing

difficulties of any kind. It is critical that we view the Soldiers' Aid Commission as a promising start, because there are so many community members who are trying to fill the gaps left in our province.

The amount of veterans without housing is not a surprise to me. I have other community members who are engaging on this matter, like local legionnaire treasurer, Paul Molnar, of Branch 350 in St. Catharines. He has been working to reach out to a number of homeless veterans in the city of St. Catharines and across Niagara. He has been working with community partners such as Outreach Niagara and CMHA to locate homeless veterans, to gather information about their age, where and when they served, and to determine what their immediate needs are at the time. It is called the Homeless Vet initiative, and it was started simply out of care and concern.

Paul just recently met with CMHA and Outreach Niagara to continue dedicating resources to the initiative through their teams. They are continuing talks to consolidate and collaborate with other local organizations, such as Quest, a community health centre, to create a smoother financial avenue for different Legion funds and through the poppy fund as well.

To paint a better picture of the organizations involved, Outreach Niagara is a non-profit dedicated to helping those experiencing homelessness, addiction, mental health struggles and human trafficking. Their team has been wonderful in tracking homeless veterans, as they specialize in street outreach, moving across Niagara and directly engaging with homeless populations. As a result of their work and their dedication, numerous homeless veterans within the Niagara region have been located, many within the boundaries of St. Catharines.

Programs like the Soldiers' Aid Commission will be a good preventive measure that can help provide the supports to ensure a veteran never has to be placed where there is no housing. Outreach workers and organizations will attest that once someone is without housing, it becomes more difficult to support them. It takes time to fully engage with these individuals, given they have no address, and many more variables are involved.

It is devastating to hear that since December 2019, three homeless veterans have died on the streets within the Niagara region. This battle is not easy, not easy for the veterans living this reality, nor for the teams of people working to create real change. One homeless veteran is one too many. The problem is systemic. The cost of not providing comprehensive support is not only the risk of the veteran losing housing, but the risk of one's mental health.

Mental health criteria is a component of qualifying for the Soldiers' Aid Commission. It is so important, it deserves to be expanded. I have made mental health support one of my focus points to support my community in St. Catharines.

Over the last few years in office, I've had the pleasure of meeting individuals and veterans who could have benefited from the Soldiers' Aid Commission had they been eligible—may I repeat, had they been eligible. Last

year, I worked closely with two gentlemen from St. Catharines, Shawn Bennett and Graham Bettes—a shout-out to Shawn, a shout-out to Graham. Shawn is a retired firefighter, and Graham is a retired first responder. Both of them have served in the Canadian services.

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Both men live and cope with PTSD on a daily basis. In fact, that was the basis of my professional relationship with them. At the time, they were using labyrinths as a personal means to cope with PTSD, along with their service dogs. Both men came forward to support our community members who struggle with PTSD. For anyone who is not familiar with the use of a labyrinth, they are circular in shape and represent a release of emotions, pain, thoughts or triggers. You walk from the outside to the inside of the labyrinth while reflecting and following the paths, by walking from the inside to the outside once again. This helps to release everything you just reflected on. It is actually known as an exercise of meditation.

Working closely with Shawn and Graham, the city of St. Catharines acknowledged the benefit of a professional labyrinth and what it would do for the community, so they approved the installation and it was granted to one of our famous parks in St. Catharines, which was a big win for them and our veteran community.

While the individual labyrinth, of course, cannot benefit all, it is a representation of the needs of veterans and those with mental health concerns. It is symbolic in the veterans' and the first responders' communities in Niagara. In fact, I encourage anyone who ventures to the region to stop by and check it out.

The Soldiers' Aid Commission fund shares this symbolism with the labyrinth project, as it is about knowing you have somewhere to turn to. It is more than just a program that provides a few thousand dollars. It is knowing that as a veteran, you have somewhere to turn. It's somewhere you can go. It continues a mandate to support all veterans in need in this province, not just some.

Even though it will not be decided now, in regulation we will decide to include more, and extensive, mental health criteria in order to qualify for this program. For the 215,000 veterans who will be newly eligible for the assistance, it is important to provide programs that are comprehensive enough that our communities won't have to feel the need to fill the gaps.

I've spoken about this topic before many times in the Legislature, but in my riding of St. Catharines, we have lost far too many young lives due to suicide on the Burgoyne Bridge. I support the community and push for barriers to be added to deter one from taking their own lives on the bridge. It is important that we have the programs to support individuals that feel they have nowhere else to turn.

The barriers were finally installed this past summer. It is a deterrent, but again, the root of the problems started with mental health. Every life lost means we're losing that fight. It means more is needed to be done, and still needs to be done. If we are all doing our jobs and providing help at the moment it was needed, we would be saving lives.

Most of the time, the issue is that supports were not immediately available. When I was reaching out to a local group in the riding called Niagara United to address mental health and suicide last year, they mentioned that the thought to commit the act is really quick. Usually, individuals experience a moment of crisis, call a hotline, for example, and then, when there's no answer, it causes further distress for an individual. If there is a lack of funding contributing to a lack of crisis workers or a lack of mental health beds in our hospitals, this creates a very vicious cycle.

The same goes for our veterans. Whether it be an issue of eligibility or a denial of an application for support, each "no, go somewhere else" answer causes further distress for our veterans. This chain of events is what matters here. I want to ensure that the veterans are not and will not be turned away from the very government they worked to represent on duty.

Even though this is a promising start, not having the support of the Soldiers' Aid Commission last year—the expanded eligibility—had a real cost to my community, Speaker. If you just hear these local stories with their local heroes about mental health and homelessness, if you are thinking this is a community coming together, then you've missed the point. It is our obligation to respect the sacrifice of our servicemen and women by committing to a goal that strives to openly decrease poverty and eliminate homelessness among traditional and modernized veterans. It is important that we acknowledge the gaps will not be filled with our heroes when we have a system that finally works.

Current legislation, untouched for decades, was the problem. It was a problem that local organizations and veterans have found ways to try to solve all by themselves. It is time that we stand up and make this right. This, again, is a promising first step.

We also have to keep in mind that vulnerable populations, such as homeless veterans, will be more open to engaging with outreach workers, sharing their stories and seeking help when there is actual support available to be given. It is great that a team of people is willing to listen and sympathize with the fact that they are living on the streets. However, if after the conversation ends and our teams do not have the funds to offer the veterans, the question will be: What good was talking about it? There would be a disservice to everyone who does this work if one point was made that is outside of the scope of the legislation but still needs to be made.

It is proven that whether we are talking about addictions or housing issues, outreach saves lives. We have great teams of outreach workers in St. Catharines that I would like to mention that have really made a real difference. It is great that we are modernizing a program to support veterans, but so many have already fallen through the cracks. In my community alone, the evidence is staggering.

I implore this House, this government, my colleagues on both sides of the floor, as we look to the budget release at the end of this week, to ensure we incorporate more

funding for outreach; identify veterans who need this support work when there are boots on the ground. In my community, good organizations like Positive Living are proof that outreach works and that we can't offer programs without proper outreach too. I hope I see outreach money announcements for these initiatives to complement a program like this.

Bill 202 will hopefully be the change we need to better engage homeless veterans, get them off our streets and assist them on the journey forward, but it requires complementary funding and commitment-based support.

There is an elephant in the room, Speaker, that is lingering in every conversation about legislation right now. It is that we are unable to view any legislation accurately without viewing it through the lens of the COVID-19 pandemic and the cost it has forced on organizations and people. In this case, earlier on when I began speaking, I described the process that an organization goes through to fund emergency money to a veteran in need. They take small packets of funding from various sources, cobbling together multiple streams of money to ensure larger emergency purchases can be covered, like prosthetics, replacements of roofs, or wheelchairs.

A big part of the support has traditionally come from our local Legions. Unfortunately the climate of COVID-19 restrictions has rendered all of the non-profit volunteer organizations without funds to maintain operations at the same level. In fact, some of them are under water with mounting operational costs. They are faced with insolvency, which means the donations they would normally provide to veterans and widows of veterans and community organizations that support veterans will not be able to be made this year.

Everything in this part of the world shares the same string. When you pull one end of the string and the other end moves, the expanded criteria and funding for the Soldiers' Aid Commission is promising, but Legions across this province have been gutted for revenue. Members across the aisle will be aware of this matter. The Royal Canadian Legion has written to you, and so have I. I have stood in this House asking for support for Legions so we can ensure the work they do around supporting veterans can be maintained. It is unfortunate that the province has offered no support to Legions for operational costs. It was the federal government that had to step in and help. The federal funds are supposed to be out before December 30, but clearly, it will be desperately needed well before that.

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There is still no clear communication on when that money will be flowing, but I hope both sides of the Ontario Legislature will agree that it is needed and it needs to be urgent, especially in the absence of provincial support. I am thankful, as are Legions across this province receiving some much-needed financial help. We are hopeful this will all happen soon, in time to save some branches that are set to be closed or to help those that still cannot reopen their doors.

The point of the concern is that this year is much different than others. Providing additional support for the

Soldiers' Aid Commission might not even come close to the amount of money that veterans will require in emergency situations, because other streams of support like from our local Legions might not exist in some areas of our province. This is a serious regional equity issue for veterans across the province.

This brings us to this week, and on Thursday, Veterans' Week begins. The provincial poppy campaign is well under way. Speaker, yourself and I, as we know, were out on duty this weekend. But due to COVID-19, the campaign will look much different this year. Campaigns will likely create less revenue through donations this year. The poppy campaign started last Friday. People will once again see the traditional poppy boxes across the country, and people can donate spare change. They have over 30 partners this year and 25,000 locations. But because some of them are touchless, we are unclear what that means for the Legion's donations.

I will do one shout-out here: You're able to donate online and participate in other ways this year. So I hope everyone listening in this House and across Ontario considers doing that, and I hope you engage.

The concern I have is clear: Legions have struggled during the pandemic and have yet to receive any kind of support. This legislation in third reading today, Bill 202, the Soldiers' Aid Commission Act, is a promising step forward, but I worry this year it will not do enough to balance the loss of revenue for veterans in need in other ways. It is my hope we see that rectified later this year in other ways. That's because support is more important than ever to veterans in need.

I have one more COVID-19 observation that I would like to be recorded in the House today that relates to Bill 202, the Soldiers' Aid Commission Act. This type of program is designed to help support the good work of the veterans who served across this province. It helps them be able to get back on their feet. The pandemic has made it hard to do that in 2020. I know that it is not a particularly incisive observation, of course. That's obvious. And yet one of the accidental outcomes—or at least I'm going to assume it was not intentional—is the chaos we saw earlier related to the federal programs and what that meant for individuals on provincial social assistance programs. It was a communication exercise that left many on ODSP or OW scratching their heads, wondering if one program meant clawbacks in another. In my constituency office, I have had way too many individuals who made mistakes, received the wrong advice and are now faced with clawbacks that have placed them in deplorable positions. This is one of the many lessons of COVID-19 that needs to be crystal clear from the start when it comes to assistance and the impacts of support.

There is a sense of great pride within the veterans and military community. The other side of that coin is belief that any support that is given to them will have a cost later. I implore that we do everything we can to ensure that this is not the case with this legislation.

The Royal Canadian Legion, Ontario Command, and many others have asked that this program not consider this

support as income. In other words, we won't support veterans by providing money for food or shelter, only to claw it back a few months later if they happen to be using social assistance in Ontario. Especially if a veteran has lost a limb or had an injury, being on ODSP puts anyone in a precarious position.

I am told that this matter will be decided in regulation. I am told that we do not need to write this into the legislation. The veterans' community and myself are putting trust in the fact that this government—this government—will ensure that this support is not income and will enforce it in regulation, as was suggested and as told to the veterans of Ontario. I will keep a watchful eye on this matter, Speaker, as this legislation proceeds through regulation, as providing support with unfair caveats will not be good enough for veterans in this province.

I do need to mention as well that I am a proud Legion member of Branch 138 in the community of Merritton, known as my hometown—God's country, I say. For most of my life, I've been a Legion member, and I do my best to truly show my gratitude to local veterans I know personally and to relay that message to veterans across Ontario. I've attended my fair share of fish fries on Friday night, and on Saturday nights, my steak draws across the Legions in St. Catharines in support of our veterans because it's the least I can do to honour and give back to their sacrifices.

I know a while back, when I was here in the Legislature advocating for financial assistance for our Legions, my colleague opposite the member from Nepean expressed a personal connection to her local Legion and its importance to her community and veterans living in the riding. I mention this because empathy is shared.

Outside of Merritton, in St. Catharines, we have three other local Legions that do exemplary work in the community, both for veterans and more broadly. We have Port Dalhousie Legion, Branch 350, in the north end; downtown Branch 24, famous for their fish fries; and in the east end, the Polish Veterans Legion, Branch 418, is well-known for their perogies and cabbage rolls. No one in these Legions wants to see a veteran struggle—no one. No one wants to deny a veteran a small sum of money that could prevent him or her from going hungry.

In St. Catharines, every Remembrance Day, each Legion commemorates their sacrifices, celebrates their bravery and thanks them for risking their lives. No one in this House today objects to that. I stood in this House to amplify the voices of veterans because of the great appreciation I have for my own community, ensuring there are no more clawbacks, re-evaluating the need for more support later on and recognizing that Legions in my community and across Ontario are struggling and they need extra support to help make sure no veteran is ever left behind. I simply want each and every veteran to feel included.

