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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 22 March 2023

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 22 mars 2023

The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WORKING FOR WORKERS ACT, 2023

**LOI DE 2023 VISANT À OEUVRER
POUR LES TRAVAILLEURS**

Mr. McNaughton moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 79, An Act to amend various statutes with respect to employment and labour and other matters / Projet de loi 79, Loi modifiant diverses lois en ce qui concerne l'emploi, le travail et d'autres questions.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): I recognize the minister to lead off debate.

Hon. Monte McNaughton: I am really excited and pleased to rise today to debate Bill 79, the Working for Workers Act, 2023.

Before I begin debate in the House today, I want to acknowledge that I'll be dividing my time with my two parliamentary assistants, the member for Mississauga–Malton and the member for Scarborough Centre. I want to also just say to both of them, thank you so much for your leadership and all the work you're doing at the Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development to train the future workers in our province and to have their backs every single day.

I also want to thank the Premier. From the Premier, to the Premier's office and his staff—the Premier has led the pathway for our government to ensure that we have the backs of workers we're working for every day, to bring in truly game-changing opportunities for workers in the province, to ensure that we're bringing in tough health and safety measures to protect our workers, who are out there every day building the province. So to the Premier, thank you for your leadership. It is truly historic—many of the changes that we're bringing forward.

I also want to thank my amazing staff, many of whom have been with me since 2018, since we formed government, when I was at the Ministry of Infrastructure. My chief of staff, Josh Workman, has been with me since I was elected, back in 2011. I want to thank my incredible team who have worked so hard in the ministry to introduce, again, game-changing legislation. We have not seen anywhere in North America and, in some cases, around the

world a number of these legislative changes that we are bringing in.

I think of past legislation that my team worked on and our government passed—the Building Opportunities in the Skilled Trades Act—to get more young people into the skilled trades and of how we've worked with our labour partners, labour unions, employers and industry associations to put forward changes to give more people opportunities and pathways into these amazing jobs.

We passed Working for Workers 1 and Working for Workers 2, which I will talk about soon.

We brought in legislation—I think it was since I have been here, in 2011—that passed probably the fastest of any bill, and that was our COVID paid sick days bill that we passed during the pandemic.

My team worked on job-protected leave during the pandemic. It was the first piece of legislation that we brought forward when COVID hit our province. We were the first in the country to bring in job-protected leave to ensure that anyone who was impacted by COVID can't be fired for staying home.

Then, of course, we brought in legislation to deal with WSIB changes during the pandemic to ensure that we have a sustainable system, to be there for our workers and to be there for small businesses, in particular.

Our government is committed to improving the lives of workers and making Ontario the best place to live, work and raise a family. Everything that we do is about ensuring that Ontario is the best place to live, work and raise a family.

This current bill, which I'll speak to shortly, builds on the strong success of our two previous Working for Workers bills that this House passed in 2021 and 2022.

In our first bill, we introduced measures to make it easier for workers to spend time with their families and loved ones, by requiring employers to have a "right to disconnect" policy. We were the first jurisdiction in the country to do this. There needs to be a line between work and family time. Every day, our men and women put in an honest shift, and they deserve to unplug when they are off the clock.

We also banned the use of non-compete agreements—the very first in Canada. This ensures fairness for our workers by allowing them the opportunity to advance their careers, and helps smaller and growing businesses find the skilled workers they need.

In our first bill, we also protected and supported vulnerable workers by establishing mandatory licensing of recruiters and temp help agencies, and we established the harshest penalties in the country for lawbreakers.

For truckers and food delivery drivers, who keep our world moving and bring what we need to our doorsteps, we enshrined their right to use washrooms in the businesses and restaurants they serve.

Furthermore, we made it easier for internationally trained workers to practise the professions they trained in when they come here to Ontario so that they can realize the Canadian dream and build our economy for the next generation.

We followed these workplace improvements with our Working for Workers Act, 2022. In this bill, we made Ontario the first province in Canada to establish a minimum wage and other foundational rights for digital-platform workers who provide rideshare delivery and courier services. These rights—like the right to regular pay periods, the right to keep their tips, and the right to resolve work-related disputes here in Ontario—go a long way to levelling the playing field between these workers and the companies they work for.

Building on our work to help those from other countries start their careers here, we took steps to make it easier for those from other provinces to do the same. Effective March 31 of this year, workers from other Canadian provinces or territories who apply to work in their regulated profession must receive a registration decision within 30 business days. In the race for talent, this change is an important part of how we're taking a customer service approach to those who want to come here to Ontario.

0910

In our second bill, we also took action to reduce overdose deaths by requiring employers to provide a life-saving naloxone kit in workplaces where opioid use may occur. This was also a first in North America.

We also enhanced worker health and safety by increasing maximum fines for directors and officers of businesses who fail to provide a safe work environment.

And in our second bill, Ontario became the first province to protect workers' privacy by requiring employers to develop an electronic monitoring policy and share it with employees.

Both of these groundbreaking pieces of legislation are already helping the millions of workers here in Ontario, yet there is obviously more we can do to support workers and help them find good jobs.

Ontario is facing a truly historic labour shortage that's holding back our ambitious plan to build the homes, schools, hospitals, transit and other projects our families need. Whether you're a gig worker, a pipefitter, a plumber or a health care technician, our government has your back, and we're only getting started.

That's why I'm here this morning to proudly talk about our government's plan to continue our progress with Bill 79, our Workers for Workers Act, 2023. Working with labour leaders and businesses, we're proposing unprecedented action to keep, attract and equip people to thrive in today's world of work and power future economic growth.

Let me begin with an issue our province is facing today. Right now, approximately 300,000 jobs are going unfilled.

That means nearly 300,000 salaries are not being collected. That's 300,000 lost opportunities for a worker and their family to get ahead. At the same time, there are many workers looking for a job or chance to get ahead, including over 800,000 people relying on social assistance. Our government knows that something has to be done.

Today, the average age of a skilled tradesperson here in Ontario is over the age of 55, and the average age of an apprentice is 29. In construction alone, we need 100,000 skilled workers over the next 10 years to fill the positions as workers retire and we prepare to build Ontario at an unprecedented speed. To help deliver our province infrastructure plans, including building 1.5 million homes by 2031, we need more people in the skilled trades, especially young people, who have their entire lives ahead of them. The trades are full of exciting careers where workers can earn six figures, work towards a defined pension, and have a job for life that they can be damn proud of.

That's why, along with the Premier and the Minister of Education, I announced earlier this month that Ontario is helping young people prepare for in-demand, well-paying careers in the skilled trades by allowing students in grade 11 to transition to a full-time skilled trades apprenticeship program. As part of this, workers who receive their certificate of apprenticeship could also receive their Ontario secondary school diploma as mature students. At a time when we continue to face historic labour shortages, this change will mean that more students can enter the trades faster than ever before to help build Ontario.

Our government is proud of the work that we've done to erase the stigma around skilled trades, to invest in young people's exploration of these in-demand and purpose-driven careers, and to help end the labour shortage to unlock Ontario's economic potential. That is how we are getting our province's skilled trades system back on track for the next generation.

Across Ontario, there were 600,000 people working in construction in 2022. Every one of the workers is a hero, yet the conditions these workers face can be rough.

One of the biggest injustices I've seen on construction sites is the condition of washrooms. That is why, last month, in February, my ministry launched the first inspection blitz targeting dirty washrooms in provincial history. Since then, our health and safety inspectors have visited over 1,800 job sites and found over 244 violations. The common issues they found were no toilets being provided, facilities that lacked privacy, and failures to meet basic cleanliness and hygiene standards. That is why we're taking action to double the number of washrooms on job sites and introduce the toughest standards in North America. Our new rules would require toilets to be completely enclosed and would require washrooms to be adequately lit and to have hand sanitizer where running water is not possible. Furthermore, we're requiring larger construction sites to have at least one women-only washroom.

In addition to improving washrooms, we're also making it clear that protective equipment and clothing provided, worn or used by workers in construction are required

to be a proper fit. It's not only the right thing to do, but it's necessary to keep our workers safe. Everyone should have protective clothing, boots and safety harnesses that fit properly.

Women belong on our job sites, and they should see themselves reflected in the protective equipment and clothing that they wear.

We must ensure that the skilled trades are open to everyone. Our government is proud of the steps we have taken so far, and we've seen the results. In the past year, the percentage of new entrants to the skilled trades who are women is up by a historic 28%. However, we're not satisfied yet. We're going to continue pursuing measures that will encourage women to join the skilled trades and make sure the doors to these in-demand careers are open to everyone.

I have emphasized that Ontario is facing a historic labour shortage and that this shortage hinders our economic growth. Immigration is a crucial tool we can use strategically to fill labour market needs and spur further job creation. Yet, relative to population, Ontario can select fewer economic immigrants than any other province. When Ontario is able to nominate immigrants for permanent residence who best meet the needs of our communities, everyone wins.

That's why the Premier and I have been working for months with our federal counterparts to land a better deal, a new deal, for Ontario when it comes to immigration. Last week, on Saturday, I was pleased to join my counterpart and friend, Canada's Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Sean Fraser, for a truly historic announcement. The federal government has answered our calls to double our annual allocation for the Ontario Immigrant Nominee Program to 18,000 by 2025. This will help ensure that we have the skilled individuals and innovative entrepreneurs Ontario needs to grow and prosper.

Everyone who chooses Ontario should be able to pursue their dreams right here. That's why we are proposing additional changes to remove even more of the barriers that internationally trained professionals face when seeking to work in regulated professions. In Bill 79, we're proposing changes that will ensure alternatives to Canadian work experience cannot create new barriers for newcomers, because newcomers wanting to contribute to our communities deserve a chance to do just that.

We also know that the world of work has changed. For many, the daily commute to work is now simply down a flight of stairs or across the room. Automation and the Internet have uncoupled geography from employment. In the fourth quarter of 2022, 1.4 million workers here in Ontario were working exclusively from home, and another 800,000 were working via a hybrid model. And while these remote workers don't have a desk in the office, their contributions to their employers and to Ontario's economy are just as valuable. Unfortunately, it is increasingly common for workers, especially in big tech, to find out they've been laid off via the media. That's simply unacceptable. To address this alarming trend, we have proposed provisions to treat those who work remote with

the same protections as those who work in-office. If passed, this would mean fully remote employees have the right to more notice that they're losing their jobs or pay in lieu of notice. In some cases, they would receive up to eight times more notice or pay. That doesn't make much difference to a billion-dollar tech company's balance sheet. But a little more time to find the next step in their career can make a huge difference to a worker and their family. It's also the right thing to do.

0920

On a much happier note, we are requiring employers to provide basic employment information before new workers start their first shift. This written information will outline things like pay, work location and hours of work—things every worker should know before they start a new job. In addition, balancing the scales between new hires and their employers will help attract workers to that business.

Attracting more people to the workplace is the best way to boost our economy and will develop Ontario for the next generation.

Additionally, our government is standing up for our men and women in uniform, reserve force members. Thousands of people in Ontario are active reservists in the Canadian Armed Forces. These courageous men and women are an integral part of Canada's national defence and the security of our country. They put their full-time careers on hold to join important military missions at home and abroad, and they step up to provide support during search and rescue operations, natural disasters, ice storms, wildfires, conflicts and other major events. We know it isn't easy for military reservists to pack up and leave on a mission, especially if they're just starting a new job, and it isn't always easy for them to immediately return to their job afterwards, especially if their mission is difficult or traumatic.

That is why we have proposed to reduce the length of employment needed before going on reservist leave to just two months of continuous employment, down from the current three months, and there would be no length-of-employment requirement if the leave is for assisting during a domestic emergency. This ensures that when somewhere in Canada is in crisis, our reservists can put on their uniforms and help their neighbours.

Our proposed legislation would also create a new leave to help our reservists recover from injuries after a deployment. This includes physical or mental health treatment and recovery or rehabilitation related to serving Canada.

These proposed changes build on job-protected leave already in place for reservists, including protections we introduced last year. We're giving those who selflessly serve us the piece of mind they deserve.

With these changes, we are proud to make Ontario's reservist leave among the most flexible and comprehensive in all of Canada. I am proud to stand up for our men and women in uniform, and our government will continue to do so. It's the least they deserve for putting their lives on the line for their service to Canada and for all of us.

A key emphasis in our proposed legislation is protecting vulnerable workers. As we know, Ontario relies on foreign workers to help fill labour shortages in our province. Yet despite prohibitions in the Employment Protection for Foreign Nationals Act, some scumbag employers continue to take foreign nationals' passports and work permits. This is illegal. Bad actors and lawbreakers need to know that if they do this, we will hold them accountable.

You can run, but you can't hide. We will find you, and we will put you behind bars.

Speaker, our government is strengthening protections for foreign workers. We are proposing to establish the highest maximum fines in Canada for employers and recruiters who are convicted of taking or retaining a foreign national's passport or work permit. If our proposed amendments are passed, individuals convicted would be liable to either a fine of up to \$500,000, up to 12 months in prison, or both. Corporations would be liable to a fine of up to \$1 million.

We have no tolerance for labour trafficking in Ontario. No matter a person's immigration status, you have rights.

Speaker, our government is committed to the health and safety of every worker in Ontario. Workers need to be safe on the job, and employers need to be held accountable when they violate health and safety laws. That is why we are proposing amendments to the Occupational Health and Safety Act that, if passed, would increase the maximum fine for corporations convicted of an offence under the act from \$1.5 million to \$2 million. This would give Ontario the highest maximum corporate fine under workplace health and safety legislation in the country. The idea that injuries at the workplace are the cost of doing business is over. We will hold lawbreakers accountable.

I also want to talk for a minute about measures we intend to take for Ontario's firefighters. These brave men and women are there for us in times of our greatest need; in return, we must be there for them. They do what others won't do: They put their lives on the line to save others. We all know that and are forever thankful for their courage. What many might not know is that firefighters die of cancer at a rate four times higher than those in the general population: 25 to 30 firefighters die every year in Ontario. We owe it to them and their families to ensure they have easy access to compensation for work-related illnesses. That is why our proposed legislation has provisions to make it easier for firefighters, fire investigators and their survivors to get access to Workplace Safety and Insurance Board compensation. We will be expanding presumptive cancer coverage for firefighters to include primary site thyroid and pancreatic cancers—cancers that can upend the lives of firefighters and their families. By presuming thyroid and pancreatic cancers are work-related, firefighters can get easier access to benefits and easier access to the supports they need to recover. These measures will be retroactive to January 1, 1960, helping to ensure that those who have these cancers or have had them in the past can get the help they need and deserve. This will apply to all firefighters: those who are

full-time, part-time and volunteers, as well as firefighters employed by First Nations band councils, and fire investigators. Firefighters look after our families, so we need to do what we can to help them.

Speaker, together we can protect and support our workers to thrive in today's world of work, find better jobs and earn bigger paycheques. We can address Ontario's labour shortage by helping workers gain skills for in-demand jobs to help build Ontario for the next generation. Together, we can create a more prosperous and fair society.

Our proposed legislation is one more step in our ongoing efforts to make Ontario the best place in the world to live, work and raise a family.

Now I will yield my time to my parliamentary assistant and the MPP for Mississauga—Malton.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Before I start, I just want to say thank you to the minister for the wonderful remarks and the amount of work he is doing for the workers in the province of Ontario. He is a true champion.

It's kind of a coordinated effort today.

I'm pleased to rise in the House today for the second reading of Bill 79, the Working for Workers Act, 2023. During my remarks, I'll be covering the past, present and future of our province, how we look at it.

Remember the time in 2018 when we took over the government—we were part of the government. Before that, 300,000 manufacturing jobs left the province of Ontario. In 2018, Ontario had the highest debt of any subnational government in the world.

Since 2018, the tables have turned. Under the leadership of the Premier, the government has created conditions for prosperity in the province. This is the government that took Ontario's GDP beyond the \$1-trillion mark in 2021. That is incredible. Thanks to each and every Ontarian for your hard work. It was only possible because we all came together, worked hard and were able to deliver this.

It's no surprise the members of this caucus are continuously interacting and listening to the residents, to make their lives easier and better.

0930

Many times, I have talked about this: I came to Canada on January 15, 2000, and took my first full-time job as a lab technician at Novaquest, an automotive company. Around 2003, and after, we saw a spiral of reduction of the workload. One of the key reasons was that it was becoming difficult for auto manufacturers to keep up with the cost. The formula is simple: If you're doing business, and your cost is \$10 and your revenue is \$12, you're sustainable. But if your revenue is \$10 and your cost is \$12, what choices do you have? Reduce your cost, move out or close. And that's what we saw in each one of those categories.

But since 2018, we worked with the industry to reduce the cost and, through job-creating policies, supported increase in revenue. We did this by cutting red tape, reducing the cost of doing business, making workplaces safer and empowering the workforce. We've saved \$570 million in annual regulatory compliance costs. We made

sure that revenue goes up, expenses go down and businesses become sustainable. The result is very simple. We've seen investments of close to \$17 billion here in the province of Ontario. We talked about the past, with 300,000 manufacturing jobs leaving day to day. Now, we have 300,000 jobs available in the province of Ontario, and that is due to the policies of this government.

To connect job seekers with in-demand jobs, we are working on four pillars:

- (1) help workers and job seekers upskill and train;
- (2) promote opportunities and connect people with jobs, especially in the trades;
- (3) bring in new workers from other provinces and across the globe—we know the province of Ontario is an amazing place to live and raise a family; and
- (4) make sure Ontario workplaces are globally attractive to workers.

We are moving all of these levers, under the leadership of Minister Monte McNaughton and Premier Ford, to propel Ontario forward. We're offering more and better training opportunities to help people prepare for better jobs and bigger paycheques—and it's not just words; it is what we are delivering here. That is why we invested in the Better Jobs Ontario program. It offers job seekers up to \$28,000 to help with short-duration training and in-demand jobs.

Interruption.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Ontario is saying we're doing a great job.

Through three rounds of the Skills Development Fund to date, Ontario has invested \$700 million through 388 projects. The result: 400,000 workers have taken the next step in their careers in in-demand industries. That's what we've done.

We are supporting training specifically for women under-represented in skilled trades, Indigenous people, newcomers, visitors under the emergency travel measures, young people, workers with disabilities, people on social assistance, and people who have been in conflict with the law to get back on track for sustainable employment.

These are the ways we are working to make sure we're delivering results for the people of Ontario.

Thanks to this government, because of the policies that were created, because of the investments and new employers that came to Ontario, we have more jobs today than we had in 2018.

So what we need to do if there's a problem is, we need to find a solution.

Our government is transforming the way employment services are delivered. We're making it easier for job seekers to access the training and support they need, especially those on social assistance. We're doing this by creating a streamlined, one-stop shop for employment services. This means better access to job matching and career coaching. It also means that we're working and making it easier for employers to find workers to grow their business. And the result? The result is, we have seen 63,200 people now on a path to a job, including over 23,000 who were on social assistance. That is how we turn

the tables. It's not just giving them a job or just giving them financial independence; it is empowering them. That is the focus of our government—to empower Ontarians so that we can come together and build a better Ontario.

Recently, the minister announced that we are bringing new employment services to Windsor-Sarnia, London, Kitchener-Waterloo, Barrie, Durham and the Ottawa region. This includes introducing service system managers—organizations that will design, plan and deliver employment programs in these local areas.

Madam Speaker, I talked about SDF. Our government is also investing \$224 million in a new capital stream of the Skills Development Fund, which will provide eligible applicants, including unions, with funding to update or convert their existing facilities into training centres. I always talk about this—simply put, it is common sense. Jobs need people, and people need jobs. What we need to do is to bring them together, help them, upskill them, give them the tools required, and with those, we can help them to get a job. When people get a job, they contribute to society, and employers thrive. But we can't do it alone—unless we work with everyone.