I have had the absolute pleasure of meeting a few traditional veterans over the last few years. I have to get this in: I met a young fellow in my community of St. Catharines, Chuck Page. He was celebrating his 100th

birthday. He's a 100-year-old veteran who vowed to walk 100 laps for a fundraiser for his community. I walked with him and we shared some of our local Legion stories and some of his stories that he had seen. I saw the pride he has in the same community that I love; the same commitment to fill the gaps left for some veterans to fall into. But these programs can be a real game-changer.

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I leave with this story. I personally know of some veterans who did qualify for the previous Soldiers' Aid Commission and the difference that it made. Just last year, a gentleman approached my office for assistance for his roof that needed to be replaced. It was leaking. Luckily, he was eligible for the funds through the commission and the poppy fund through our local Legions here in St. Catharines. I still remember the relief he expressed when he found out that these funds were available specifically to assist a veteran—a veteran in need, just like him.

Like I said, he was in his late eighties, still completely able to live and care for himself, which is so fantastic. But living on a small pension doesn't always allow our seniors to save for emergencies, necessarily. The Soldiers' Aid Commission saved this man from borrowing money and prevented him from sacrificing elsewhere in order to ensure his roof was fixed. I want every single veteran to feel that same level of support. It might not be much, but it is something; it is a start.

Doesn't every veteran who has served our country deserve to live in a safe, dry and clean home? Doesn't every veteran deserve to live stress-free instead of wondering how his or her medication will be paid for? Or how they will access costly medical or dental health support programs? Unless you serve in the military, there are many struggles you will never, ever understand, both mentally and physically. It is why I stood in the House last year to push for the modernization of this legislation. It is why I think this is a promising start to providing more real support for veterans in our community. It will help fill in the gaps, help respect and honour the service of the men and women that have served in our Canadian military.

Speaker, I am hopeful that this is the first step to provide more tools to allow Soldiers' Aid Commission programs to become a modern and viable option for veterans who require emergency needs. I will endeavour to stand vigilant and ensure the legislation proceeds as it should.

There is definitely much, much more work to be done, and the advocacy should never, ever stop. But it is your hard work, the veterans' hard work, over the decades that has led to this step. It is the Legions, it is our community groups and our veterans, again, that have led us to this step. Without their voices, I wouldn't even be standing here. It's about education and awareness. It's about getting our veterans off the street. It's about giving them the respect. It's about offering supports to them, whether it's needed or not.

On November 11, on the 11th day, in the 11th hour, in the 11th minute, we will all stand in silence. We will all stand in silence while we remember, while we honour all

of our men and women in uniform, whether it's land, it's air or of sea. We will remember them, but I ask that we all, when we see a man or a woman in uniform, say, "Thank you"—it's two words, "Thank you"—"for everything you have done."

Madam Speaker, we have to make sure that with this bill, we get it right; we don't leave any of our veterans homeless; we look after their mental health; we make sure that if they are on ODSP or OW, their funds are not clawed back when they need this money the most.

Again, I want to make sure that everyone in this House remembers and thanks all of our men and women, land, air or sea. We must remember them and we must thank them.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Questions?

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: Thank you to the MPP for St. Catharines for your passionate talk on this issue, and thank you for your support. You've expressed your concern and also your devotion and your family's devotion to serving this country, and I thank you for that.

Also in your speech, you mentioned about a lack of support for the veterans. Would the member opposite agree that an eligibility change is long overdue, and that we need to move quickly to pass the government's bill to ensure this support makes its way quickly to the veterans who need it?

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Thank you to the member opposite. Yes, coming back from any kind of combat that any of our men and women in uniform have experienced in our Canadian military—mental health challenges are something that is often faced by our men and women. But we have to make sure that this bill, Bill 202, definitely helps them when they come back. They come back and they have wounds, and you can't see these wounds. There are no Band-Aids on them, Speaker. They don't have broken arms. PTSD is an injury that they face on a daily basis. I hope that this bill goes a little further in helping our soldiers and men and women in uniform with mental health and addictions.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Questions?

Mr. Percy Hatfield: I applaud the member from St. Catharines, who is our party's critic for Legions, veterans and military affairs. I think she did a tremendous job in her hour-long lead.

She talked about the eradication of poverty and the eradication of homelessness for homeless veterans. She also talked about the 23 homeless veterans in her community, and it reminded me of Sir Winston Churchill: Never have so many owed so much to so few. The rest of us in Ontario owe those 23 young men so much.

Can you suggest a way that all levels of government can get together and do more to eradicate the poverty and homelessness of Canada's military veterans?

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Thank you to my colleague, who is always on the forefront of helping out anyone who is from our Armed Forces. I want to thank you for your continuing advocacy for that.

Most of all, every level of government must stand behind and definitely look at how we can support the homeless, mental health and addictions. I think that all

comes from having those programs in place for when they come back, and from the funds from each level of government being there—not just a little bit, but making sure we know that the funds are going to help these men and women who have fought for us, who have given us our right and the privilege to stand here in this House. We should give them back what they have given us: the ultimate sacrifice.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Questions?

Ms. Donna Skelly: To the member from St. Catharines: First of all, to your son, please share how proud we are of him and how honoured we are that he is doing so much for our country. As a mom, you must be so proud, I can't imagine. I know you beam with pride, but what a remarkable opportunity to be able to share his experience in the Legislature.

We've only got a couple of minutes. You talked about them coming back. I can't imagine our veterans are actually homeless. It's unbelievable. What happened? Are they not prepared for civilian life? What is the obstacle that is causing this—which really is unnecessary—homelessness and inability to earn a living? If you could just single out one thing in the limited time that you have.

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Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Thank you to the member from across the way there. I want to thank you for thanking my son. I do let him know every time I stand up how proud I am, and gleam every time. People must often say, "Here she goes again," but, I tell you, I am proud of him and all the men and women he served with on his four different deployments that he's gone on to fight for this country.

In saying that, "Mental health," and "Why they are homeless," when they come back from their deployments and their battle and their fight for this country, the support groups are not here, the money wasn't here. This Soldiers' Aid Commission was not even in the forefront until I brought it forward and asked for Mr. Kitchen, who was looking for the support. He was living in a tent with his family. That's because there are no supports, when these men and women come back, to help them with mental health or addiction, and that's where your homelessness comes—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Thank you. Questions?

Mr. Jamie West: I want to thank the member for St. Catharines. Normally, in COVID, we're seatmates, so it's good to see you and to you talk to you from way over there. You talked about ODSP, OW; you talked about homelessness; you talked about the number of people who are homeless—23 in your community; and the last time I sat in on the debate, we talked about 11% in Toronto, and mental health.

I think it would be interesting, from your perspective, as we move this forward and improve soldiers' aid, how we reach out to these people who are homeless, people who maybe are disconnected. Because with OW and ODSP, the chances of you being able to afford Internet and having a connection—or mental health problems—you might not be able to reach out.

How will we be able to let soldiers know there's more aid for them, more things that we can do to help?

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: I would like to thank my wingman, or my colleague, for that question. Actually, the Royal Canadian Legion command has a program right now—I believe it's called “getting veterans off the streets.” Anybody who is able to, please reach out to your Royal Canadian Legion Ontario Command. They are there to help. They are there to help locate veterans who are homeless.

Like I said, our local Legions, they do support. I have one gentleman in my riding of St. Catharines, Paul Molnar, who goes out and works with different homeless organizations through the region to find and help local vets. They tag them, they find out where they are and where they served, to help them get off the streets, bring them packages of care and help with first and last months' rent.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further questions?

Mr. Mike Harris: It's always great to hear the MPP for St. Catharines stand up. I'll give her credit for filling the hour, too. That was pretty good.

I guess my question to her is—with her son obviously serving right now, previously, under the old, I guess, iteration of this act, he wouldn't be eligible for taking part in these services, if he ever needed to, and let's hope that he never does. What does this mean to her in regard to now having eligibility for veterans from all stripes, from all conflicts, and, not only that, but for folks who maybe didn't actually go and serve overseas, for them to be able to take part in this program?

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: This is a great first step. This soldiers' commission bill is a great first step. Seeing that we have actually changed the definition of a traditional vet to include a modernized vet as well is so important.

I had a bill up in front of the House—my first bill—and it was to change the definition of a traditional vet to a modernized vet to get the beds within our long-term-care homes. It's still sitting out in space somewhere. I look at the government side to make sure that we get that to committee so that we can also look at getting our veterans on a list within our long-term-care homes and our hospitals to make sure that we get the modernized vet definition across every legislation in this Legislature. So we have to make sure that every traditional veteran and every modernized veteran—that definition is changed in all legislation.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

Mr. Lorne Coe: I'm pleased to join the debate on the Soldiers' Aid Commission Act, 2020, and I do it as a member of Branch 112 in Whitby and an affiliate member of Branch 152 in Brooklin. I'm so pleased that the government has introduced this legislation to further assist our veterans and, in particular, their families.

I want to give special recognition to our Minister of Children, Community and Social Services—along with

his parliamentary assistant—for being the first minister in 18 years to take action on this. The need has been highlighted over and over again, and our Minister of Children, Community and Social Services is finally taking action to honour our veterans in a very practical way.

The Soldiers' Aid Commission Act, if passed, will ensure that veterans of all ages—not just those who served in the Second World War and the Korean War—and their families will be eligible to apply for financial assistance. It's absolutely time to remember the tremendous sacrifices our veterans have made to make our province and country a better place. That's why we're working hard across government to make sure that we're there for them when they need us.

We're committed to helping more of our heroes in need through the Soldiers' Aid Commission. To support the next generation of servicemen and servicewomen, the government is proposing to increase its investment in the Soldiers' Aid Commission to more than \$1.5 million annually. The funding provided by the commission will continue to support veterans who are unable to pay for health-related items such as hearing aids, wheelchairs and glasses, home-related items such as home accessibility modifications and repair costs, and personal items and support services such as clothing and counselling.

Regardless of when and where they served, our veterans face many challenges, and that's the case in Whitby and other parts of the region. I was at Branch 112 yesterday—as you know, Speaker, it's the poppy fund time, and many of the members are still out selling poppies in COVID-19. In my discussions with some of the members—and it's a range of ages—they talked about the needs they have, the needs their families have. They also spoke about some of the individual challenges they have, and this includes everything from post-traumatic stress disorder, physical injury, challenges finding employment, and even at times facing homelessness, all while trying to navigate a complex support system.

I want to give a little bit of context to this bill with some background information. The commission was created to support veterans coming home from the First World War over 100 years ago, and it later expanded to support those who served in the Second World War and the Korean War.

Speaker, over the years, the commission has provided financial support for countless veterans and their families, to assist them during hardship. The commission has a program of last resort. They share the cost of special items and services with other veterans' organizations. The commission may provide up to \$2,000 over a 12-month period to an eligible applicant.

I ended the discussions I was having yesterday with some of the veterans—and some of the family members were there, as well. They expressed how grateful they are for the government's commitment to support veterans with many of the new features of what the commission is going to be providing. It's also true that the commission has helped thousands of veterans and their families over the years. But we know that their needs are growing. That's what they're telling me. And our veterans deserve our help. They do deserve our help.

1550

I want to take this opportunity to speak about a constituent of mine who actually has been involved in getting us to the place we are this afternoon: Bob Hartley. There are lots of Bob Hartleys in the region of Durham, and I don't say that lightly. Many of us can stand in this Legislature and talk about individual members of the Legions that we either belong to or have supported for years.

Bob is a member of Branch 112 in downtown Whitby and he has been for a number of years. Bob is like many veterans: He's a volunteer. You see him everywhere across the town. When he's not attending all of the events, you'll see Bob in the Legion—when he was able to and we didn't have COVID—serving meals to seniors as well. I really can't think of a community event where I've been that Bob has not been present.

But Bob is like many veterans, whether it's the people I spoke to at Branch 112 yesterday or 152 up in Brooklin: He's been advocating for several years to several ministers in government to expand the mandate of the Soldiers' Aid Commission. He saw the need, in Whitby in particular, to modernize.

Bob is not only a man of words, he's a man of action. Bob worked outside of the Legion in the town of Whitby. He visited other Legions across the region of Durham to spread the news about the Soldiers' Aid Commission to make sure that veterans were aware of the supports that were available to them. What he found in those discussions with Legion members was that most people couldn't believe that the mandate did not serve modern-day veterans.

Well, Bob, we listened. We listened carefully and we took long-overdue action, haven't we? That action has not been in isolation. Yes, we've consulted with Legions, we've consulted with the Ontario Command. Yes, we listened very carefully in the Standing Committee on Social Policy, and yes, the member from St. Catharines was instrumental in providing that input. We heard the specifics of that, and I thank her for her presentation. It resonated with many veterans who might be watching today. It resonated with many of us who have long served our local Legions as well.

The proposed legislative changes respond to those needs of veterans and their families, whether it's in the middle of the town of Whitby or whether it's up in the hamlets of Brooklin and Myrtle Station. The needs are still there. They're still there, Speaker.

The president of the Royal Canadian Legion Ontario Command is pleased with the government's commitment to Ontario veterans. He had this to say: "Big thrill today is it opened it up to modern-day, still-serving, and what we call 'new day' veterans. Veterans from after the Korean conflict. We're hoping and we're optimistic that this will be a big thing for our veterans. It will help us here with the Royal Canadian Legion to get some help to veterans who are homeless, help with service dogs, and other items that will be available through the commission."