Immigration is another focus area for the government. While Express Entry is the flagship federal program to immigrate to Canada, the Ontario Immigrant Nominee Program has been proactively responding to the skills shortages in the target areas. Yet, relative to the population, Ontario can select fewer economic immigrants than any other province; for example, we were only allowed to have 4.5%, compared to Quebec's 52%. Thanks to this minister, and thanks to each one of you, in fact, we advocated and we worked hard, and the results came—I talked about the problems and the solution and the result. That's why the Premier and the Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development has worked with the federal counterpart to land a better deal for Ontario. Thanks to those efforts, Ontario now gets to double its OINP allocation to 18,000 by 2025—starting from 9,000, to 18,000. This historic increase will help us fill jobs in the skilled trades, technology and health care. In other words, we'll be able to serve our Ontarians better.

As we invite more people to call Ontario home, we are also creating an enabling environment to help them realize their dreams. In 2020, immigrants made up about 33% of Ontario's workforce. The vast majority, however, are not working in the fields in which they are educated—75% of internationally educated immigrants are not working in their field. If these immigrants are able to work in the field in which they are educated, it would mean collecting a bigger paycheque; it would mean increased revenue for the employer; it would mean higher contribution to our province and the local economy. So it's a win-win situation. When we help immigrants get to their dreams faster, we all win. That is why we are making it easier for immigrants to settle and find jobs in their field.

Ontario was the first province in Canada to prohibit regulated professions from requiring internationally trained persons to have Canadian work as a qualification for registration. To further help them work faster, we are

making additional changes, through Working for Workers, 2023, to the Fair Access to Regulated Professions and Compulsory Trades Act. The proposed changes in Working for Workers, 2023, will include introducing a new duty for regulated professions to consult with their oversight ministries and to make sure that they're considering Ontario's labour market needs—again, a problem followed by a solution. That is what this bill is doing.

We are also going an extra mile in supporting our skilled trades. There are roughly 1.2 million people working in skilled trades as of right now. But at the same time, in 2021 nearly one in three journeypersons with a certificate of qualification in Ontario was aged 55 or older. In the construction sector alone, 72,000 new workers are needed by 2027. We talk about building 1.5 million homes. We talk about having subways. We want to have highways. We want to have 86,000 child care centres. We want to have these places—long-term care for our seniors—but all those would need skilled trades, all those would need more labour.

That's why we want to make sure, to help deliver the province's infrastructure plan, we are here to help Ontario.

That is why we introduced Ontario's Skilled Trades Strategy, investing nearly \$1 billion to make it easier than ever to learn a trade, by breaking the stigma and attracting youth, by simplifying the system, and by encouraging employer participation.

We're doing this by our government launching our first annual trades career fairs, where high school students get to learn about life-changing career opportunities, try trades, and hear directly from the tradespeople.

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Under the leadership of Premier Ford, working together, we are seeing the progress—again, a problem followed by a solution and seeing the result of it. As of February 2023, apprenticeship registrations are up by 27% in Ontario compared to last year. And what's most important—we talk about having more women in construction, in the trades. It's not just words; we're delivering it. How? Registrations for women in Ontario are up by 24%. So I just want to say thank you to everyone who has registered. These are fantastic opportunities—the chance to make a six-figure salary, have a job for life, and be proud of what you build.

Starting with students entering grade 9 in September 2024, all students will now be required to earn a grade 9 or 10 technological education credit as part of their Ontario secondary school diploma. The new graduation requirement will introduce Ontario students to at least one technological education course that would guide them to a future career in the highly skilled workforce, including the skilled trades. In addition, our government is also allowing students in grade 11 to transition to a full-time skilled trades apprenticeship program. Upon receiving your certificate of apprenticeship, you can apply for your Ontario secondary school diploma as a mature student.

Madam Speaker, it's as simple as this: When we talk about having more people in the skilled trades, we need to encourage, we need to make our students—and more than

students, I think; we need to make our parents aware of all the opportunities we have in the skilled trades. Think about if we didn't have people from the skilled trades. Look at this beautiful building—we would not have anything which we have here. So it is important for us to work with the parents and make them aware that through the skilled trades, we're able to achieve a better Ontario.

We will not stop here. We will also talk to the education stakeholders, and we'll push forward to get more workers that we need to build a stronger Ontario.

Under the leadership of Premier Ford, we are working tirelessly to inform job seekers of the unlimited opportunities available here in Ontario. Together, we are building a stronger Ontario that leaves no one behind.

The minister briefly talked about the support that we're getting from our staff. I usually think about an analogy: When you talk about the minister or I—we're basically like a screen, but there is a big processor behind that screen, and that processor is no one but our wonderful staff.

I want to take a moment to thank my constituency staff and the ministry staff for everything they do for us, so that we can deliver to the province of Ontario.

Madam Speaker, to conclude, this bill is very simple. We heard from the stakeholders, but rather than just listening to what they said, the minister took time, effort and made sure what they told us, as a problem—when we worked with them, consulted them, to provide us a solution, by working with them, we are able to bring the legislation that will give us the results.

Through this bill, we are making sure—for military service, we're proposing to reduce the service requirement from three months to two months. We are also expanding the reason for taking leave to include physical or mental treatment.

We are expanding cancer coverage for firefighters.

We are making sure we are enhancing fines to protect workers—making sure that, through the Occupational Health and Safety Act, we are increasing the fine from \$1.5 million to \$2 million. In fact, those employers convicted of taking possession or retaining a foreign national's passport or work permit—we're enhancing the fines for them.

We're making sure we have clean washrooms on construction sites.

We want to make sure that we have our women's workforce—giving them the support they need by providing that large construction sites with over five washrooms at least have one washroom exclusively for female workers.

We're providing remote work protection.

We're preparing students for skilled trades jobs.

We're helping newcomers start their careers and expanding employment services.

This is a bill which in turn is going to build on our narrative of building a stronger Ontario.

I am going to support this bill, and I'm looking forward to each and every member of our caucus supporting this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): The member from Scarborough Centre.

Mr. David Smith: I have to share the compliments of my minister, Monte McNaughton, and PA Anand for working together as a team in making certain that Bill 79 becomes law in Ontario.

I'm pleased to rise in the House today for the second reading of Bill 79, Working for Workers Act, 2023.

I have been working with the Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development to further support and protect workers and their families.

I would also like to thank and acknowledge our Premier for his tremendous leadership and support for this bill and our last two pieces of Working for Workers legislation. These acts have been helping millions of people, and we will continue moving Ontario forward. Earlier this week, we announced further changes that would, if passed, expand on those successes.

Ontario is experiencing unprecedented labour shortages. Our proposed changes would help increase labour supply and ensure that workers have the right skills for in-demand jobs. The way we work has been changing and evolving for some time, and the last few years have accelerated these changes. Where we work, how we work and the meaning we find in what we do all need to adapt, because an economy that doesn't work for workers doesn't work for all. Our government is planning for the workplaces of the future. We are proposing changes to spread opportunities and give Ontario workers a better deal and employment experience.

Nowadays, it's possible never to go in to an office in a physical location. Technological advances have uncoupled geography from employment. These changes have resulted in globalized competition for highly skilled workers and revealed gaps in our labour and employment laws.

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The legislation we introduced, if passed, would make employees who work solely from home eligible for the same enhanced notice of termination as in-office and other employees in a mass termination situation. Ontario's Employment Standards Act provides for greater notice or pay in lieu of for employees affected by mass termination. Mass termination provisions generally apply if 50 or more employees are terminated at an employer's establishment within four weeks. Depending on the number of employees terminated in the case of a mass termination, an employee could be entitled to eight, 12 or 16 weeks of notice. Under the Employment Standards Act, an employee's private residence is not considered part of the employer's establishment, so fully remote workers may not be included in the employee count when determining whether the 50-employee threshold for mass termination has been reached. The proposed changes in Working for Workers Act, 2023, would help fix this gap. If passed, the changes would broaden the definition of an employer's establishment to include employees' private residences if they solely work remotely. This could entitle employees

who exclusively work remotely to a longer notice period or pay in lieu of layoff notices.

We have all read about workers employed by billion-dollar tech companies learning that they have lost their job via the media, and that shouldn't happen, ever. Mass terminations can make it difficult for employees to find alternate employment, and by providing these protections, our government is standing up for workers who are terminated.

Putting workers first means giving them the tools they need to stay safe. It also means protecting them from bad employers and recruiters.

Ontario relies on foreign workers to help fill labour shortages in our province. However, despite the Employment Protection for Foreign Nationals Act prohibitions, some employers continue to take foreign nationals' passports and permits. This increases the possibility of exploitation of vulnerable foreign workers.

That is why our government is proposing to strengthen protections for foreign workers by introducing changes that would, if passed, establish the highest maximum fines in Canada—fines that will apply to employers and recruiters who are convicted of taking or retaining a foreign national's passport or work permit. If amendments are passed, individuals convicted of taking or retaining a foreign national's passport or work permit would be liable for either a fine of \$500,000 or up to 12 months in prison, or both, and corporations will be liable for a fine of up to \$1 million. The proposed increase in maximum fines aims to prevent labour trafficking in Ontario. Anyone can be a target of labour trafficking, but migrant workers and newcomers to Canada looking for work can be at higher risk. Our legislation would support government efforts to protect vulnerable workers essential in building up our province's economy.

Our government is committed to the health and safety of every worker in Ontario. Employers have significant responsibility for health and safety in the workplace. They must keep a safe and well-maintained workplace. Workers need to feel safe on the job, and businesses must be held accountable when violating the health and safety laws of Ontario.

That is why this legislation would amend the Occupational Health and Safety Act to increase the maximum fine for corporations convicted of an offence under the act from \$1.5 million to \$2 million. This would give Ontario the highest maximum corporate fine under Canada's workplace health and safety legislation. Corporate fines under the Occupational Health and Safety Act have not been increased since 2017, when the increase was from \$500,000 to \$1.5 million. The increased fine proposed in the Working for Workers Act, 2023, would, if passed, deter violations of the Occupational Health and Safety Act by corporations. It would reinforce the importance of putting workers' safety first. Workplace injuries and death should not be a cost of business.