Every year, veterans who served in those wars decrease. I see it in my own local Legion as well and also up in

Brooklin. They're struggling to maintain their memberships. This particular bill and the type of assistance that we're going to be able to provide through it will go a long way to help them and improve their overall quality of life, going forward.

As we approach Remembrance Day, we'll never forget their sacrifices; like my Uncle James, who died in the battle at St. Aubin, three days prior to his 21st birthday. We remember the sacrifices of everyone: the doctors and the nurses who tended to the wounded, the parents who watched their children fight things that they couldn't protect them from, the children who were too young to understand why their moms and dads wouldn't be home for Christmas, the teen boys who were shipped off to fight before they even got a chance at adulthood.

Speaker, as I stand here this afternoon in peace and safety, I pay my respects to all of the fallen, like my Uncle James; all of the wounded; all of the supportive families; and all who served. As we should every day, Speaker, we remember those who volunteered, sacrificed, served, fought and died for our freedom. But it's also time, through this new legislation, that we honour a new generation of servicemen and women. There are aspects within this particular legislation that do that, that provide equity, provide help for families, provide help for individual servicemen and servicewomen that didn't exist previously. This particular legislation will make a significant difference in so many lives here in the province of Ontario.

The Premier and our government will continue to stand behind each and every woman and man who has served in our Armed Forces, and a modernized and expanded Soldiers' Aid Commission in our province is our way of saying, to all Ontario veterans and their families, "Thank you for your service."

Speaker, it's such an honour to stand this afternoon to speak to this particular bill and the features of it, as I said earlier, addressing many of the challenges that have existed for 18 years in our province, 18 long years, whether it's homelessness, whether it's poverty, whether it's requiring a type of support that many members of the Armed Forces and veterans need to deal with mental health.

I am grateful that in my riding I have Wounded Warriors Canada that goes a long way to provide the type of support that veterans need to deal with their mental health issues and to lead the type of quality of life that they need and deserve and their families deserve. And it's not just financial supports. It's the types of supports that they need to bring the type of quality of life that they have long desired.

In conclusion, Speaker, this particular piece of legislation is a hallmark piece of legislation. It's a hallmark piece of legislation due to the level of support and input that we've received from all parties in this Legislative Assembly. It will be a piece of legislation that will be a legacy piece of legislation, because it is affecting the quality of life for so many people in our great province.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Questions?

M^{me} France G linas: I was just interested to know—the member seems to want change and has had the opportunity to talk about this to many constituents. Would we know, as we speak right now, how many are in need of help? How many are homeless? And how many have tried to reach out for help and been turned away? Just to see what the situation looks like right now, so that hopefully, in weeks, months, not too many years down the road, we can look back at this bill and see how many people it has helped. Right now, I’m just curious to see: Does the member know what the situation looks like and have any numbers to support this?

1600

Mr. Lorne Coe: The member from St. Catharines touched on this to some extent in her presentation and rightly pointed out that there’s a collaboration of three levels of government—municipal, provincial and federal—to provide the level of support that families and individual veterans need. I do know that—speaking for the region of Durham, and I can speak specifically to my Legions, Branch 112 and, to some extent, Branch 152—the need is there. But it requires a collaboration of all levels of government. For example, in my riding, Wounded Warriors Canada; some of the help that we’re going to be providing through the commission; Ontario Shores Centre for Mental Health Sciences down at the foot of Whitby as well—collectively, they’ll provide the type of support that veterans will need.

My hope also, Speaker, will be that we’ll see through our public education effort—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Thank you. Question?

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: Thank you to the member for his speech and the fact that he talked about being involved in Branch 112 and Branch 152 and about how this is one of Bob’s dreams come true. Can you tell us what impacts this makes on military families as well, and what it means for individuals like Bob and the individuals you speak to at Branch 112 and Branch 152?

Mr. Lorne Coe: Thank you very much for that question. What it’s going to mean, particularly for families—because we expanded the eligibility—is that they now will be able to be the beneficiaries of some of the types of services that they need.

For so long they weren’t—18 long years. Can you imagine? Eighteen long years before a government decided to deal with this particular need and honour our veterans. But through the changes that we’ve made—and I just spoke, Speaker, about expanding the eligibility requirements, and the impact that that’s going to have on families. I know what it’s going to have in terms of Branch 112 in particular and some of the supports that they need, whether it’s physical or mental health, or in other areas as well. So it is really going to be significant.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Question?

Mr. Percy Hatfield: I listened closely to my good friend from Whitby and his very eloquent presentation. He started off by talking about how they had worked hard across government lines in preparation for the update of the Soldiers’ Aid Commission.

My question is, perhaps, if the member is aware of any consultations that the people behind the scenes who were updating this had with the federal government and the municipal governments telling them what great things we’re going to do to update this legislation and broaden it, and asking the federal government and municipal governments if they could do something within their realm to enhance what the provincial government was doing so that more aid was forthcoming to all of our veterans in need.

Mr. Lorne Coe: I thank my colleague for his question—another long-standing supporter of the Royal Canadian Legion and his constituents and the work that occurs in his particular riding. I’ll speak specifically to my experience, Speaker, in the riding that I represent and other areas that surround it in the region of Durham.

We have an upper-tier government, and I’m surrounded by a number of federal MPs as well. In the course of the development of this particular piece of legislation, I know that I regularly engaged with a cross-section of people within the regional government sector, and I know I did with other federal members as well, to keep them up to date about the breadth and depth of direction of this piece of legislation and how I saw it affecting particular constituents, not only in the immediate term, but in the mid- and long term going forward. And I emphasized—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Thank you. Questions?

Mr. Vincent Ke: We know that support for our veterans is about more than words on paper. There also has to be an investment in the program to ensure it can serve those who will be newly eligible for this support. I’m so glad to see our government announce increased funding alongside this legislation to support this expanded mandate.

My question to my colleague is, can you talk about the increased investment and how it will ensure we meet the needs of modern-day veterans?

Mr. Lorne Coe: Well, this particular investment wasn’t available for many seniors for quite a long time, and it now is. The expansion of the amount of money is going to make a big difference going forward—and this is out of the discussions that I’ve had with veterans in my riding as well as some of the families. There will be a continuing dialogue with the veterans, I know, in the region of Durham about the effect, and we’ll be monitoring the effect as well.

To some extent, the member for St. Catharines talked about the importance of looking beyond the immediate, looking to the future and how we can do better, beyond what we’re doing today.

I thank the member for his question.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Questions?

Mr. Faisal Hassan: I would like to thank the member from Whitby for participating in the debate.

It has been noted that a majority of our veterans are struggling. Also, as my colleague the member from St. Catharines stated, this is promising.

Is there any immediate plan to assist those who are veterans with the support they need at the moment? Could you comment on that?

Mr. Lorne Coe: As members know, there are existing federal programs for our veterans and other funding programs for veterans in general. But I think the question from the member opposite was, how quickly are we going to be moving to implement this legislation. And that's the point that the member in St. Catharines was making—to move ahead with this.

I'm confident that we will be moving ahead, specifically, with the regulations that are necessary to effect the key parts of this legislation and to make the type of difference that's going to be so important to individual veterans and their families in the mid-term and long term.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Questions?

Mr. Michael Parsa: It seems fitting that we're debating this bill here today, with Remembrance Day being less than two weeks away. There's no better time to discuss the legislation that will continue towards helping our veterans.

The Soldiers' Aid Commission has been around longer than any of us here, but our support for our heroes in uniform should never be outdated. That's why this bill ensures that we continue to provide assistance for veterans and their families by modernizing the Soldiers' Aid Commission.

Through you, Speaker, to the honourable member from Whitby—and I thank him for the great and passionate speech that he gave earlier: I'd like to ask him to please elaborate on how an annual funding increase and expanded eligibility criteria for financial support will help Ontario's veterans.

Mr. Lorne Coe: The eligibility requirements and expanding them—I think the two key aspects that stand out for me are these: extending the benefits to families, particularly; but the other really significant aspect of this is mental health—the mental health challenges that veterans are presenting with and how we can provide the level of support that they need to reintegrate within the particular—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Thank you. The time is up for a response.

Further debate?

Mr. Percy Hatfield: I stand today as a proud more-than-30-year member of Riverside Branch 255 of the Royal Canadian Legion in east Windsor.

I applaud the government for everything outlined so far in the update to the Soldiers' Aid Commission. It's a bill worthy of support, but it can be improved, and it should have been improved, and I see little reason why that hasn't happened. Let's talk about mental health and homelessness. Let's talk about the mutual interest of the provincial and federal governments.

1610

Speaker, like our veterans, our First Nations communities are caught between a rock and a hard place when the Ontario and federal governments squabble over jurisdiction. These jurisdictional battles have been under way for years and have been seen by many of us as nothing but an

excuse for a lack of action. Boil-water advisories, shoddily built homes, lousy roads, expensive food, non-existent health care and sometimes poorly trained educators: The list goes on and on. Many of the same problems are being experienced by our veterans of the wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, the Balkans and elsewhere: PTSD, other issues of mental health, homelessness, a breakdown in marriage, a lack of retraining, a lack of jobs, alcohol and drug dependency—a lack of government will and funding.

The Soldiers' Aid Commission is seen as a last resort. If you need a couple of thousand dollars and if you have exhausted all other means of support, it's a blessing; and I say thank you to the government for opening up the benefits package to include those who served after the war in Korea. But let's ask ourselves what else a concerned government could or should be putting on the table that would benefit our veterans of military service and conflict.

We as politicians, we like our little boxes and labels and checkpoints. We have our silos, but most of the time we don't think beyond the walls of those little boxes and labels. Why is veteran A experiencing mental health problems and what can we do to help her get better? Why is veteran B sleeping on downtown streets instead of in a shelter and what can we do to improve his quality of life? What do we do with veteran C to keep a roof over their family while he's in between jobs? How can we help veteran D pay for a used car, and how can we cover his car insurance so he can get back and forth to work?

We can probably do all of those things, but because of our provincial ministries being silos unto themselves and usually at odds with the department silos on Parliament Hill, we aren't seen by all of our vets as doing much of anything to really help them out. Yes, Ottawa is and should be the prime source of all funding for the military and their veterans, but, for example, when it comes to homelessness and mental health and addictions, those are provincial jurisdictions. There's nothing to say we can't have a subset in legislation to deal specifically with veterans who fall under those categories. Can this bill change that? Maybe, but we need the political will to make it happen.

Canada sent 40,000 troops to Afghanistan; nearly 160 never returned. Hundreds more came back, but not at 100%, and some may never fully recover. Last year in Canada, 20 military personnel chose death by suicide. That's the most since 2014, when 23 military personnel took their own lives. Since 2010, 175 have died at their own hands, and that is 17 more than the 158 Canadian soldiers killed in action during the Afghanistan War between 2001 and 2014.

The Soldiers' Aid Commission can't, as it's written now, do anything to help put an end to those statistics, but can't we work in partnership between ministries and between governments at all levels to find solutions, so we don't allow this to continue? This bill has been stated so often in the House this afternoon as a great place to start. To butcher a phrase, where there's a bill, there's a way.

The largest funeral I ever attended was 12 years ago in Windsor on Friday, September 12. Corporal Andrew

Grenon, a 23-year-old soldier serving with the 2nd battalion of the PPCLI, was on patrol in Afghanistan's Zharey district. At 9:30 in the morning nine days earlier, his team was on a routine patrol and came under heavy fire by the Taliban. Andrew and two others were killed. He was on his second tour of duty. He had been wounded twice on his first tour. He'd just received a medal for bravery for preventing a riot and saving the lives of two soldiers. He only had a few days left in Afghanistan before being shipped home.

Our Lady of the Atonement Church in our Forest Glade neighbourhood was packed. The mayor was there and several of the city councillors. When we left, on our way to Heavenly Rest cemetery about 20 kilometres away, on both sides of the road, the sidewalks were packed, people standing shoulder to shoulder waving Canadian flags. It was Windsor's version of the Highway of Heroes. It was a fitting tribute for a local hero. It was the biggest funeral in Windsor's history.

Andrew had joined the army when he was only 19. His military buddies called him G-Man. He had a great sense of humour, he was a talented juggler and he loved the Montreal Canadiens.

Andrew was also known to put pen to paper and write down his thoughts, and during his first tour, he wrote a poem, which he titled *Why We Fight*:

I've often asked myself why we are here.

Why my government actually agreed to send troops to this God-forsaken place.

There are no natural resources. No oil, gold, or silver.
Just people.

People who have been at war for the last 40 plus years.

People who want nothing more than their children to be safe.

People who will do anything for money; even give their own life.

I look into the eyes of these people.

I see hate, destruction and depression.

I see love, warmth, kindness and appreciation.

Why do we fight?

For in this country, there are monsters.

Monsters we could easily fight on a different battlefield, at a different time.

Monsters that could easily take the fight to us.

Surrounding these mud walls and huts is a country in turmoil.

A country that is unable to rebuild itself.

A country that cannot guarantee a bright future for its youth.

Why do we fight?

Because, if we don't fight today, on THIS battlefield, then our children will be forced to face these monsters on our own battlefield.

I fight because I'm a soldier.

I fight because I'm ordered.

I fight, so my children won't have to.

Andrew Grenon didn't make it home alive, but some of his friends did, some of the men and women in the same

regiment, the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry. Now some of them, and other Canadian veterans from the same war, are living on the streets of our cities and towns. We've heard it mentioned: In Toronto, 13% of the homeless people have a military background.

When we look at the words written by Andrew Grenon, these homeless veterans once had love, warmth, kindness and appreciation, but they now see hate, destruction, depression. They're fighting their own monsters of addiction and mental health. That's why I say this bill could have been improved. A bill dealing with soldiers' aid can surely do more to come to the aid of our soldiers who are now living on our streets. Instead of the Taliban, they're now fighting inner battles, demons, addictions. After serving their country proud in faraway lands, laying their life on the line for us, they're facing new monsters.

When they were there, they didn't do it for oil, gold, or silver, as Andrew reminded us in his poem. Still, they left those faraway deserts and hills damaged, and they remain damaged to this day. We, if we choose to, can find a way to help them if we break down the ministerial silos and political barriers with our federal cousins in Ottawa, if we do the right thing, the necessary thing, the honourable thing, to make our broken military veterans whole again.

1620

They served our country. They served us. The very least we can do is resolve to find a way to pay them back for their sacrifices, pay them back for their damaged souls, pay them back for Andrew Grenon and the other 157 men and women who died fighting for Canada in Afghanistan. Rebuild their lives. Guarantee a brighter future for their children. Take them off the streets, off the battlefield of daily survival, and find a place for them to live, a safe place to heal—not because we're ordered to, but because we want to. We want them to know that we appreciate their service and we're sorry it's taken this long for us to tell them that.

Speaker, as you know, Andrew's mother, Theresa Charbonneau, is our Silver Cross mother and attends all of our military services in Windsor. She told me a number of years ago that other provinces have created a Silver Cross or a Memorial Cross licence plate. It has the full support of Canada's military leadership. It's offered to the closest family members of those who were killed in Canada's military battles in Afghanistan, the Balkans and other recent wars.

I believe our member from Hastings-Lennox and Addington is in support of this, as I speak. I hope our government members will see fit to follow the example set in other provinces. Those Silver Cross licence plates would be a fitting tribute, Speaker, especially since the government is working on a new monument here on the grounds of Queen's Park to honour those who served in Afghanistan.

I think of Andrew Grenon often, especially every time I see or hear about his cousin, Mark. Some of you met Mark. He was here with my son. He visited the Legislature before COVID brought us this new battleground. Mark spent a lot of time at our home during their high school

days. He and my son were buddies. Mark served a couple of tours in Afghanistan, and I thank him for his service.

Andrew Grenon paid the supreme sacrifice and is one of 158 killed over there. But when you count up the number of military personnel who came home injured, physically or mentally, the number touched by that war and the need of government help reaches into the thousands. That's why I believe this bill could have been amended to offer more than a couple of thousand dollars after all other avenues of funding have been exhausted. Don't get me wrong, please; I support the bill. I'm just saying that it could have been better. It could have done better things. It could lead us to actually helping end the homelessness population of our military veterans.

I accept that Canada's federal government has a responsibility for our military veterans, but I think as a province we can do our part and in doing so maybe even shame the feds into doing more.

I applaud my friend from Peterborough—Kawartha, Mr. Smith, who a week ago introduced a private member's bill to create an award for Ontario's military cadets. He named it in honour of Murray Whetung, a First Nations leader from Curve Lake who served as a communication linesman in the Second World War. The member told us how badly Canada treated the 3,000 natives who volunteered to serve their country—a glitch, if you will; call it bureaucratic red tape within the Department of Indian Affairs. Not paying attention to restrictions of deployment within Canada's military, Indian Affairs said that if you're away from your reserve for four years or more, you lose your status.

Prejudices back in the day kept some native vets out of some of Canada's Legion halls. Native vets weren't treated as generously as non-Native veterans returning from the war. When I heard that it reminded me of a poem written by Chief R. Stacey Laforme of the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation in reference to those who returned from the First World War, when 4,000 First Nations people volunteered to fight for Canada. It's a very famous poem and it's called I Love This Land:

You were and always shall be my brother

We were all the same colour wrapped in the flag of this nation

My blood flowed as freely as yours, mixed in the fields one could not be distinguished from the other

Yet when we came home, when the nation's colours were removed

Difference became apparent, not between you and me, God willing never

But in the eyes of those for whom we laid down our lives.

Oh, we still stood shoulder to shoulder in the parades, but the government thought that your life was more valuable than mine

So you were given land property, while I waited and waited.

I know what you were given was not enough for what we endured

Still it was much more than I.

I am not envious of you brother, I believe you deserve even more than you received

But it hurt me very badly, I am not ashamed to say I cried and why not

I bled, I died, I killed, why does my country think I am unworthy

The enemy I fought could never be as cruel as the people I came back to embrace.

I gave so much, lived through so much and then you, you who I would give all for, you pushed me aside as if I was inconsequential

I feel as if I have been spit upon by one I honoured

Do I feel good having to ask you for what should have been given long ago, no?

In fact, I am a little ashamed to ask for justice in this

For I never went to war for money, for glory, for reward, I went because it was the right thing to do and God forgive me, I would go again.

This may seem an old wound to you, but it is a wound that never heals

For it is a wound to my people's heart and soul and insult to our pride

And we deserve so much better, especially from you

Speaker, again I applaud the government for updating the Soldiers' Aid Commission. I thank them for their support for my private motion a couple of weeks ago, asking the AGCO to allow our Legion halls to legally raise badly needed funds through their daily loonie-and-toonie draws. I'm most pleased to inform the Legislature today that, indeed, the AGCO has written to me, saying they will be in a position to offer gaming licences for those progressive monetary draws before the end of this month. Members of our Legion branches are thrilled, as am I, and I'm sure we can all accept the role that we played. It was a unanimous decision, and I thank members on all sides of the House.

We need to do everything in our power to honour our veterans, and our Legion halls do that every day of the year. We're all proudly wearing our poppies this afternoon. We all proudly support our veterans. It's that time of the year when we go out of our way to do that.

But remember, some of our veterans have fallen through the cracks. They need our help. They're not all home safe and sound. They don't all feel as we do when we hear the beauty of war and John Gillespie Magee's High Flight:

Oh! I have slipped the surly bonds of earth

And danced the skies on laughter-silvered wings;

Sunward I've climbed, and joined the tumbling mirth

Of sun-split clouds—and done a hundred things

You have not dreamed of—wheeled and soared and swung

High in the sunlit silence. Hov'ring there
I've chased the shouting wind along, and flung
My eager craft through footless halls of air.

Up, up the long delirious, burning blue,
I've topped the windswept heights with easy grace
Where never lark, or even eagle flew—
And, while with silent lifting mind I've trod
The high unsurpassed sanctity of space,
Put out my hand and touched the face of God.

Speaker, John Gillespie Magee Jr. was an American serving as a pilot in the Royal Canadian Air Force. He was killed when he was just 19 years old.

We can do more; we must do more for all of our veterans, especially those who have fallen through the cracks.

To all of Canada's veterans, I say: Thank you for your service.

To those who paid the supreme sacrifice: "At the going down of the sun and in the morning / We will remember them." We will remember them.

I was out last weekend, on Friday and Saturday, with my poppy box. COVID-19 is eating away at the revenue the Legion normally generates with the poppy campaign. I think it's important to show our pride each and every year by wearing a poppy, and if you've got one on your visor, leave it on your visor. Put a contribution in the box. Buy a new one. It's the right thing to do, and we should all be showing our support for our veterans.

Again, thank you to the government for updating this Soldiers' Aid Commission Act.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Thank you. Questions?

1630

Mr. Daryl Kramp: I'd like to congratulate the member from Windsor–Tecumseh and thank him very, very kindly for his considerate, thoughtful and concerned words with regard to this bill. Like he, I've been a lengthy—I don't want to say how many years—member of the Legion. As such, I know we've had the occasion to see first-hand former military who have come in dismembered, disfigured and hurt in so many, many ways. But also, there are those who have come in with no outward signs of injury, but certainly the damages mentally in so many, many ways. I wish that perhaps he could comment on the unseen damage.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Thank you for the question. I think any of us who have been around Legion halls for any length of time at all can name any number of people who we believe have brought home something—PTSD or worse. There are no Band-Aids to put on it, as we've heard in the House, but it's there.

I think back to my father's generation and some of the troubled souls that came home and that he came home with—we just didn't know exactly what it was at the time.

We didn't know how to treat it at the time. I think we can do better, but it may take more than a couple of thousand dollars each from the Soldiers' Aid Commission to do that.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Question?

Mr. Jamie West: I want to thank the member for Windsor–Tecumseh. As we all know, he is a great fan of poetry. He read two poems. Mine isn't as good, but I have my question in the form of a poem:

Today we debate
The Soldiers' Aid Commission Act
And the member for Windsor–Tecumseh
Spoke with great tact.

Our friend's a Legion member
(And here come the cheers)
Of Riverside 225
For 30-plus years.

He spoke to the strengths
And he didn't delay
To recommend improvements
"Where there's a bill,
There's a way."

The member from Windsor–Tecumseh,
He leads with his heart
So I ask my friend Percy,
Where should we start?

Mr. Percy Hatfield: I don't know where to start. How do you follow that? I can't tell. As you know, Speaker, the member from Sudbury—we ran a poetry contest back in the early days of COVID, and he was the well-deserving winner. I thank him for that.

I think we start by opening up the lines of communication with the other levels of government to say: This is what this bill is going to do. This is what we're putting on the table. How can you help us? How can you change things to do more for our homeless veterans, our military veterans perhaps with mental health and addictions? How can we all work together as one unit to do more for those who deserve it most?

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Questions?

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: I wanted to ask the member—he mentioned a comment in his speech by a gentleman who said, "Why does my country think I'm unworthy?" and the fact that he went to war not for money or glory, but to obviously give back to his country. We have a lot of these stories in our local Legions. I want to ask you, what other members have you talked to and the feedback they're giving you in terms of the importance of this change we're making today and the importance of this change to those military families, and what you've heard from those Legions?

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Yes, I was reading from a poem written by a chief of the Mississaugas of the New Credit about veterans returning from the First World War who didn't have the same benefits given to them as First

Nations veterans, as other veterans when they returned who were given homes or had property to build homes on and so on and jobs that were given to them. So he put that down on paper and it's been out there for many, many years.

I think when you talk to our veterans in our Legion halls, some will tell you of the horrors they saw over there and what they encountered when they came back, and others won't tell you anything because they just don't want to open up those old wounds. I remember talking to my friends who served in Vietnam, and when they came home, their welcoming committee was anything but what the soldiers who came home from the Second World War received.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Questions?

M^{me} France Gélinas: It was really interesting to listen to my friend from Windsor–Tecumseh.

A lot of people have talked about post-traumatic stress disorder and how many of our veterans come back home with post-traumatic stress disorder, better known as PTSD. This is a mental illness that is treatable. If you have access to the right treatment, you will get better; you will get through your post-traumatic stress disorder; life will be good again and worth living—and certainly prevent many of the people taking their own lives that he talked about.

I was just wondering if, through this bill, it would be possible to make sure that every service person, every veteran, has access to all of the mental health services that they will need coming back or into the future.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Thank you for the question. Unfortunately, the federal government has a role to play and they haven't been playing a very good role in this. The Soldiers' Aid Commission has available about \$2,000, once you've exhausted all other supplies of funding that are available. That \$2,000 isn't going to go a long way in creating any kind of a counselling program for you to get over your PTSD, but it is one of the elements of what could happen.

If we work together at all levels of government and when our veterans come home we screen in such a way to perhaps expose if any are suffering from traumatic experiences, that they need or will be expected to need PTSD counselling—I think this bill will touch on that. But we all have to do so much more to get the counselling for all of our veterans who are in need of it.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Questions?

Ms. Donna Skelly: Thank you to the member from Windsor–Tecumseh.

We talked about shared experiences or memories of our parents or grandparents who served in World War I, served in World War II. As I mentioned earlier, my grandfather served in World War I.

Often, when we think of veterans, we think of the Great War or World War II or the Korean War. But there are young veterans alive today who also need the support from all levels of government.

Would the member opposite share with the Legislature the need to recognize that we have young people today in Canada, in Ontario, who also need our support and need to

be recognized for the service they have given to our country?

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Thank you for the question. When your minister kicked off the debate on this bill when it was introduced, he advised us then that the average age of military personnel retiring from Canada's military was 39. So you might join at 19, then you put in your 20 years, and then you can get out and collect a pension. Our veterans today could be a single mom; it could be a guy going to university. Old guys like me having a beer at the Legion—that's one face of the veterans. But the new face of the veterans—it could well be somebody that you'd never expect had even served in the military. It could also be that guy on the street sleeping in a sleeping bag in the rain and the snow, maybe with a dog by his side, having a hand out. We need to give those veterans a hand up.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Questions?

Mr. Ian Arthur: Thank you very much for your contributions to this debate.

These problems aren't new. When we think back to the wars of history, we can think of the American Civil War and the image of the homeless vet on a crutch on a dusty Midwest street, and then the damage that was done during World War I on unprecedented scales, and it just keeps going.

When you speak of a young veteran, I think of my friend Ian and his struggles and how he would tell me, "They're going to get my cocktail right," when he was having a hard time—that they were going to do it.

How can we finally get it right after all these hundreds of years of not understanding and not doing enough?

1640

Mr. Percy Hatfield: I think it's a matter of political will and all three levels of government—the municipal, federal and provincial levels—getting together to say we're going to make veterans a priority, especially those who are living on the streets and especially those with issues of mental—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Thank you. Further debate?