Speaker, our government is proud to protect workers who protect us. This includes military reservists, who put their lives on the line for us. Thousands of people in

Ontario are reservists. These courageous men and women are integral to the Canadian Armed Forces. They put their full-time career on hold in their communities to join important military missions at home and abroad.

Yesterday, our government introduced legislation that, if passed, would provide better protection for our reservists and remove barriers to their deployment. The proposed legislation, if passed, would reduce the length of employment needed before going on a reservist leave to just two months of continuous employment, down from the current three months. And there would be no length of employment requirement if the leave is due to deployment to assist during a domestic emergency. The proposed legislation would also expand the reasons for taking the leave, to help our reservists recover from injuries after deployment—reasons that include physical or mental treatment, recovery or rehabilitation related to a military operation or specified activity. These proposed changes build on job-protected leave already in place for reservists, including protections we introduced last year. These changes, if passed, would cover all military reservists in Ontario covered by the Employment Standards Act who participate in Canadian Armed Forces military skills training, are deployed to assist in a domestic emergency, or are deployed abroad. In introducing these changes, we are standing up for our front-line heroes while they protect us. We are trying to give them peace of mind that their job will await them when they return. We are proud to propose changes to make Ontario reservist leave among Canada's most flexible and comprehensive.

I want to take this moment to talk about another group of heroes, our firefighters, and measures the Ontario government intends to take through regulations to make sure we are leaving no one behind. Firefighters risk their lives to enter smoke-filled buildings to rescue people, battle out-of-control blazes and respond to other emergencies. Their work touches the lives of so many people and communities across Ontario. They are there for us in our greatest need, and we should be there for them.

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Firefighters die of cancer at a rate up to four times higher than the general population, with 25 to 30 passing away yearly in Ontario. We owe it to them to ensure they have easy access to compensation for these work-related illnesses. The Ontario government plans to propose a regulatory change to make it easy for firefighters, fire investigators and their survivors to access Workplace Safety and Insurance Board—WSIB—compensation by expanding presumptive cancer coverage for firefighters to include primary site thyroid and pancreatic cancers. By presuming thyroid and pancreatic cancers are work-related, firefighters and fire investigators could get easier access to benefits and the support they need to recover. If approved, they would apply to full-time, part-time and volunteer firefighters, firefighters employed by First Nation band councils, and fire investigators. We want Ontario to know that we have the backs of the brave men and women who protect and serve us daily.

I will conclude by calling for all in this House to support the Working for Workers Act, 2023. The measures

we've outlined will position Ontario as a front-runner in charting the way forward as workplaces and how we work evolve. By giving workers a better deal, we are not only protecting them, but we are both keeping and attracting more workers to the province and ensuring our economy remains strong.

I hope all members of this House join me in supporting this bill. So please help us vote on Bill 79 as it comes forward.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Questions?

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

The minister started his remarks by boasting about the temporary and inadequate paid sick days program that his government was forced to introduce, but he has told the media that the program has filled its purpose and it is expiring at the end of the month.

The legislation that we have here today would have been a perfect opportunity to amend the Employment Standards Act and finally bring in a permanent paid sick days program, like they have in BC, to cover all Ontario workers not just for COVID, but for any other illness or infectious disease that means that they have to stay home from work. Why did the minister not include that in this bill today?

Hon. Monte McNaughton: I'm proud that we were the first in the country to bring in job-protected leave to ensure that if there's a worker out there who is sick, obviously, from COVID, staying home to look after a loved one, having mental health issues—it's really a flexible job leave—that workers can't be fired for that. We brought in paid sick days, which the member opposite supported. I think I referenced it; it was probably the fastest bill that ever passed in this chamber since I've been here. It has been very successful. Over half a million workers have accessed that, which is good—again, very flexible.

I guess what I don't understand from the NDP is—I think of our past Working for Workers bills that brought in naloxone kits to workplaces, that improved labour mobility so unionized construction workers could come to Ontario, that brought in foundational rights for gig workers. You opposed those. Why?

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: I thank the minister for his presentation today, and the other members who presented today.

I'm very excited about this proposed legislation because it's something that people in my riding of Essex have been asking for; I know it because I've heard their requests. I'm so proud that this legislation has been tabled, and I hope it will pass so that these great measures can be implemented.

My question to the minister is this: Who else is supporting this legislation?

Hon. Monte McNaughton: Great question.

The member from Essex is doing such a great job being a champion for folks in his riding, especially around the skilled trades. I've been with the member from Essex a

number of times, meeting with building trade union leaders from the Windsor-Essex region who are doing a great job. They're going to be building that new hospital down there, they're working on the bridge, expanding Highway 3—the list goes on and on and on.

Those men and women who are wearing hard hats every day are heroes. I say that proudly, because for too long in this province, people looked down their noses at people in the skilled trades. They're heroes. That's why I'm proud that this government is the first in history to do an inspection blitz to clean up washrooms once and for all for construction workers and to get more women into the skilled trades.

He asked, "Who's supporting this bill?" I want to pay tribute—and I will do this in the next question—to Joe Maloney, the former head of the international boiler-makers union, who is supporting this bill. He now runs Helmets to Hardhats. I'll speak about him shortly. Unfortunately, he is retiring, but he has gotten men and women who have served the country into the skilled trades.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Mr. Wayne Gates: The Minister of Labour said he won't tolerate scumbag employers. What did he do to stop the employer who passed Bill 124 and Bill 28, which trampled on workers' corrective bargaining rights, forced wage caps, working conditions on largely women-led sectors—the same employer that won't end deeming for injured workers or won't pass anti-scab legislation?

My question to the minister is pretty simple: What has the minister done to stop that scumbag employer?

Hon. Monte McNaughton: I'm proud of the action that we're taking. I think it's despicable that there are employers out there that would take a passport or work permit from a migrant worker. It's wrong on so many fronts. That's why I'm proud that our government, in this legislation, is bringing forward hefty fines to ensure that these migrant workers get the protections they deserve. And not only are they going to be fined, they're going to be put in jail. Our government, 18 months ago, in our first Working for Workers Act, passed legislation to set up within the Ministry of Labour an anti-labour trafficking division—a special division—hired people to fill the roles, and I'm proud to say that they're working every day to bring people to justice who abuse workers in this province.

We will work every day to ensure that the health and safety of every worker is protected.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Question?

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: I want to thank the Minister of Labour and his whole team for this incredible movement in terms of labour legislation. This is part of a huge series of changes that his team, with our government, is making.

One of the changes that is very vivid for my community—we have Base Borden, close to Barrie. When I speak to reservists—and of course, I speak to our local Legion in Belle Ewart—they talk about the mental health impacts of anyone in the Armed Forces.

So what is this bill doing to show respect and honour to not only our veterans, but everyone in the Canadian Armed Forces, and really move the labour pendulum for those workers?

Hon. Monte McNaughton: We're doing this, first and foremost, because the men and women who serve in uniform—serving our country, serving all of us—deserve to have their jobs protected when they choose to leave work,

I do want to get back to my good friend Joe Maloney, who unfortunately is retiring from Helmets to Hardhats. He founded this organization. Joe was the former international vice-president of the boilermakers union, and he did a great job promoting boilermakers as a first career choice for many young people out there. Joe said, "Helmets to Hardhats welcomes the expansion of job-protected leave for military reservists. Reserve force members are a vital component of the Canadian Armed Forces but are also crucial in their civilian careers, including careers within the unionized construction industry. Allowing additional job-protected leave will support retention in the military and the workforce while ensuring Canadian reservists can return to work safely and sustainably."

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Joe, on behalf of the province of Ontario, thank you for your work with the boilermakers' union and being the founder of Helmets to Hardhats.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Question?

M. Guy Bourgoin: Je vois dans le projet de loi—on ne voit aucune allocation qu'ils vont retirer le projet de loi 124. Le ministre a utilisé le mots « scumbag employers ». Mais, les personnes qui sont assujetties à la loi 124, je peux vous dire qu'elles se posent seulement une question. La question qu'elles aimeraient qu'on pose au ministre : qu'allez-vous faire—pour utiliser encore vos paroles—des « scumbag employers » et pour retirer le projet de loi 124?

Hon. Monte McNaughton: We're working for workers every single day. That's why we're bringing forward not just nation-leading changes to our labour laws to rebalance the skills, to help those everyday heroes out there, but a lot of the changes we're doing haven't been done across North America.

I think of what we're going to do around portable benefits. There are millions of workers today in the province who don't have health and dental benefits. We're going to be the first in North America to bring in a portable benefits plan.

Speaker, I think of the support we have for this legislation. The head of the provincial building trades, who represents literally hundreds of thousands of unionized construction workers in this province, is supporting this legislation—to clean up washrooms on job sites, to create a washroom on a large site specifically for women, to ensure that there's adequate lighting, to ensure that these washrooms that don't have covers on them are banned in the province of Ontario.

For the life of me, I do not understand why the NDP are objecting to this legislation—it's to help people. This

should be a non-partisan issue. All of the changes we're bringing are to improve the lives of workers in this province.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): The member from Newmarket–Aurora.

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: First off, I'd like to thank the minister for all his hard work, as well as the parliamentary assistants today for their speeches.

I'd like to give an example of something the minister mentioned today about encouraging women to join the skilled trades. In my community of Newmarket–Aurora—I spoke to this before in a member's statement—we have a Blue Door enterprise called Construct. I spoke specifically with a young woman who started this program. She was on social assistance—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Thank you to the member from Newmarket–Aurora.

A quick response.

Hon. Monte McNaughton: The member does a great job.

We're going to clean up washrooms for every construction worker. There are 16,000 women and men today working on job sites in the province—we're going to clean it up for them. They're heroes in this province.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): It is now time for members' statements.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

WORLD WATER DAY

Mrs. Robin Martin: Since 1993, March 22 has been observed by all UN member states as World Water Day.

Our province is blessed to be a world leader in fresh water with more than 250,000 lakes—roughly 20% of the world's fresh water. The word “Ontario” itself is said to derive from portions of the Huron word for “great lake” and the Iroquois word for “beautiful water.” Our government has and will continue to protect Ontario's waters.

For example, in 2020, Ontario partnered with Pollution Probe to collect plastic waste from the water at marinas around the province using innovative plastic capture technology.

In 2020-21, our government invested almost \$11 million in more than 98 projects to help improve the health of the Great Lakes, including cleanup projects which prevented over 250,000 pieces of litter from entering Lake Ontario.

We enhanced Ontario's water-taking program and issued new guidance on managing water-taking in areas where sustainability is a concern.

Additionally, the Wetlands Conservation Partner Program has invested \$15 million to protect, restore and rehabilitate over 2,600 hectares of wetlands across Ontario.

The Great Lakes provide drinking water directly to 60% of Ontarians. Ontario's drinking water protection framework received an A rating from Ecojustice Canada's drinking water report card as it implements “the most ambitious source water protection program in Canada,” with some of the strongest protections available.

On this day and every day, we will work to protect this great resource for future generations.

I invite all members and all Ontarians to raise a glass to toast Ontario's fresh water. Happy World Water Day.

ATTAWAPISKAT FIRST NATION

Mr. Guy Bourgoin: Today I'm here to speak about Attawapiskat First Nation and the disappointing neglect they have been facing with the government for over 30 years. I was just up in Attawapiskat last week with my staff to offer a clinic and to meet with chief and council. Chief Sylvia and the council are very discouraged, as were their predecessors. They have been asking for help to address their housing crisis and the development of their community for years. Multiple meetings and emails have been exchanged, with no advancement.

In 2014, a joint task force was established with Attawapiskat First Nation and both federal and provincial governments to address their requirements. In 2018, the joint task force established a memorandum of understanding to govern their meetings. In 2019, a renewed relationship commitment was signed to ensure the advancement of this working relationship—signed by the Honourable Minister Rickford, Minister O'Regan and Chief Ignace Gull. In 2023, here we are, in the same place, with no advancement and nothing to show other than an exchange of words.

The community is currently landlocked given its geographical disposition. There are only two ways for them to expand: option 1, remove the dispute on the road due to the De Beers mine; option 2, relocate the airport.

They're offering solutions so that they can expand their community and address their issues, yet it's falling on deaf ears.

They are facing a housing crisis, to the point where they do not have a single piece of land to expand their home and infrastructure on their traditional territory—quite ironic.

It is time to respect the—

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

Members' statements?

BURLINGTON TEEN TOUR BAND

Ms. Natalie Pierre: The Burlington Teen Tour Band is Canada's oldest and largest youth marching band. For over 75 years, the band has been a symbol of pride for the city of Burlington. They are known for their high-energy performances and their ability to captivate audiences with their intricate formations and synchronized movements.

The Burlington Teen Tour Band has had the privilege of performing at some of the world's most prestigious events, including the Rose Bowl parade, the Macy's Thanksgiving Day parade, the 75th anniversary of D-Day, and the 70th anniversary of Pearl Harbour.

Earlier this week, the band returned from their tour in Ireland, where they were in attendance for the St. Patrick's Day parade and were named best band overall.

One of the things that sets the band apart is their dedication to excellence. The band spends countless hours perfecting their music and choreography. They are a tight-knit community of young people who share a passion for music and performance. Through their involvement in the band, these young musicians—my daughter was one of them—develop important life skills, such as discipline, teamwork and leadership. These skills will serve them well for the rest of their lives.

COST OF LIVING

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: Constituents in my riding are struggling to make ends meet. More families are accessing food banks because the cost of food has skyrocketed. Many people are living in deep poverty. Seniors are cutting pills in half or skipping doses. They can't afford their medication and rent or food.

We have a housing crisis in Windsor-Essex and across Ontario. Housing remains unaffordable and unattainable for many. Young people and families are unable to buy a home in the community they grew up in. The cost of rent has increased dramatically because rent control was scrapped by this government.

More people are experiencing homelessness, yet shelters in my community aren't receiving the funding needed to provide supports. The Welcome Centre Shelter for Women and Families says that 61% of the individuals accessing supports are children and youth. The largest predictor of future shelter use is the children accessing those shelters now, yet this government gives no thought to young people and their future.

The people of Windsor West and across Ontario deserve a government that supports them and takes action to make life better for everyone, not just the wealthy friends and donors of the Conservatives. We need a budget that will bring relief for the rising cost of living.

The Conservatives want the people of Ontario to settle for less, to think that this is normal. We must demand better, because better is possible.

We can double social assistance rates to lift people out of poverty. We can build more affordable housing while protecting green space. We can protect workers' rights and ensure that good-paying jobs are available to everyone.

1020

Budgets are all about priorities. This upcoming budget is an opportunity for the Conservatives to prioritize the people of Ontario. Maybe they'll—

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

BRAMPTON WEST YOUTH COUNCIL FOOD DRIVE

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: Giving back to the community and charity work is something that's truly close to my heart.

Throughout the week of March break, my Brampton West Youth Council held a food drive.

As we all know, food is a basic necessity of life, and yet there are so many people in our community who struggle to put food on the table every day.

Fortunately, we have the power to make a difference. By donating non-perishable food items and volunteering our time, we can ensure that everyone in our community has access to healthy and nutritious meals. By coming together as a community, we can make a real difference in the lives of our neighbours.

Mr. Speaker, I'm so proud to have such wonderful volunteers as part of our team. Their willingness to help and their unwavering support has been instrumental in making this food drive a success.

I would like to take a moment to express my heartfelt gratitude for your incredible efforts during our Brampton West food drive, and all of those who helped out either by donating or volunteering. Thank you for making such an impactful change in the community through your kind actions.

INDIGENOUS CONSULTATION

M^{me} France Gélinas: This morning, I was on the phone with Gimaa Craig Nootchtai, the Chief of Atikameksheng Anishnawbek. His people's traditional territories are home to almost all of the mines in Nickel Belt—mines that play a big role in this government's upcoming budget.

Gimaa Nootchtai and his council were invited to an information session on Bill 71, the Building More Mines Act. They put in a lot of time and effort preparing for this information session, as Bill 71 will have multi-generational implications for their people. Gimaa Nootchtai and his team were shocked when the government declared after the start of the information session that this virtual meeting would satisfy the government's duty to consult First Nations on Bill 71.

Gimaa Nootchtai said, "I told them that 'consultation' should have started when the proposed changes were first conceptualized so that we could truly participate in drafting legislation that directly affects our lands and rights." I agree, Speaker.

This government has a duty to consult First Nations. Why are they not taking this responsibility more seriously? Why is it that this government seems bound and determined to continue to treat First Nations with such disrespect? This has to change.

When will this government consult Atikameksheng Anishnawbek on the changes to the Mining Act?

SEMAINE DE LA FRANCOPHONIE

M. Stéphane Sarrazin: Je veux profiter encore une fois de l'occasion pour souhaiter une joyeuse Semaine internationale de la Francophonie, non seulement aux Franco-Ontariens mais à tous les francophones à travers la planète.

Merci à la ministre des Affaires francophone, son adjointe parlementaire et son équipe pour avoir organisé une rencontre lundi ici même à Queen's Park. Ça a été une belle occasion de rencontrer des représentants de plusieurs organismes francophones de différents secteurs et de différentes régions de notre belle province. Merci à mes collègues députés et leurs adjoints qui font partie d'un groupe de nombreux d'Ontariens qu'on appelle des francophiles. Je suis très reconnaissant pour leur participation à cet événement.

J'ai aussi participé à un événement lundi en soirée à l'Université de l'Ontario français. J'ai eu l'occasion de me joindre à mes collègues et à plusieurs membres de différents organismes qui font rayonner la francophonie dans notre province.

Vous savez, monsieur le Président, il y a beaucoup d'activités cette semaine par rapport à la francophonie. Hier encore, j'ai pris part à la cérémonie de l'Ordre de la Pléiade dans la suite de la lieutenant-gouverneure ici même à Queen's Park pour reconnaître des personnes exceptionnelles qui ont grandement contribué à la francophonie de notre province. Vous avez vous-même, monsieur le Président, eu la chance de recevoir ces invités : M. Donald Lemaire de Hearst, M^{me} Claire Forcier de Hearst, M. Denis Chartrand d'Ottawa, M^e Mark Power d'Ottawa, M^{me} Lauraine Côté de Mississauga et M^{me} Ursule Leboeuf de Pointe-aux-Roches.

Je tiens à réitérer mes sincères félicitations aux récipiendaires pour leurs contributions exceptionnelles aux communautés francophones de l'Ontario et à l'ensemble de la province. Leur travail acharné et leur dévouement ont eu un impact significatif et durable sur la vie de nombreuses personnes.

FLOODING

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Imagine waking up to the sound of cracking thunder and pouring rain in the middle of the night. You just can't sleep, so you tiptoe downstairs to the basement to watch some television. Here, you are met with ankle-deep water and maybe even sewage soaking your freshly carpeted floors. This comes as a complete shock. You don't live near any flood plains, rivers or streams, so you never expected a flood in your home. Why would you? You try your best to subdue the damage by using towels and sandbags, but there is nothing you can do besides wait for the downpour to be over. You sit and watch your possessions decay and await the \$43,000 price tag to clean up your basement.

Basement flooding is not normal, but it is common. All of this could potentially have been averted if Bill 56 was law. It's time for proactive solutions, not reactive measures.

Flooding is the most common disaster in Canada, and it now costs Canadians more than any other natural disaster.

Bill 56 will save your constituents and you from unnecessary hardships—financially and physically and mentally. I know this issue is close to home for many of you, as you have shared your basement flooding stories with me personally. By implementing this bill, money can be saved and headaches can be avoided. Ontarians—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. Members' statements?