Mr. Daryl Kramp: Today it's with great humility that I speak on a matter that's very, very close to my heart for many reasons.

I currently represent most of Hastings county in this provincial Parliament. As a previous federal member in Ottawa, in that previous life, at that time I represented all of Hastings county and all of Prince Edward county—of course, all adjacent to and including CFB Trenton. Over the years, those two counties provided many, many brave minds and bodies—and of course, the name of the very revered Hastings and Prince Edward Regiment. They used to call them the county plow boys, irreverently speaking. They served with great distinction in the Italian campaign. The battle of Assoro was absolutely an incredible accomplishment and a great demonstration of Canadian tenacity and the ability to overcome unbelievable odds. Armouries in my area, in Picton, Belleville and Madoc, provided the base for the Hasty P's, with their local organizations and, of course, the cadet corps that were

there because of this regiment, and they reached into all of the schools. In my school of 400 people, I had 250 to 260 cadets. We were very, very heavily—not ingrained, but basically influenced by the impact of the military contributions over the years, of this group particularly and, of course, many, many Canadian regiments.

My father was with the Princess Patricia light infantry. He served in Holland and in Belgium, in the liberation of Holland, and lost many, many of his comrades in the hand-to-hand battles over there. They fought with distinction and honour, which allows us to have the freedom to, I suppose—we seem to forget their names in the hustle and bustle of everyday life. That's why Remembrance Day uses these absolutely loaded, incredible words: "Lest we forget." It reminds us annually that we cannot and must not ever forget the bravery and the sacrifice that led to this present time, when we enjoy the many, many fruits of their sacrifice.

I know the current headquarters of the Hasty P's are in Belleville, Peterborough and Cobourg, because its reach extended beyond simply its local borders. The dots on the map just cannot contain their bravery. The simple motto which the regiment always delivered on—it was unusual for a military regiment, but it was "Prepared." That is so important in today's life.

The regiment first deployed under the current name in 1939 and first fought in France in 1940, but the roots go far, far deeper. In the early years of the province, when Ontario was known as Upper Canada and the two counties that I represent today, Hastings and Lennox and Addington, were part of the pre-county divisions known then as Mecklenberg or the Midland District, local militias formed to, of all things, defend the area from American attacks after the Revolutionary War, and they fought bravely during the War of 1812. That bravery, which started in the earliest days of our province, is what kept Ontario free back then, from the days when we were known as Upper Canada and then Canada West, before we became Ontario in 1867. It is that legacy which we honour by recognizing our veterans today with the Soldiers' Aid Commission Act.

Throughout history, the return of soldiers from the battlefields has been a time of celebration. We remember the lyrics to the song *When Johnny Comes Marching Home*—"Hurrah! Hurrah!"—but that isn't the simple melancholy end of it, because we know our veterans need our active assistance to re-acclimatize to civilian life. As those needs evolve and as the situations that they face evolve, so must we.

When my father returned from the Second World War—as I remember, he was affectionately known, again, as from the Princess Patricia regiment. Incidentally, they were the first regiment into Europe in the Second World War and the last out, and they were the first regiment into Afghanistan and the last out, so it has a great history. Like so many, many veterans, he didn't talk a lot about what he had seen and felt. They weren't really good memories. But the camaraderie he experienced with his fellow soldiers was matched by the warmth of the community upon their

return. I know they made his landing softer and over time allowed him the opportunity to both remember and forget.

In my younger years, though, Remembrance Day was always the most important day of the school term. The sacrifices of the veterans from World Wars I and II allowed us the freedom to march proudly from the school to the cenotaph—the entire school. Many veterans from both wars were there, though, to honour their fallen comrades as well and the cause of freedom for which they had fought on foreign soil. Their berets and medals and sashes were worn with pride even as they shivered in the cold of November 11 at 11 a.m. But as more than one veteran has told me over the years, November 11 at the cenotaph was never as cold or brutal as it was on the battlefield for them and their comrades, huddled in foxholes, bullets flying.

Certainly, I would like to extend extreme thanks to the teachers and the educators back then, who taught us about Remembrance Day in a consistent way and emphasized its critical importance to our history, and of course, those who still teach it today and help keep the memories alive for all of us, and all of those who didn't make it home or those whose returns required simply more than just a giant hug from us.

Now, there are 16 chapters of the Canadian Legion in my riding of Hastings–Lennox and Addington. Entering their literally hallowed halls is always a sobering memory for me. Both of my parents were lifetime members. I've been a long-time member myself. The names on the walls, the pictures, the medals on display, the battle honours and now, the veterans, mostly from more recent years, upon whom we must bestow that hug of thanks, the one that says, "We're with you."

I'd like to say thanks to my friend, my colleague, the minister and the member of Parliament from the adjacent Bay of Quinte riding, who brought forward this bill. We share lots of borders and common ground and interest between us, and he introduced this government bill at that time with some well, well chosen words. It wasn't great poetry, but I will acknowledge it was absolutely heartfelt prose when the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services plainly stated the purpose of this bill. He said, "Our government is introducing legislation to modernize the Soldiers' Aid Commission and expand assistance to Ontario veterans of all ages and their families who are in financial need."

Once thought of as charity, after World War I, the responsibility we hold for our veterans was now seen as our duty to them, just as they discharged their duty for us. And as times change and things are seen through more modern lenses, we see that the discharge of duty to our soldiers must also change to better reflect their needs. That's what this bill does, by upgrading the marching orders for the Soldiers' Aid Commission.

Consider this: There are currently 230,000 veterans living in Ontario. On average, 3,850 service members leave the Canadian Armed Forces every year to live in Ontario. As has been stated before by the strong member for Whitby—he said their average age upon release is 39,

still young. And yet not one of them—none—is eligible for support from the Soldiers' Aid Commission. Something is wrong with that equation. But that's because the existing rules say that to be eligible for Soldiers' Aid Commission financial assistance, a veteran must—here are three priorities they had: They must be in financial need—that's reasonable; they must live in Ontario—that's reasonable. And then the third one: They must "have served with the Canadian Armed Forces in the Second World War or the Korean War." Talk about being out of date, sadly, sadly out of date. We can all see that problem. So yes, a full 93%, or about 213,000 of the veterans in Ontario, as noted earlier, who served in the Canadian forces after the Korean War—these men and women are all currently ineligible for support from the Soldiers' Aid Commission.

As a result, in the last year, the Soldiers' Aid Commission has provided support to only 53 veterans. A government program serving the people of Ontario—our men and women who have paid so much—and only 53 people were eligible.

1650

But by passing this bill, the Soldiers' Aid Commission will be able to provide support to hundreds of additional veterans and their families. The government of Ontario is proposing to increase its investment in the Soldiers' Aid Commission by \$1.3 million, if this bill passes, to more than \$1.5 million annually. The proposed changes to the Soldiers' Aid Commission would recognize the service and sacrifice of all of our veterans since the early 1950s—currently not covered—reflecting more than 65 years and many dozens of deployments in conflicts and peace-keeping missions around the world. Literally, you can take a look at the map, put a finger on the globe, and Canadians have somehow been there over the course of years, helping humanity through some very, very challenging situations. Whether it's the Congo, Rwanda, the Balkans, the Mediterranean or the Middle East, we have been there. The government of Ontario has proposed changes to the commission which would recognize the service of all veterans since the early 1950s. That's more than 65 years and many dozens of conflicts, as I mentioned. That can't be overstated. We have too many people who have been left out of the support system that should be there for them.

Indeed, if we did not pass this bill, I would be compelled to visit my own home branch, Legion 363 in Madoc, the same legion to which I and my parents have been lifelong members, to explain why fellow MPPs knew the facts about the soldiers' commission, but declined to change the law to help over 200,000 Ontario veterans currently eligible for assistance. Well, I certainly have no intention of doing that, and I expect that no other member in here would have to undergo that same situation. I wouldn't want to have to do that next week in Napanee when, like many other members, I will potentially be attending some events. Certainly, I will be attending the annual November 11 Remembrance Day ceremony at the cenotaph in Napanee.

Obviously, there are different challenging moments now, and I would note that next week's ceremonies in

many, many locations will be sparse in physical attendance due to the need for distancing during the pandemic. But the need has not diminished. The memories cannot fade. We absolutely must put our foot forward and our hearts and our souls behind the need to not only remember but support our veterans. I know that attendance, even though it will be sparse physically, will be far, far greater than appearances will suggest as, of course, in today's world of technology many of these ceremonies will be on local media. Whether it's on Facebook, Zoom, Twitter or whatever, they'll all be attending.

Whenever I stand at the cenotaph on November 11, though, this becomes a little bit more personal in that I think back to the repatriation ceremonies I attended at CFB Trenton during the Afghan war as a federal member of Parliament. I think of the families of the 156 lost, the children, the loved ones, the friends, the siblings, the neighbours, who all came to welcome home a hero, unfortunately, in a flag-draped casket—156 souls. I missed one repatriation only, out of all of them. It was a commitment, but I felt this was something that—when you have an opportunity to acknowledge the sacrifices paid by so many, you should never miss it. That's why when I was in school, they always said the most important day of the year was Remembrance Day, and I hope people bear that in mind this year.

I know when I was there, I spoke to many of them and I heard about their loved ones. I learned about his or her childhood, education and commitment to service above self, and, of course, the origins of the Highway of Heroes. I think about their final journey along that Highway of Heroes, along Highway 401 west from Trenton—and not just our military, because there are so many other people involved in this. I think of the firefighters, the paramedics and the police lining the bridges and the hundreds and thousands of people on that thoroughfare, patriotic Ontarians of every background, there to say thanks. For most who have ever observed the procession, I can assure you it will linger in your hearts for a lifetime.

I can say firmly that I know each of them would have wanted this bill to become law to ensure their comrades had the assistance they needed upon their return home. This isn't a partisan issue, and I know and have heard, quite frankly—and I'm deeply appreciative that the members opposite will be supporting this bill and would be as surprised as the average Ontarian, really, to learn that this commission has had its hands tied by such outdated legislation. It's time to do something about it. That's what this bill is about today. That's why we're all assembled here.

Over 40,000 Canadians served in Afghanistan in our largest deployment since World War II. It's really time to recognize that fact. I was fortunate and privileged to be presented with the last Canadian and Afghan flag that flew out of Bagram Air Base the day Canadians left there as a memento to working with our men and women.

I know our government has undertaken a number of initiatives to help veterans over the past two years. A year ago, for example, the Ontario labour ministry launched a

project to help members of the force transition to civilian life. Known as Elevate Plus Military, it teaches former CAF personnel interpersonal skills such as conflict resolution, provides training in various fields and provides paid job placements. Our government eliminated the property taxes for Royal Canadian Legion halls—absolutely critical, because we need them to survive and even at trying times like this, they're under duress. This helps the Legions pay their bills while still helping their members. And recently, Ontario Trillium Foundation funding has been provided to support the recovery of Legion branches from the impacts of COVID-19 closures.

As I said two years ago in this chamber, in supporting our Afghan war memorial, our men and women were and are our sons, brothers, fathers, mothers, daughters and sisters. All of us here have the freedom to assemble, to dream, to aspire, to speak because brave forebears wanted the best for us today while risking their selves in yesterdays.

Memorials glorify people and spirits, not conflicts per se. They recognize that some amongst us have made courageous stands, putting their lives on hold and on the line to stand with the forces that seek to civilize the world to make it safe. So today, I ask you to think of our men and women who in the line of duty have to miss a graduation, an award ceremony, a funeral, even the birth of their child, or make the ultimate sacrifice.

Historically, Canadians rise to support and honour those affected in the face of tragedy. We distinguished ourselves in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks on the US. We showed compassion to the thousands stranded over the Atlantic and we vowed to stand with our American allies at that point. So, yes, our forces fought many terrorists, some paid the ultimate price and some still sadly pay the price here at home through injured bodies and souls. It is for them that we must pass this bill and we must do our part.

Physician and Lieutenant Colonel John McCrae— we've all heard that one—put it in this way in the powerful words, an excerpt from *In Flanders Fields*, published after his death during World War I in 1915, when he said:

To you from failing hands we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high.
If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
In Flanders fields.

From a little bit of history, being a staunch historian of conservative statements, former Prime Minister John Diefenbaker was actually even more explicit about Canadians as he spoke on the creation of the Canadian Bill of Rights, which his government put into law in 1960, when he said, "I am a Canadian ... free to speak without fear, free to worship God in my own way, free to stand for what I think right, free to oppose what I believe wrong, or free to choose those who shall govern my country. This heritage of freedom I pledge to uphold for myself and all

mankind." So true then; so true now. We are free because of the sacrifice of so many.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Questions?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I'm glad to be able to add my voice today. I appreciate the comments from the member opposite and from around the room as we're discussing the ways to improve the Soldiers' Aid Commission.

1700

As do all communities, we have vibrant service clubs in Oshawa—and two Legions: Branch 637, of which I am a proud member, and Branch 43. Both are my favourites, though. I want to say that Oshawa is very proud of its military history. Our area is home to super-secret Camp X, and the Ont Rs of the Ontario Regiment, the De Havilland Mosquito aircraft and manufacturing, and Samuel Simpson Sharpe. We are home to the 420 Wing, the Oshawa Naval Veterans' Club, the Canadian Corps Association unit, and General W. Sikorski Polish Veterans' Association. But all of these clubs and Legions need our help. Will this government commit to helping those service clubs with direct funding to help them make it through this pandemic?