TATUM HUTCHINSON

TAYLAR MCCALLUM

Mr. Dave Smith: Today, I want to sing the praises of two young ladies from my riding. On March 5, Tatum Hutchison and Taylar McCallum won the Ontario youth bowling championship. They will be headed off to Regina in May for the Canadian championships. These young ladies are only 10 years old. They're the youngest bowlers from Peterborough to win an Ontario championship. Both Tatum and Taylar started bowling around the age of four or five.

For Taylar, this must be in her genes, because she's following in her father's footsteps, who is also a former provincial champion.

The girls have been bowling together for the last five years and have become great friends and partners. They attribute their success to collaboration, friendship and the ability to not put too much pressure on themselves or one another. That's a recipe for success that we can all learn from.

Every Wednesday, they come down to Lakeview Bowl to practise.

I know they're excited to represent not only Peterborough but all of Ontario.

I truly don't want to put too much pressure on them, but Taylar and Tatum, I know I speak for everyone in Ontario when I say this: We are very proud of you, and we believe in you. No matter what happens in Regina, you are champions. From not only me but everyone here in the Legislature, good luck.

EVENTS IN RICHMOND HILL

Mrs. Daisy Wai: I rise today to appreciate the rich diversity of our Richmond Hill community. From celebrating the winter carnival to observing Nowruz and Ramadan, our community comes together to honour our inclusiveness.

I want to acknowledge the Richmond Hill Winter Carnival that took place on February 4. Despite the frigid weather, our residents came together to celebrate this winter tradition and have fun. This is the tradition that residents in Richmond Hill have been celebrating for 54 years.

Last week, I joined the Iranian community for various celebrations. I was happy to join Minister Parsa, Mayor

Tom Mrakas and guests to celebrate the second anniversary of Bill 271 to recognize Persian Heritage Month. I also attended the ICTC Youth Foundation Nowruz event.

Today marks the beginning of Ramadan. May I wish the Muslim communities in Richmond Hill and across Ontario the very best during this time of spiritual strength and personal reflection.

Let us continue to embrace our diversity and work towards a brighter Ontario.

1030

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I recognize the Minister of Energy.

Hon. Todd Smith: Thank you, Speaker. I recognize you too. It's good to see you this morning.

I would like to welcome a couple of dear friends of mine from Riverview, New Brunswick, my hometown. Believe it or not, I was the best man at their wedding a long, long time ago, when I was a younger, slimmer, more handsome man than I am today, if you can imagine that. I'd really like to welcome Peter and Heidi Foster.

Ms. Marit Stiles: There's a person who sits here almost every day in the members' gallery, and his name is Michau van Speyk. It is his 28th birthday today. I want to wish him a happy birthday.

Mr. Robert Bailey: It's a great privilege today, Mr. Speaker, to introduce to you and to all the members of the Legislature—as parliamentary assistant to the Solicitor General, I'd like to introduce Chief Kai Liu, chief of the Treaty Three Police Service, and his wife, Heidi, who are joining us in the members' gallery today.

Thank you for joining us. Welcome to Queen's Park. Thank you for all the great work you do for this province.

Ms. Laura Smith: I had the honour and privilege of welcoming the people from the JIAS Toronto LINC school of York region. They will be in the chamber very shortly, but I wanted to make sure that they knew that they were welcome. They're an amazing organization that has been working very hard for the people of not only York region but Toronto as well. Welcome to them.

MPP Lise Vaugeois: I would like to welcome Travis McDougall, from Truckers for Safer Highways, who is joining us today.

Welcome to your House, Travis.

INDEPENDENT MEMBERS

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I understand the member for Ottawa–Vanier has a point of order.

M^{me} Lucille Collard: I do, Mr. Speaker, and I thank you for your attention and your indulgence.

I am seeking the unanimous consent of the House that, notwithstanding standing order 100(a)(iv), the independent members be permitted to share the five minutes allotted to a single member for the debate on

private member's notice of motion number 34, standing in the name of the member for London–Fanshawe.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Ottawa–Vanier is seeking the unanimous consent of the House that, notwithstanding standing order 100(a)(iv), the independent members be permitted to share the five minutes allotted to a single member for the debate on private member's motion number 34, standing in the name of the member for London–Fanshawe. Agreed? Agreed.

QUESTION PERIOD

LAND USE PLANNING

Ms. Marit Stiles: Yesterday we learned that the federal government is going to heed the call of our party, of environmental groups and of so many concerned Ontarians and intervene to protect the greenbelt. The federal minister cited the danger posed to species at risk and to our country's only national urban park as they announced a new study on the impacts of paving over the greenbelt.

There is growing public opposition to this land grab, there's an ongoing ethics inquiry, and there are new federal interventions.

So will the Premier finally stop his attack on our greenbelt?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): To reply, the government House leader.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I can say this: The provincial government, this government, is steadfast in its commitment to continue to build houses for the people of the province of Ontario. The federal government can either assist us in this motion or they can simply get out of the way. We have made it very clear since 2018 that we needed to build more houses in the province of Ontario. It has also been very clear that the opposition is against this.

What we're seeing in Ontario is hope and optimism returning to this province for the first time in a long time, Mr. Speaker. Do you know why? Because we're bringing more jobs back to the province of Ontario. We have more jobs than people to fill those jobs, and we're asking for over 300,000 people to come to Ontario to help us build a more prosperous Ontario. And do you know what they need? They want to have a home. So we will continue to do that. And I can't say it more clearly: The federal government and the opposition can either work with us or they can get out of the way so that we can continue to build a better Ontario.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: Speaker, the government House leader was there when Rouge Park was created. Now he's willing to put it all at risk so a few friends of the Premier can make a quick buck. That is so disappointing.

Back to the Premier: Parks Canada said the government's greenbelt carve-up is going to cause irreversible

harm to wildlife. The federal government says the risks are real. This government muzzled the Greenbelt Council. It's becoming increasingly clear that consultation did not happen—not at all.

So my question to the Premier is, beyond the guests at his family function, who did he consult on the impacts of his greenbelt carve-up?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition is quite correct: I was there when the Rouge National Urban Park was being created because the Rouge National Urban Park, for the most part, is in my riding. What we did at the time was, we took 5,000 acres of land that was scheduled to be part of the Toronto airport and we returned it to farmers and gave them long-term, 100-year leases. Do you know who was against that, colleagues? Do you know who voted against the Rouge National Urban Park? It was the federal NDP, it was the federal Green Party, and it was the federal Liberals, including this Prime Minister. Do you know why? Because they wanted to kick farmers off that land and reforest that land. But it was a Stephen Harper Conservative government that said no. And do you know what? It was a Progressive Conservative government, under Mike Harris, that protected that area in the first place. And they voted against it.

So I say very clearly to the leader of His Majesty's opposition: Either work with us to build new housing or get out of the way.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Stop the clock.

Order.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order. The House will come to order.

Start the clock.

Final supplementary.

Ms. Marit Stiles: I can tell you, Speaker, we're not going to get out of the way. We're going to stand up for the greenbelt. We're going to stand up for the people across this province who care about farmland, about our green land.

Ontarians know that this government's greenbelt grab has nothing at all to do with housing. They are not convinced by any of this. It has everything to do with a handful of very well-connected insiders making a lot of money.

Speaker, the reality is, this government's plan won't build a single new unit of affordable housing.

If this government truly cared about making sure that Ontarians had good places to call home, they'd be ending exclusionary zoning and investing to build non-profit, co-op and supportive housing.

My question to the Premier is, instead of bulldozing the greenbelt, will you invest in truly affordable housing on the land we already have?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Members will please take their seats.

To reply, the government House leader.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I don't think it's any surprise to anybody on this side of the House that the Leader of the Opposition has suggested that they will continue to be in the way of building more houses for the people of the province of Ontario, because that is at the core of who the NDP are now. They get in the way of everything. They get in the way of building more homes. They get in the way of building a better, stronger Ontario. They get in the way of opening up the Ring of Fire so that we can have more jobs in the north. They get in the way of building more electric vehicle plants. They get in the way of transit and transportation, including the biggest investment in subways in the history of this province. They get in the way of building more roads so that we can get our products to market. They get in the way of the Minister of Energy, who wants the cleanest grid to the world—the SMR, the small modular reactor. They get in the way of that. They get in the way of everything the Minister of Education is doing to make our students the best students in the world, everything that the Minister of Colleges and Universities has done, everything that the Minister of Labour has done. But do you know what? We clear all of that with the minister of red tape, and we build a better Ontario—

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

1040

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Ms. Marit Stiles: I think it's fair to say that this government and this Premier have been under a cloud of suspicion—lucrative patronage appointments doled out to Conservative donors, cozy relationships with developers who stand to gain from carving up the greenbelt, a revolving door of lobbyists from ministers' offices. And while ordinary Ontarians are struggling to keep a roof over their heads and put food on the table or get the health care they deserve, this government is doling out gifts to everyone that they know.

My question is to the Premier: Are the interests of regular people in this province taking a back seat to the interests of their friends and donors?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: Listen to the question of the Leader of the Opposition. She just stated that she wants to get in the way of having new homes for the people of the province of Ontario. There are the next generation of Ontarians who just want the same thing that all of us have. They want to have the opportunity to have their first home. That is why people have come to this province for so many generations. But the NDP want to stand in the way of that. They want to stand in the way of the incredible work that the Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade has done to bring thousands of jobs back to the province of Ontario.

So what are we doing? We are building a bigger, better, stronger province of Ontario, and we are doing it by working together across government to make sure that that

happens for the people of the province of Ontario. And they're seeing the results, Mr. Speaker. Paycheques are getting better. It is getting easier to do business in the province of Ontario. Do you know who else is seeing the results? The billions of dollars of companies that are flocking to the province of Ontario to join with us in building a better, stronger—

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: Speaker, that's all very interesting, because just yesterday, it was revealed that insiders with connections to private health care companies have donated at least \$35,000 to the Conservatives since the 2018 election. Donations from private clinic owners, from developers looking to build private hospitals—curious, given this government's recent choice to start funneling public money towards private health facilities.