Mr. Daryl Kramp: Obviously, the government passed legislation with regard to Canadian Legions, yet we still well recognize the contributions in so many different ways of so many organizations. Where do we start and where do we stop with this? I think the reality is that it has to start at home, and my gratitude goes out to a grateful community. I know we have many, many organizations, and certainly in my riding, as well, that not only play tribute to veterans but are so supportive in so many ways.

I know that there are federal programs directly—and I'm well-familiar with a number of them, on a number of occasions—that they can reach out to. This is the only provincial legislation that I'm aware of, at this particular time, that will deal with the past history and right the wrongs. This is the first step, and hopefully there will be many more.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Questions?

Mr. Lorne Coe: When I spoke earlier, I spoke specifically about the features of this legislation dealing with mental health, and given the presentation we just heard, there is a wealth of experience in that particular area. I would ask the member to share his thoughts on our government adding mental health supports as one of the services, if this bill should pass, now accessible through the Soldiers' Aid Commission.

Mr. Daryl Kramp: I thank the member from Whitby for that. I can speak from a little bit of personal experience here in that when we established the PTSD clinics in Canada, I was a strong proponent of that, actually, because of the affiliation with CFB Trenton and all of the immediate demand and need—sad, sad need—that was demonstrated due to a lot of repatriation and the emotions that come with that, and the illnesses and the injuries and such. I was very, very pleased and proud at that time.

The first PTSD clinic that was opened in Canada was at CFB Trenton; the first of six. I was able to be there that day to thank the organization, the group, who had helped

make that possible. I still remember to this day, of course, attending with the veteran defence minister Peter MacKay, who was so, so strongly supportive of our men and women in uniform. In my constituency office at that time, as well, too, I had a number of—too many—dealings with people who had serious, serious challenges.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Questions?

Mr. Ian Arthur: Thank you to the member opposite for the contribution to this debate on this important bill. It has come up a number of times that this is a positive step in the right direction. The NDP supports it, and certainly it was raised by you—sorry, the member opposite—as well. I guess my question is, where do we go from here? It is a step in the right direction, and what would be on the member's wish list for further supports for our veterans and what we can do to progress this? We won't be done; we'll need to keep going. What would you like to see us move towards in the future?

Mr. Daryl Kramp: If we lived in a utopian world, we would never have wars. We would never have the need for a defence, we would never have the need for a veteran. The reality is, life leads itself to many, many challenges and unpredictable moments when sometimes conflicts happen. We would certainly hope that we would not need a lot of their services, going forward.

I'm so fortunate. Our generation in here—we have never known, personally, what it is to be involved in a major war, other than the peacekeeping efforts and then the Afghanistan conflict. We haven't lost millions of people the way it happened in the First and Second World Wars. We live in a society that in one way has been protected, but we should not take that for granted whatsoever.

As the member would know, RMC Kingston—I planned on attending RMC Kingston as a young person, but that got changed when they told me I couldn't get married for five years. So I chose a different vocation.

But I don't mean to make light of the member's comments. Quite frankly, this is an ongoing need that we have to continue working at, and I'm always open for suggestions.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): The member for Kitchener–Conestoga.

Mr. Mike Harris: I was hoping maybe the member from Hastings–Lennox and Addington might be able to talk a little bit about his role as an MP, a member of federal Parliament, previous to this, and what kind of interactions he's had with Veterans Affairs over the years, and how the Soldiers' Aid Commission can help supplement some of the things that Veterans Affairs is trying to do for our veterans.

Mr. Daryl Kramp: Admittedly, every member here recognizes the reality that looking after our defence requirement needs, problems and circumstances falls within the responsibilities of the federal government, as they have since its origin. But that having been stated, that doesn't mean we should totally be hands-off to situations that fall under potential jurisdictions of the province where we can be of help, guidance or assistance.

In this particular case here, we're helping to right a wrong that has been on the books for many, many years.

It certainly isn't a universal wrong, maybe, across the country, but it's a wrong that we have recognized in this province of Ontario. We have that latitude. We have the capacity to make legislation, to enforce legislation, to provide funding for that, and that's what we are doing in this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Questions?

Mr. Faisal Hassan: I would like to thank the member from Hastings–Lennox and Addington for talking about, really, the contributions of our veterans. Unfortunately, many veterans are struggling and have not been supported.

I'm also a proud member of the Mount Dennis Branch 31. My colleague from Oshawa has talked about the need for Legions to be supported. Is the government planning to provide operational support so they can sustain and be able not just to come together and wither away, but to exist and continue to do the work they're doing to support veterans? Is there a plan for operational support continuously?

Mr. Daryl Kramp: I thank the member as well. One of the challenges, of course, that we've had—a lot of our Legions have actually turned the corner and become very, very successful over those last three to four years. The challenge we have now, of course, is COVID and the implications thereof, with declining opportunities for income from sales and that.

What we have done, as I said, is that this government made it possible that the property taxes do not have to be paid. That's a direct expense off their books. In addition, we have made available funds through the Ontario Trillium Foundation. We've put a special fund open for up to \$150,000 per application specifically for organizations such as the Legions so that they can potentially—if they have some one-time circumstance right now due to this reality, it will help tide them over to be able to hopefully get us past the time when COVID will have the impact that it does and things can get back to whatever will be the new normal.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): We have time for one quick question.

Mr. Michael Parsa: Thanks again to my colleague for his presentation. Madam Speaker, I had the honour of being there when Minister Smith introduced this in Aurora; it happened in our town. I was really excited to be there with our members. I've been a long-time member of our local Legion there.

As I understand the commission currently, the way this stands, only 50-plus members are able to—53—and this will expand it to more than 200,000—230,000, if I'm not mistaken. So I'm just wondering if you can tell me, please, what that will do for the veterans that we all know, that we all talk about the fact that they need our support? What would that do for them and their families?

Mr. Daryl Kramp: In the limited time that I have, they've had no avenue of support whatsoever. They've been left in the dark. This way here, the door is now open.

1710

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

Mr. Wayne Gates: Thank you for allowing me to rise and speak today on Bill 202, the Soldiers' Aid Commission Act.

As many of you know, I was raised by a veteran and proud members of Legion Branch 38 and Branch 124. Let me say this clearly: We can never do too much for our veterans. When it comes to the men and women who wear our country's uniform and their families, we can never support them too much. We should never ever nickel-and-dime our veterans or the organizations that support them.

I'm happy to work with any politician of any party on behalf of our veterans. There is no aisle I won't cross to ensure that our veterans get the support, the care and the respect they have earned. This is not a partisan issue. Any servicewoman or man who wears the uniform of this country deserves the highest respect of this House. They are entitled to the best services and supports we can provide. When it comes to standing tall and supporting our heroes, there should be no political parties, and I hope today I will prove my commitment to that.

Madam Speaker, as I look over Bill 202, it makes changes to the Soldiers' Aid Commission Act. The act is a body that is set up to provide support for our veterans financially—right now, up to \$2,000 in a calendar year to help with their expenses. In the past, this has covered things like home supports, medical prescriptions, assistive devices. It has ensured that our veterans can apply to the fund and receive funding to assist them with a long list of these on an annual basis.

Madam Speaker, look at the commission. It's clear the goal is good but that this commission is not treating every veteran with the respect they have earned. This is not the fault of the commission, but because the legislation ties the commission's hands. In fact, this commission really hasn't been changed since 1970, and that's the problem. The commission in its present form only provides benefits for veterans of the Second World War and the Korean War. In Canada, that means it can provide service for around 17,000 veterans. That's absolutely good.

My dad, Jimmy Gates, was a veteran of the Second World War. He signed up in 1939 and fought the entire war and actually stayed in Europe until 1946. I'll return to this story in a few minutes. But the benefit as it's set up does provide for friends of my father's and his generation, and that's good.

The issue we have here is that this funding is not available to our servicemen and women who are veterans of any conflict after the Korean War. That means veterans of our peacekeeping operations and the war in Afghanistan are not eligible for funding. In Canada, we have around 215,000 veterans who fit that definition—215,000 Canadians, many from my community in Niagara, who put on the uniform of this country and serve it bravely. That is too many to be left behind. I will support any legislation that provides for those heroes.

Madam Speaker, this is a major issue for our province. Listen to this: Ontario has over 100,000 veterans, more than any province. In my riding, on Remembrance Day, we have almost a dozen ceremonies. As I say every year,

it is a testament to the incredible sacrifice that the people of Niagara have made for our nation and our province.

Every single veteran of this country deserves as much support as we can give them. We can never thank them enough for what they do for us, but we must make sure we try our best. That means ensuring they have access to these benefits. That means bumping up the pay they can receive in a year beyond \$2,000. And that means something else I wish was in this bill, and it's not, and everybody has raised it here who spoke: supporting our Legions.

Madam Speaker, COVID-19 has been devastating to our Legions. I'm telling you right now, they need financial support from this government. This is not a handout; this is funding they have rightfully earned for their service and for taking care of our veterans, their families and sometimes their kids and grandkids.

These Legion halls provide incredible services to our community, but also a place for veterans to go and be with other veterans. They are run by some of our community's involved volunteers. They operate as both social services clubs for the community and a veterans' service club for the veterans we have in Niagara.

When it comes to our veterans and their families, these clubs are so important. No one knows this more than me. As I mentioned, my father was a veteran and the Legion was a major part of our life. It wasn't just my father who was part of this Legion; it was my mother, Gloria, too. The Legion was their social life. It was their favourite place to go. There were very involved members, because they were around other people who understood their views of life and what they had been through.

I'll tell a story about my mom and dad. They used to go to the Legion all the time. My dad used to play pool, and my mom was a dancer. They'd have dances every Saturday night, and our family used to go. They'd play the music—and it always amazed me that that was their social life, the Legion. No matter what, they were always there for my mom and dad. My mom and dad went through some really tough times, but the Legion was always there for us. The Legion still offers that to this day. They offer it to the older members and to the new generation of veterans.

We have many Legions in my riding alone. We have Branch 479 on Spring Street in Niagara Falls; Branch 396 in Chippawa; Branch 124 in Niagara-on-the-Lake; Branch 71 on Garrison Road in Fort Erie; and Branch 230 in Ridgeway. I know these Legion members, and I know their executive boards. They are the best community volunteers and community members we have. When I need to get a pulse of what's happening in our community, the very first place I call is the Legion. They know better than anyone. The work they do for our veterans, for our community at large, is unbelievable. Our community would be missing a part of its soul if any single one of these Legions closed their doors.

Let me be clear: COVID-19 has hit Legions particularly hard. They need help. It makes sense that with so many elderly veterans, we simply can't have them going to Legion halls right now. But COVID-19 doesn't stop the

hydro bills or the insurance bills. They still need to pay those.

This bill—or during these debates—is a good way to raise those issues. Let's get some resources to our Legions, because if there's anyone who shouldn't be nickelled and dimed, it's our veterans. Above all, if these Legions close, there may never be a service club that opens to replace them. We can't, collectively, let that happen.

Let me return to the Soldiers' Aid Commission. When we look at the commission right now, it's clear we have a problem, not because of the commission itself—as I mentioned before, they do great work with what they can. I can't say that enough. But the problem is, the legislation ties their hands, and there's one thing that highlights that: 60% of the funds that the Soldiers' Aid Commission could have spent on helping veterans last year went unspent. How can that happen? Madam Speaker, think about that: 60% of the dollars that could have gone to veterans was not spent last year because of the restrictions on how to spend that money. So when I see this bill removing those restrictions, of course I support it, but I do have concerns. This bill is what's called enabling legislation. That means it doesn't put anything new into law, but just allows the government of the day to change their mind as they see fit. Unfortunately, as we've seen federally, some parties would choose to balance the budget on the backs of veterans. It's been going on for years.

1720

Madam Speaker, we cannot have this. We should make supporting our veterans a clear and defined law. That means that if any government wants to reduce how much they're supporting our veterans, they should have to come before this House and tell the people of Ontario. We should make any politician looking to cut funding to our veterans be honest and tell the people of Ontario they're doing that.

Because this is enabling legislation, future governments will be able to do that behind closed doors. No decision about funding our veterans should be secret. If these governments send our brave women and men off to war, they should be clear about whether or not they support them. There is no grey zone. You either support them or you don't, and you shouldn't hide from that. So I encourage this government to make support for veterans and Legions clear and defined.

Also, looking at the amount of \$2,000, it's obviously good, but for many of our veterans, it may not be enough. The member from St. Catharines raised this in her lead on this bill, and I thank her for her words. Above all, I want to say thank you to her for her son's service to our country.

The member from St. Catharines has been a tireless advocate for veterans and veterans' issues, as well as Legions in Niagara and across Ontario. I want to thank her for making sure the voices of veterans are always raised in this legislature and that we pass legislation so veterans are always thought of. She has been a strong voice for those who have worn or are currently wearing the Canadian military uniform. Thank you, and thank you to your son for his service.

She raised something in her speech: the crisis we have with mental health. This isn't a surprise to this government. We've been raising this issue and this crisis in mental health care, and being able to afford and access service. In fact, this government approved my motion—it was unanimous—to create three mental health facilities in Niagara, some of which would help our veterans to address the crisis. Then they lied to the people of Niagara and never built—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): I'm going to ask the member from Niagara Falls to withdraw his unparliamentary comment.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I withdraw, but they did.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Without qualification.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I withdraw.

But when you look at mental health issues, we must look at them from a veteran's point of view. My father never talked about the war or what he saw. I cannot even begin to imagine the pain and stress that he carried for his entire life. That carries through to veterans today. We cannot possibly understand the demons they struggle with, but we do know they're struggling.

Since December 2019—I'm going to repeat that: since December 2019—three homeless veterans have died on the streets of Niagara, three heroes who put on the uniform of this country and went to battle, who came back and fell. They came back and weren't able to adjust. They weren't able to get the housing they so desperately needed. We cannot live in a province where any single veteran wants housing or mental health care, let alone these three who passed. To this day, we know there are more veterans on the street without housing and without the supports they so desperately need.

This goes back to what I said in my opening: No dollar amount is too much for our veterans. If a veteran needs help, whether it be in housing or counselling or crisis intervention, they should know that the government of Ontario is there to provide it. It should be impossible that someone who risked their life for us comes back and loses their life because we aren't there for them.

I hope when we all observe Remembrance Day this year, we think of these veterans and about the actions we can take today to support them. Madam Speaker, there are some easy ways we can do that right here, right now, with this bill. It would be increasing the support it offers. It would be expanding the eligibility criteria and ensuring that no future veteran is left out. It would be financially supporting veterans' support groups and our wonderful Legions. There is no need to study or debate this. This should be a no-brainer. These people are the reason we live in a free and democratic province where we can even discuss the matter right here in this House.

Madam Speaker, Remembrance Day is coming soon. Ceremonies will be a bit different this year, but they're still happening. I'm hoping the government will review my suggestions carefully, because I would like to go to those ceremonies and say that we're working together to make action happen on behalf of veterans and their families. So

many veterans and veterans' groups have felt the squeezes from various governments over the last few years, so I want to go to them and tell them that this time, we have good news and that we worked across party lines to pass the strongest possible bill to support our veterans. That means that there will be no second-class veterans who do not get benefits. It means that Legion halls will get funded and able to stay afloat. It means that if they need support, they can count on it.

Madam Speaker, this should not be a political issue. It should not be an issue of funding. If there is one group of people who deserve our funding, it's the servicewomen and men of the Canadian military, past service members and their families. When we needed them, they answered the call. If we do that, maybe no more veterans will be on our streets; maybe no more veterans will feel alone; maybe their families won't struggle; maybe they'll have a Legion to go to after Remembrance Day for years to come. It is honestly the least we can do for our heroes. It's the least we can do for my dad's generation and the generations that followed them.

Everywhere around the world, the Canadian flag, the patch on the soldier's uniform, is a badge of honour. Here in Ontario, it should convey special privileges. By strengthening this legislation and passing it, we can begin to honour that.

Madam Speaker, I'm happy to support this legislation, along with my colleagues. I hope the government has listened closely to my suggestions and can make these changes so we can support it and even make the bill stronger. To every veteran listening today, I say thank you. Thank you for a world you've secured for my kids and my grandkids.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Questions?

Mr. Lorne Coe: During the hearings at the Standing Committee on Social Policy, we heard from a number of presenters who spoke particularly about the contributions of family members of veterans, including partners and dependent children. One of the significant changes that we're adopting and have been debating today is exactly that: That group will now be included and be able to accrue some of the benefits of this particular legislation.

Will the member stand here this afternoon and support that particular amendment?

Mr. Wayne Gates: What I want to say, because I didn't get a chance to say it in my speech—hopefully, this answers your question. I said that I'll support this bill and that we should work across party lines to make this bill as strong as we can, so that no veteran in the province of Ontario, in the great country of Canada, has to end up being homeless or having to die on the streets in Niagara Falls or St. Catharines, because when they came home, they didn't have the mental health services provided for them. I will stand with anybody who's going to make it easier for our veterans to have the quality of life that they've earned and that they deserve in this province.

1730

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Question?

Ms. Doly Begum: I want to thank the member from Niagara Falls for his comments. He spoke beautifully

about the needs that our veterans have in our province, and in our country, frankly. I would like him to elaborate a little bit more in terms of some of the ways we can better help our veterans across this province, be it housing, mental health supports or even the benefits they get, just to get by on a day-to-day basis.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Thank you very much for the question, because that's the issue when it comes to our veterans. I talked about our Legions, and the reason why I talk about our Legions—they have volunteers at every single Legion that I participate in, and what they would do is, they would try to help our veterans. They would actually go to their homes and say, "What do you need?"

The issues with our veterans are very clear: They come home from the war, they are suffering from mental health issues, and there's nothing for them. There's nowhere for them to go. There's no housing. There are no supports.

I already raised it with my bill. I put a bill forward about mental health in Niagara, where we had young people, veterans, committing suicide. And what happened is, with the bill, it would give 24-hour-a-day service in all our communities. Why wouldn't we do that? Why wouldn't we help them, give them a hand up and say, "Here, you're going to get the help you need when you need it"?

As far as housing goes, when they come back home, somebody should be there to greet them, somebody who can say to them, "Okay, how can we help you? How can"—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Thank you. Question?

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Thank you to the member for your impassioned speech. I'm pleased to hear and interested to hear about your father and his experience as a veteran, and I certainly, from the bottom of my heart, thank him for his service to his country. Partisan issues aside—that's irrelevant—you are correct: This is a bill that I think all of us in the Legislature can pass.

There were so few people that really took advantage of the Soldiers' Aid Commission in the last year; I believe it was 53. I'm just wondering what your thoughts are as to why that was and how many people you think will benefit from this proposed legislation becoming law in the next year. How many more people will benefit from this?

Mr. Wayne Gates: I think some of the problems with how you got the money were the steps that you had to do to get it, and some of it is just education; people don't know it's there. But you know you've got a problem with any program when they're only using half the money, especially with veterans. Nobody in this chamber doesn't know that our veterans are facing challenges around housing, around mental health, around benefits. We all know it.

Somebody raised a very good question—I don't know if it was your side or our side. When we talk about long-term care for our veterans or when they go into a hospital, I don't know if you know this, but all they're covered for is a ward. Well, the last thing you want to go into right now is a ward, if you're going into a hospital and you're a veteran. We've had veterans who are 89 years old, 92, 93,

who have called our office and talked to our Legions, and they were in wards. So all those things have to get fixed.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Question?

Mr. Jamie West: Thank you to the member from Niagara Falls. We have similar backgrounds, blue-collar backgrounds: an automaker with Unifor, and I was a steelworker mining in the north. The philosophy with that sort of work, that typically male-dominated industry, is that you rub dirt in it. You don't talk about mental health; you just keep moving on and you hold it all inside.

You spoke a lot about mental health, and you talked about that \$2,000 won't get you very far for mental health. I'm wondering: What else can the government do? Because it's going to take more than the money to help get the services. It's the awareness. It's the willingness to talk about it. It's the willingness to admit you have a problem, that you need help. If you want to elaborate on that, I'd like to give you the opportunity.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Thank you very much. I really appreciate the question. This is what I think we should do with our veterans when they come home. There should be a greeting, where we greet them and we say, "What do you need? How do we make you get back into society? How do we make sure that we can give you a job, that you can take care of your family? What services do you need?" and do all that kind of stuff. That's what we have to do for our veterans.

We don't do that. They come home, we have probably a party when they get back, and then we kind of leave them alone. We've got to provide more service for them. They are risking their lives every day that they're—whether it be in Afghanistan or Iraq. And some, as we know, didn't come home. But that's what we have to do: We have to make sure that the services are there for them. I mentioned the one service we could do with, mental health, in Niagara. They supported, chose to—haven't done anything with it in a year, as we've had three veterans die on the streets in Niagara. That's wrong.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Question?

Hon. Paul Calandra: I appreciate the opportunity to ask a question and I appreciate the debate and the support that we've received from across the aisle and from all members. I know the member said in his speech that we shouldn't even be debating this, that this is the least that we could do. I fully agree with him. I think that he's absolutely correct, so I wonder if he would join with me in ending this debate and allowing us to vote on this this evening so that we can do what's right for veterans right now.

Mr. Wayne Gates: First of all, I do appreciate you saying that we agree on something. I think that's the first time in two and a half years I've been here. That is not my call on how we end debate. You know how it works in this Legislature: We have a team here that will talk about that.

But I do appreciate the fact that you stood up and said how important our veterans are, because I'm saying to your government that we've got to do more. We've got to make sure that we provide housing; make sure they get the mental health; make sure they can get the funding from

here, although I think it should be increased—I think \$2,000 isn't going to go a long way, but it certainly is a start—make sure that we're using every single penny that's been allocated to this, make sure it's all being used; make sure that we educate our veterans, educate maybe our Legions, because every Legion has somebody in the Legion who will take care of veterans and make sure they're getting whether it be assistive devices or making sure they're getting food. That's all out there as well. All those things should be done in the bill. So I do appreciate it, but it's not my call.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Question?

Mr. Faisal Hassan: Thank you, and I do appreciate the member from Niagara Falls, his contribution in this. He talked about, really, the neglect that goes to many veterans in our communities. I know our government, the Ontario government, can do better.

Also, you talked about the Legions. The Legions are struggling, and many of them have been forced to amalgamate or come together in order to survive. What is your thought on that? Can you elaborate on how we can help them?

Mr. Wayne Gates: Well, thank you very much. I'm going to say a little bit about the Legions. I cannot stand up here without incredible pride around Legions and what they did for my family. I can't get into it here because it's—it's incredible. But how can we help the Legions? You know how you can help them? I don't know if you can do this in the House, but put your hands up: How many go to a Legion fish fry on Friday night? Put your hand up. How many go to—they sell hamburgers on a Saturday afternoon, the middle of the afternoon, trying to raise funds. Support your Legions. Go to the fish fries. I don't know what they do at Legions with fish fries, but they make by far the best fish and chips, no matter which one you go to. They're all delicious, and it's a good way to raise money and support it.

I say to the government, do whatever you can to help our Legions. They are so important to the overall health of not only our veterans, but the overall health of our community. Obviously, with Remembrance Day coming up, let's all go to Remembrance Day and thank a veteran.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I really appreciate having the opportunity to speak today and share a little bit of the proud military history in Oshawa and our connected communities. I see the member across the way from Whitby. When we used to share part of Oshawa, we would also share the service clubs and many of the occasions that we would come together as a community.

I know that we all have stories across our communities, and we've been hearing those today. It's very heartening to know that we all have that in common and that we do continue to appreciate the service and sacrifice of so many before us, but also to come together at our Legions, at our service clubs, with community members to ensure that we continue to care about and support those veterans and families of veterans in our community.

I would be glad to actually tell you, Speaker, that in Oshawa we have a very proud tradition of levee day. I don't know how many other communities still have levee days, but we do. We have, on January 1, a very special way of ringing in the New Year, and that is, the morning of January 1, we travel around and visit all of the Legions and service clubs. There are a few things, Speaker, that I'll say, and that is that what happens in the navy club basement stays in the navy club basement. There may or may not be grog, but there are memories made. It's a very important time, when we come together, and it is, I guess, to count our blessings and take stock of what we have as a community.

1740

And I get nervous, Speaker, because I've been hearing during the pandemic, as I know my colleagues in the Legislature have, from those clubs, from the Legions. They're very concerned about how they're going to be able to continue beyond the pandemic. They're quite concerned about the support they haven't had, that they need financially to be able to keep their doors open to be able to continue to serve and support.

I was saying it earlier, Speaker, but I will share that, in our area, we recognize the contributions of:

—Samuel Simpson Sharpe;

—the manufacturing of the De Havilland Mosquito aircraft—I don't know if it was the only, but it was a wooden aircraft, interestingly;

—super-secret Camp X—any of you who know about Camp X or where to find it, come to my neck of the woods; it's not in Oshawa, but those stories come from that area, and we're proud of that;

—the Ont Rs of the Ontario Regiment and the armoury;

—the Ontario Regiment RCAC Museum; we have the tank museum which is something that is growing and brings youth from across the province who play tank videogames and then can come and actually see them in real life in Oshawa.

We have active cadets groups and two Royal Canadian Legion Branches, 43 and 637. I'm a member of 637.

The Polish Veterans' Association, the 420 Wing, the Oshawa Naval Veterans' Club and the Canadian Corps Association—these are the long-standing service clubs that serve our city and our neighbours.

This week, actually, just this past Friday, the last Friday in October, we kick off poppy week in Oshawa. So we raise the flag. We have a week, from the 30th leading up to Remembrance Day, we fly the poppy flag in Oshawa, and as we've all been talking about today, we remind each other to buy a new poppy, to wear a poppy. Some of us have been wearing the Legion masks or carry new Legion umbrellas or are supporting the Legions online this year to ensure they have the resources they need.

But, Speaker, we're here talking about Bill 202, the Soldiers' Aid Commission Act. The long and the short of it is that it hasn't been what it has needed to be to serve and support veterans. As we have heard put, it hasn't been updated, I think, in 60 years and so the veterans that it purported to serve were those who had served in World

War II and the Korean War but not since. We have been talking about the veterans who have served subsequent to that who have been left out. Obviously, that's not a partisan issue. We all feel the same need to serve and support.

I would like to commend the members from St. Catharines and Windsor–Tecumseh who have fought long and hard and worked with our communities and, I think, with this government on motions and bills to further the voices of veterans in this House.

My own work has been, like many of us, meeting with Legions, talking with them and hearing from them about what it is that they need, and so, Speaker, I wanted to share part of a letter that I have written to this government. I'm excited to get that response from the government. I'm hoping it's in the mail. But I'll read part of it:

“During the uncertain and challenging time of COVID-19,” Legions “have been left to fend for themselves and many will not make it through the pandemic. Considering the essential role of these organizations, it is a travesty that this will be the case when it does not have to be....