Again, to the Premier—I'd appreciate a real answer: Doesn't the government realize how this looks? How do you explain it?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): A reminder to members to make their comments through the Chair.

Government House leader.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Speaker, I don't know who's writing these questions for the Leader of the Opposition.

What are we doing in health care? We are spending billions of dollars in every part of this province to build a bigger, better, stronger health care system. We're building massive amounts of investment in Niagara—and not only in new hospitals. We looked at their small hospitals and we decided that we have to do a better job of funding their small and medium hospitals. So we're doing that—the largest investment in hospitals in Ottawa. We're doing that in long-term care. We work with the Minister of Colleges and Universities to make sure that we have the staff to support all of this massive investment.

And hey, go figure, we want to do things differently so that the people of the province can have a better health care system going forward. But do you know who's standing in the way of that? It's the Leader of the Opposition, because they're stuck in the 1940s. I thought Dr. Horwath was bad enough, but now we have Dr. Stiles, who knows everything. But despite it, we'll get the job done—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Stop the clock.

I'll remind the members to refer to each other by their riding names or their ministerial title, as applicable.

Start the clock.

The final supplementary.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Speaker, the timing is curious too, because some insiders were making donations to the Conservative Party at the same time they were lobbying this government to privatize health care. In fact, one donor made a very significant contribution to the Conservative Party just two days after their private company received a lucrative licence to do 5,000 cataract surgeries. Another started donating to the Conservatives just last year, and now, suddenly, his company—guess what?—stands to benefit from privatized health care imaging.

To the Premier: Ontarians want to know, is this a return to cash for access in Ontario? Is this how we get it done in Ontario again, under the Conservative government?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'm going to caution the Leader of the Opposition on her use of language.

The government House leader.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Do you know how we get it done in the province of Ontario? First, what we do is, we make sure we put policies forward, and the people of the province of Ontario elect a Progressive Conservative government to get the job done. And then we look and we say, "How can we improve Ontario?" We say the first thing we've got to do is get rid of the red tape regulation that was killing this province. We did.

Then we said we have to stabilize our energy sector. We did it.

We have to reinvest in infrastructure. We are doing it.

We have to reinvest in our health care system to build better communities. We're doing it.

Do you know who votes against it all the time? It's the Leader of the Opposition and that party.

Imagine a Leader of the Opposition, an NDP party, trying to suggest that they hold the high bar in ethics. I wonder how Kevin Yarde feels about that high bar on ethics—who was drummed out of the party because of that. This is a party that elected a leader because nobody else wanted to get into the race—but now we're finding out that there was never going to be a race because the decks were cleared.

ACCESSIBILITY FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

MPP Lise Vaugeois: Twenty-one days ago, the government received a report on the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act. The report states: "The Premier of Ontario, and his cabinet, have yet to meet even the basic needs of people with disabilities." Adding insult to injury, the AODA Alliance, a group concerned with implementing the act, has met with every Premier since the AODA was passed in 2005, but not this Premier.

Speaker, through you: Will the Premier commit to meeting with the alliance and immediately work to fully implement the AODA?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): To reply, the Minister for Seniors and Accessibility.

Hon. Raymond Sung Joon Cho: Thanks to the member opposite for this important question.

Mr. Speaker, "Nothing without us"—our accessibility community wants their voice heard. This is why people with disabilities are involved in the design and evolution of program and service delivery in Ontario. Their voice matters.

We welcome the feedback from Rich Donovan to improve accessibility across Ontario.

Under the leadership of this Premier, we are the first provincial government to have a ministry and cabinet position dedicated to advancing accessibility in Ontario. We are building a more accessible Ontario together.

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

MPP Lise Vaugeois: I hope there will actually be a date, then, made with the AODA Alliance as soon as possible.

Each five-year review has expressed grave concerns about the lack of progress implementing the AODA. The third review in 2019 by the late Honourable David Onley called the experience of Ontarians with disabilities “soul-crushing.” And the current review says, “Due to 17 years of inaction, any excuse to delay is laughable and wildly insulting.”

Speaker, will the Premier tell the three million Ontarians with a disability what he’s doing to ensure Ontario is fully accessible by the target year of 2025?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I’d ask members to please take their seats.

The Minister for Seniors and Accessibility.

Hon. Raymond Sung Joon Cho: Thank you to the honourable member for that question.

When David Onley gave me his report on the AODA, he told me, “Raymond, the number one thing you can do to create a more accessible Ontario is to help people with disabilities get meaningful jobs.”

I want to thank my good friend the Minister of Labour for the investment into the Skills Development Fund. We are making sure that people with disabilities have the right programs, services and training to find meaningful jobs.

When it comes to leadership here, there is no better advocate for accessibility than this Premier.

1050

FISCAL AND ECONOMIC POLICY

Mr. Graham McGregor: I want to ask the government House leader a question after that clinic he put on this morning, but my constituents want me to ask a question of the Minister of Finance.

Speaker, as global events, high interest rates and on-going supply chain issues contribute to worldwide economic uncertainty, we’re experiencing the effects here in Ontario. While Canada’s inflation rate is easing, it’s still stubbornly high, and we know that people are struggling. We remain in a time of elevated inflation that is straining household budgets by driving up prices on everyday goods and services.

People across Ontario are looking to our government to put forward measures that will provide them with direct help and support.

Can the minister please explain how our government is working on behalf of Ontarians during these uncertain economic times?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound, the parliamentary assistant.

Mr. Rick Byers: Thank you to the hard-working and amazing member from Brampton North for that question.

We all know that these are challenging economic times. As we navigate this uncertainty, one thing I have absolute confidence in is the resilience of Ontario’s workers, businesses, families and its people. Ontario has proven time and again that together we can overcome any obstacle that’s in our way.

And our government has a responsible plan. Our plan to build Ontario is supporting families, workers and businesses while laying a strong fiscal foundation for the future. We are continuing to take a targeted approach after unprecedented investments in response to the pandemic. Now is the time for our government to be prudent and responsible while investing in the priorities for today and planning for the future.

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

Mr. Graham McGregor: Thank you to the parliamentary assistant for that excellent response. It was so good that I’ve got another question for him.

It’s reassuring that our government is focusing on actions and investments that will support individuals, families, seniors and businesses.

Because of the reckless policies of the previous Liberal government, supported by the NDP, Ontario’s fiscal position was severely weakened.

That’s why it is necessary for our government to continue with forward-looking and solution-oriented approaches to successfully navigate our province through this period of economic uncertainty.

With Ontario’s growing population, diverse workforce and an abundance of natural resources, we are well positioned in many areas for continued economic growth and prosperity.

Can the parliamentary assistant please explain the priorities of our government’s economic vision for Ontarians?

Mr. Rick Byers: Thank you for that fantastic question from a fantastic member.

What I can say is, over the past couple of years, Ontario and the rest of the world faced a once-in-a-generation challenge unlike any in our lifetimes.

We have a strong plan for Ontario. By being fiscally prudent and responsible, we can overcome any challenge that comes our way. That’s why I will be proud to be in this chamber tomorrow, when the minister tables the 2023 budget. Ontario’s Plan to Build is a responsible, targeted approach to help people and businesses. This is a long-term economic vision. We are making the investments that we need today while laying a strong fiscal foundation for future generations.

WATER QUALITY

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Today is World Water Day. Access to clean water is a basic human right.

Children like four-year-old Kayde from North Caribou Lake First Nation face serious medical issues and even

have to be medevaced out to a hospital to treat their skin conditions.

Premier, will Ontario commit to studying the long-term health effects of boil-water advisories to help children like Kayde?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): To reply, the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks.

Hon. David Piccini: Thank you to the member for that important question on World Water Day.

Speaker, our government is proud of our record in keeping Ontario's drinking water safe for all Ontarians. We have comprehensive legislation and a regulatory framework, including the Safe Drinking Water Act, the Clean Water Act, the Health Protection and Promotion Act. We know water on reserves does not fall under that; it falls under federal legislation. Having said that, that's not good enough. We're working with the federal government and with Indigenous communities.

It was this government that, for the first time ever, in the mandate of Walkerton and the Ontario Clean Water Agency, included a mandate to engage with Indigenous communities. I'm pleased to say members of the Ontario Clean Water Agency and Walkerton have been in a number of Indigenous communities on a 24/7 basis, working with Indigenous water operators and the federal government, because it's not good enough—as previous governments, supported by the NDP—to just pass the buck.

We're leaning in, working with Indigenous communities.

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

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Not everyone has access to clean drinking water. Everyone here—all you do is snap your fingers if you want clean drinking water.

And you cannot use jurisdiction as an excuse to not do anything.

Recently, Indigenous health researcher Jeffrey Ansloos found a correlation between drinking water advisories and suicides in First Nations. Ontario has the highest rate of long-term drinking water advisories and one of the highest rates of suicide in First Nations in Canada. We live it in Kiiwetinoong.

What is Ontario doing to protect First Nations youth from the serious effects associated with lack of access to clean drinking water?

Hon. David Piccini: Again, I appreciate the question from the member opposite. I don't think they heard when I said we're not passing the buck, as previous governments have done, supported by the NDP 99% of the time.

The member asked what we're doing.

If we're going to be intellectually honest with ourselves on the challenge—a lot of it stems from lack of training for water operation.

We know the federal government—this was Indigenous communities that said to the federal government, “Pay us a fair wage.” We supported them.

What has Ontario done? Well, as of June 2022, 168 operators and 116 managers or supervisors have been

trained at no cost to Indigenous communities. This was never done by the previous Liberal government. Our government is standing up, working at no cost to these Indigenous communities, and we're going to work together with them. If the member opposite has any specific communities he feels are not benefiting from that training, let me know and we'll make sure we have water operators there to work with them.

EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: My question is for the Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development.

The commitment by the Premier and this minister to advance protection for workers has been continuously demonstrated with measures that support them and help to build Ontario for the next generation.