This “government's re-announcement of capital grants will not keep the doors open for the clubs faced with growing bills for operational costs. The federal government's assistance in the form of an interest-free loan, while helpful to some clubs, will not be an option for many who are unable to take on such substantial debt. Only one club in our community has been supported by their landlord through the CECRA—the kindness of strangers cannot be the only strategy to keep veterans supported.

“Service clubs need direct financial assistance that can help to pay their rent, mortgage, or utility bills without putting them further into debt. They need this assistance.”

Speaker, I'm excited for what the government's response to this will be, because if I'm to take what we've heard today to heart, we all want what's best for our communities, the veterans, the service clubs and Legions. So hopefully I won't just get an answer. Hopefully, we will be able to keep their doors open. And they need that assistance to retroactively take into consideration the last several months that they've been struggling, that they've been fighting to keep their heads above water for the members who count on them. I hope that this government will provide them with the support that they desperately need and desperately deserve.

While I've got you and while I have the floor, I would also like to share some letters from a few of the clubs in my community.

Craig Brand is actually a fellow member of Branch 637. Part of his letter to me earlier in the summer—this was in July. He said, “During the pandemic, I ... wanted to let you know that our branch may not” be “around because we cannot open under stage 3. I would like to see if the government can help us and the other small Legions that may not be around. We as the Legion” have “provided support to our community and to the veterans that live in them. If we close because of this pandemic and” are “not able to open, I feel the community and the veterans will not be serviced the way they should.”

So that was Craig's concern. We continue to have that concern with such an uncertain road ahead.

Rick Saunders wrote to me in March with the subject "Financial assistance":

"Good afternoon Jennifer, in light of Premier Ford's announcement they said 300M is set aside for COVID-19.

"There is growing pressure to close Branch 637 so can you clarify if part of that money would be available for private not-for-profit organizations who shut down during this crisis.

"Yours in comradeship

"Rick Saunders

"Zone F1 Commander."

Again, there's so much uncertainty and concern.

From the Oshawa Naval Veterans' Club, this is from Brian Wilkins, the president, regarding the service clubs motion at Queen's Park. This was just earlier in October, and we know that this is in reference to the motion of my colleague that passed this Legislature. Here are his thoughts:

"It's going to help a lot having 50/50 draws and such not worrying about a permit.

"But, that's not helping with the big picture. We can't rent our hall for more than 50 people, so no bookings are happening, our customers aren't returning very quickly, most of the dart leagues are suspended, we can't make the income needed to stay afloat comfortably. This is why the original talk with Jennifer, was about getting the loans some received, forgiven. It was federal money, but Ontario hasn't done anything for our veterans." Premier Ford "needs to take some of the money he's passing around, and help us out....

"All the best."

Frankly, I wish them all the best. We get attached to the community spaces in our hometowns.

We've heard today about the importance of Legions and how they serve veterans in need and their families. On a lighter note, Legions really are that social net. For me, I love being able to dance and prance from service club to service club on levee day or after Remembrance Day, which is a sombre and important day, but it's such a special opportunity to visit these community spaces and connect with people you haven't seen in a while, whether it's sitting and having a nice dinner and the party afterwards or sitting and doing karaoke—and, Speaker, in case you're wondering, no, there is not video of that. And we haven't had karaoke since the pandemic, of course, because of all of the precautions and whatnot. But we reflect on what these spaces mean to us. To imagine that they aren't there is, on a personal level, very distressing, but on that community level is really upsetting.

Speaker, I think that we all are reflecting on the pressures of the world around us. Many of my colleagues in this House have spoken extensively today about the pressures faced by veterans when they come back, whether it's with physical harm and physical, visible scars, or whether it is the unseen burdens they carry. If there aren't the supports and services in the community, like housing

or mental health supports, supports for families, they're left to go it alone.

1750

It was interesting, earlier—I've lost track of time, so I feel like it was about a year ago, but I'd have to double-check. It was a local initiative. The courthouse was renamed, and it was an interesting conversation to have. It was renamed in memory of Samuel Simpson Sharpe. The reason it was at all controversial was because this was an individual who, despite all of his service and all of his community involvement, was erased from history because he died by suicide, and it was at a time that that was—the stigma that went with that resulted in the erasure of his legacy. That was actually non-partisan. My Conservative colleagues in the surrounding communities and I wrote letters and came together to advocate for the renaming of the courthouse. It was a proud and important day which was part of that broader conversation not only about recognizing service and sacrifice, but talking about it and recognizing the weight and the burden of mental health, of PTSD, of shell shock, of whatever we're going to call it—but that unseen burden and how we support that.

So here we are talking about the Soldiers' Aid Commission and ways to improve it. Of course, we are going to say, as I'm sure my colleagues on the other side are going to say, we need to keep doing more and keep doing better. When we look across this province, we have everything that we could imagine. We live in a free and democratic society, and we are able to stand and run for election. We are able to send our children to school. We are able to do all sorts of wonderful things that might not be imaginable in other countries, and that is because we have built a foundation on that service and sacrifice of so many. So this is not a time, nor is it ever a time, to nickel-and-dime the investment in their health and well-being.

I will come back to my letter and my ask in a minute. I think I've still got a little bit of time left and I'm going to use it, because it's really important and special for me to be able to share about my community.

We have rights and responsibilities. We talk about that all the time in this Legislature. We have a responsibility because we have those rights. And our responsibility as a Legislature is, when we identify a need, to address it, especially if we're going to talk about veterans. Our blessings and freedoms are really being brought into clear focus right now as we look at other jurisdictions around the world, some that we share a continent with. As we're looking at other jurisdictions right now, we are seeing shifting ideologies; we are seeing, maybe, shifting governments—we're not sure what we're seeing. But I think that it's important to recognize the foundation that we have and how fortunate we really are.

And what was that service and sacrifice for? We have to be able to reflect, respect and protect it, and not just appreciate it once a year. I'm not suggesting that that's what any of us in this House are doing, but we do need to continue this journey. We have to flex our democratic voices, because there are many folks who have fought and died for us.

When we look at the history of the Great War, when we look at the history of World War II, we see that people fought evil powers to ensure that we had democracy, freedom and rights. We do see a rising tide around the world of neo-Nazism. We see a rising tide of bigotry and white supremacy, Islamophobia, hate, racism, anti-Black racism, sexism. If we're not protecting our seniors, our youth—we have a lot of work ahead of us not just as a Legislature but, and I'm speaking broadly, as a society. We have to honour and value our veterans, and because of their sacrifice, we have to roll up our sleeves and do the hard work.

Veterans need mental health supports and services. We have talked about that extensively today, but we can look around our own communities and see it every day. We need housing options, and for younger veterans who return from conflict, bearing new scars and wounds, be they mental or physical, we need supports and services. We need housing. We need employment supports, potentially retraining. Again, mental health supports: We cannot allow them to shut themselves away; we also cannot shut them away.

Everyone who comes back from conflict should be able to reintegrate into society as they are able, and that will be different for everyone. I remember speaking to a gentleman. His name was Rick, a veteran in my community. He was one of the first appointments I had. And it wasn't an appointment that I reached out and made; it was an appointment where he reached out to meet with me. He wanted me to be very clear on PTSD and to understand what that meant. This was his explanation, Speaker. He said that it was like he was a teapot. It was like he was a broken teapot that had shattered and been glued back together. After treatment and help, he was able to put those pieces back together and it could still function, but the cracks were always still there, and it would always be more fragile and need special care. Some of those were my words, but it was his picture, and I've always carried it with me. It still works, it still functions, but it has some parts now that make it more unique. The cracks—they say

that's how the light gets in, but we do have to make sure that we help to shine a light on ways to support.

We don't have to do much of our own work to figure out what that is. We are told by the Legions, we are told by mental health supporters, we are told by veterans and the families themselves what it is they need, and that is something that is not in the bill before us. This is one part of it today, but broadly, when we're looking at any ministry, whether it be housing or supporting families, we're calling on all of us, I think, to identify ways to make things better.

We need safe and funded long-term care, Speaker. When we think of veterans, perhaps we think of seniors, although today we've talked about how it is younger and younger veterans that are coming back from conflict. But still, we're talking about our aging Ontarians in care. We need safe and funded long-term care. A couple should be able to live together and not be separated, aging and staying in place. Whether that's investing in home care or services, we have a lot of important work to do.

I am a proud Legion member and an honorary member of many of the clubs. I'm proud of my family's legacy of service. I'm proud of the work that I do in my community with them and for them. I'm proud to be Canadian and I'm proud to stand in this House. But we really have the opportunity to shape the future in this room, and we have an obligation to do that.

As we are nearing Remembrance Day, we need to remember their service and sacrifice and the veterans in service clubs. We cannot forget them. I look forward to working with everyone to ensure that these vital organizations can make it through this challenging time and continue to serve our communities and veterans.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Thank you. Seeing the time on the clock, questions and comments can be done next time the bill is called.

Third reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): It being 6 p.m., this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 9 a.m.
The House adjourned at 1759.

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Bourgouin, Guy (NDP)	Mushkegowuk—James Bay / Mushkegowuk—Baie James	
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Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	
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Gill, Parm (PC)	Milton	
Glover, Chris (NDP)	Spadina—Fort York	
Gravelle, Michael (LIB)	Thunder Bay—Superior North / Thunder Bay—Supérieur-Nord	
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Hardeman, Hon. / L'hon. Ernie (PC)	Oxford	Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / Ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales
Harden, Joel (NDP)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	
Harris, Mike (PC)	Kitchener—Conestoga	
Hassan, Faisal (NDP)	York South—Weston / York-Sud—Weston	
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Khanjin, Andrea (PC)	Barrie—Innisfil	Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjointe du gouvernement
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Kusendova, Natalia (PC)	Mississauga Centre / Mississauga-Centre	
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Lindo, Laura Mae (NDP)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	
MacLeod, Hon. / L'hon. Lisa (PC)	Nepean	Minister of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries / ministre des Industries du patrimoine, du sport, du tourisme et de la culture
Mamakwa, Sol (NDP)	Kiiwetinoong	
Mantha, Michael (NDP)	Algoma—Manitoulin	
Martin, Robin (PC)	Eglinton—Lawrence	
Martow, Gila (PC)	Thornhill	
McDonell, Jim (PC)	Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry	
McKenna, Jane (PC)	Burlington	
McNaughton, Hon. / L'hon. Monte (PC)	Lambton—Kent—Middlesex	Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development / Ministre du Travail, de la Formation et du Développement des compétences
Miller, Norman (PC)	Parry Sound—Muskoka	
Miller, Paul (NDP)	Hamilton East—Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est—Stoney Creek	
Mitas, Christina Maria (PC)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	
Monteith-Farrell, Judith (NDP)	Thunder Bay—Atikokan	
Morrison, Suze (NDP)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	
Mulroney, Hon. / L'hon. Caroline (PC)	York—Simcoe	Minister of Francophone Affairs / Ministre des Affaires francophones Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports

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Piccini, David (PC)	Northumberland—Peterborough South / Northumberland—Peterborough-Sud	
Rakocevic, Tom (NDP)	Humber River—Black Creek	
Rasheed, Kaleed (PC)	Mississauga East—Cooksville / Mississauga-Est—Cooksville	
Rickford, Hon. / L'hon. Greg (PC)	Kenora—Rainy River	Minister of Energy, Northern Development and Mines / Ministre de l'Énergie, du Développement du Nord et des Mines Minister of Indigenous Affairs / Ministre des Affaires autochtones
Roberts, Jeremy (PC)	Ottawa West—Nepean / Ottawa- Ouest—Nepean	
Romano, Hon. / L'hon. Ross (PC)	Sault Ste. Marie	Minister of Colleges and Universities / Ministre des Collèges et Universités
Sabawy, Sheref (PC)	Mississauga—Erin Mills	
Sandhu, Amarjot (PC)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Sarkaria, Hon. / L'hon. Prabmeet Singh (PC)	Brampton South / Brampton-Sud	Associate Minister of Small Business and Red Tape Reduction / Ministre associé délégué au dossier des Petites Entreprises et de la Réduction des formalités administratives Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
Sattler, Peggy (NDP)	London West / London-Ouest	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjointe de l'opposition officielle
Schreiner, Mike (GRN)	Guelph	
Scott, Hon. / L'hon. Laurie (PC)	Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock	Minister of Infrastructure / Ministre de l'Infrastructure
Shaw, Sandy (NDP)	Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas / Hamilton-Ouest—Ancaster—Dundas	
Simard, Amanda (LIB)	Glengarry—Prescott—Russell	
Singh, Guratan (NDP)	Brampton East / Brampton-Est	
Singh, Sara (NDP)	Brampton Centre / Brampton-Centre	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjointe de l'opposition officielle
Skelly, Donna (PC)	Flamborough—Glanbrook	
Smith, Dave (PC)	Peterborough—Kawartha	
Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Todd (PC)	Bay of Quinte / Baie de Quinte	Minister of Children, Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et des Services sociaux et communautaires
Stevens, Jennifer (Jennie) (NDP)	St. Catharines	
Stiles, Marit (NDP)	Davenport	
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Wilson, Jim (IND)	Simcoe—Grey	
Wynne, Kathleen O. (LIB)	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	
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Yarde, Kevin (NDP)	Brampton North / Brampton-Nord	
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