Across our province, thousands of brave men and women are military reservists with the Canadian Armed Forces. These individuals go above and beyond their regular jobs and normal workday to selflessly answer the call of duty in service of our country, both at home and abroad. Reservists should not face an uncertain future when they return to their civilian jobs after deployment.

Can the minister please explain what our government is doing to support our military reservists?

Hon. Monte McNaughton: I want to thank the MPP from Mississauga–Erin Mills for this really important question.

Speaker, our government, under the leadership of Premier Ford, is standing with our military reservists and their families. On Monday, I introduced our third Working for Workers Act. This bill creates a new job-protected leave for military heroes who need time to recover from physical injuries or mental trauma. Anyone who is willing to drop everything to help their neighbours should be rewarded and not punished. They deserve the peace of mind that their civilian jobs will be waiting for them when they are ready to come back to them. I'm proud that our reservist leave will be the most flexible and comprehensive in the country.

Our government is going to continue working for the workers of Ontario.

I look forward to answering more in the supplementary.

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

1100

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Thanks to the minister for that response.

Since day one, our government has been working for workers, and it is continuing to lead the country with groundbreaking protections.

It is a fact that the way people work has changed. The dynamic has shifted from in-office work to other formats. In 2022, 1.4 million people in Ontario were working remotely, and 800,000 were working hybrid jobs.

Workers also need greater certainty, when starting a new job, that they have been given information about the nature of their job before they start their first shift.

It is vital that regulations and employment standards keep up with the new reality.

Can the minister please explain how our government is ensuring that our labour laws reflect the changing world of work?

Hon. Monte McNaughton: I want to thank the member for Mississauga—Erin Mills for this question and his leadership in standing up for workers in his riding.

Speaker, remote workers who don't have a desk in the office are just as valuable to our economy, and they shouldn't be treated as second-class workers. That is why our government is changing our employment standards laws to ensure they receive the same enhanced severance payments during mass layoffs as their in-office colleagues.

We also know that asking your boss questions on day one of a new job can be daunting, especially for young workers, newcomers and those in precarious roles. To protect their workers, we're requiring that employers provide them with basic information on their role and how much they'll be paid before they actually start their first shift.

Under the leadership of our Premier and our government, we are rebalancing the scales and putting workers in the driver's seat of Ontario's economic recovery.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Ms. Sandy Shaw: My question this morning is for the Premier.

Today is World Water Day.

The UN just released a frightening warning that without urgent climate action, we risk leaving our children with a world that faces extreme weather events and regular flooding. But instead of urgent action, your government is making things much, much worse by unilaterally steamrolling the greenbelt and destroying important wetlands that prevent flooding.

My question, Premier: We already know that your government is working to protect developers, but why won't you honour treaty obligations and future generations of Ontarians by protecting our water?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks.

Hon. David Piccini: I appreciate the question from the member opposite.

It's important that Ontarians know that we're very blessed to live in this province that has such robust standards for water—the Safe Drinking Water Act, the Clean Water Act, the Health Protection and Promotion Act.

It's unfortunate that the member opposite is choosing to politicize water rather than work with this government to make investments that protect water.

That's why, as a government, as I mentioned in the previous answer, we've worked at no charge to train water operators—dealing with systemic challenges in training for water operators—in Indigenous communities. That's why we're working with rural municipalities, the Ontario Clean Water Agency, and dealing with staff and retention

challenges there. That's why we're investing in the modern and critical infrastructure.

That member said “urgent action”—that's why we've required updated monitoring and reporting in her own community, to ensure that we're protecting water for generations to come and investing in the modern infrastructure to support those growing communities.

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

Ms. Sandy Shaw: It's really unfortunate to hear the Minister of the Environment call, when we raise issues about boil-water advisories and the climate crisis—calling that politicization is just foolhardy.

This government has no credible climate plan—none whatsoever—and obviously no clear provincial water strategy. This is the government that fired scientists, muzzled the Greenbelt Council, and kneecapped conservation authorities in their important work to protect our watersheds—watersheds that clean our water, protect endangered species and allow bodies of water to remain in the earth and not in our basements.

Back to the Premier: In the spirit of World Water Day, what will you do today to protect the greenbelt and its watershed for our future generations of young people?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry.

Hon. Graydon Smith: This government is doing more around wetlands than any government has done previously.

Speaker, the previous government, backed up by the opposition, presided over the loss of wetlands in Ontario—tens of thousands of hectares gone.

This government has a different approach. This government has an approach where we want to expand wetlands in Ontario, expand natural features in Ontario. We are going to do that. The previous government could not do it, would not do it. The opposition continues to talk a game that they can't back up. We're doing it. We're getting it done. We're protecting wetlands in Ontario.

ARTS AND CULTURAL FUNDING SUBVENTIONS POUR LES ARTS ET LA CULTURE

M^{me} Lucille Collard: I have a question for the Premier.

The arts industry plays an important role in our everyday life, whether we realize it or not. All those moments we're not working, we're somehow consuming art, and it improves our well-being and the economy.

We know that the arts industry has suffered incredibly during the pandemic, and it's still struggling to recover. Just because we are in a post-pandemic economy doesn't mean our artists don't need our support anymore. The current high inflation makes it particularly difficult for artists to continue their work, let alone expand.

With the new budget coming out, people have been reaching out to express their concerns about proposed cuts. They've been writing to the Minister of Finance and also

to the Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport, so they know about it.

How is it reasonable to encourage our youth to get educated and follow their dreams while cutting funding in venues they could earn a living with?

Will this government ensure the survival of creative industries and support the artists who drive them?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport.

Hon. Neil Lumsden: Thank you very much for the question. I appreciate it, and it's timely.

I will express a couple of thoughts afterwards, but I'll get to the point and cut to the chase: The Ontario Arts Council funding is being maintained at the current levels for the upcoming year. So worrying about cuts, at this point, isn't what we are talking about. We're talking about and working with people to take advantage of what they have, what they will continue to have, and the impact they will have on our communities.

The arts are cherished by this ministry and this government. It extends into tourism, certainly culture, and makes a huge impact on all demographics—from kids in schools, to be able to go out and experience art, to experience the artists who are delivering it. And we understand from a cultural piece, it has played a huge role in Ontario's growth. Billions and billions of dollars are spent in tourism—and because of the arts, will get even stronger.

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

M^{me} Lucille Collard: The funding in Ontario has stayed the same over the last few years, while BC and Quebec have seen significant increases, so maybe we should take note.

L'Association des auteurs et auteures de l'Ontario français et le Conseil des arts de l'Ontario travaillent sans relâche pour promouvoir et enrichir les oeuvres culturelles, y compris la littérature, les spectacles et les expositions d'art visuel de l'Ontario. Leur travail est crucial pour la croissance et la vitalité d'un secteur qui contribue à notre divertissement et notre économie.

Les coupures envisagées—ou le même budget, qui ne sera pas suffisant—aux individus et associations impliqués dans le secteur des arts, seraient particulièrement inquiétantes pour les communautés francophones de l'Ontario, qui dépendent du financement des arts pour promouvoir et préserver notre langue et culture.

Nous avons fait des progrès dans la francophonie. Nous devons continuer de protéger et d'étendre notre culture francophone. Sans le financement nécessaire, nous allons faire face à un recul.

Est-ce que le gouvernement s'engage à assurer la vitalité de la culture francophone et la viabilité du milieu culturel en maintenant le financement dans le domaine des arts de l'Ontario?

Hon. Neil Lumsden: Thank you again for the question.

Mr. Speaker, I'll go back a little bit in time: Since 2018, we have invested over \$1.1 billion in arts, culture through

the ministry program and agencies. This includes nearly \$340 million for the OAC.

In the OAC, we address all art; we don't single things out specifically. Francophone art—that world is very important to us, and we've addressed it. We talk in terms, with respect to our government, of supporting all, not just defining one—the impact within tourism, as I said earlier; the cultural piece; what it does to communities and helps build in communities; the people within those communities who not only actually participate in the arts and the delivery of it, but those who enjoy it and support it and drive the revenue and build communities. Building communities is a part of what we do and what we focus on, and the culture in our sector is very important and will continue to be important to this government.

NORTHERN ONTARIO DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Ross Romano: My question is for the Minister of Northern Development.

1110

Under the previous Liberal government, workers in northern, rural and remote communities felt abandoned. Manufacturing plants closed, jobs were destroyed, and the local economy in many communities—my own included—was devastated. Year after year, the Liberals and the NDP chose to focus on urban issues instead of listening to the needs and concerns that are important to the people across northern Ontario.

Communities across the north are counting on our government to promote economic and community development. The north is ripe with opportunities for creating employment, as well as promoting economic and community development and modernizing business operations. It's not just a beautiful place with beautiful and amazing people.

Can the minister please explain how our government is investing in Ontario's northern communities to promote opportunities for good-paying jobs?

Hon. Greg Rickford: I want to thank the member from Sault St. Marie. He does a fantastic job in that city, making sure that industry in Sault St. Marie is on the cutting edge—that's exactly what these kinds of announcements are focused on.

The computer numerical control lathe is like no other. Its accuracy and timing consumption factor—it sounds kind of technical, but basically it allows them to do more work on larger-scale projects, including building much-needed locomotive trains, putting northern Ontario into a sector more actively than it has ever been. This is the kind of technology that isn't just protecting jobs; it's creating new, high-tech jobs in the manufacturing sector in northern Ontario—that walked out the door under the previous government.

We're back. We've got a great member from Sault St. Marie who is protecting and creating jobs in his city, and we couldn't be more pleased to support him.

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

Mr. Ross Romano: Thank you again, Minister, for that wonderful response. It is welcome news to hear that our government is focused on supporting the north and investing in communities like mine, in Sault St. Marie.

Mr. Speaker, let me say, through you to this House: Our government has been so incredibly committed to communities like mine across the north. Just in my own community—I can say the minister has been in my riding I can't even count how many times; the Premier has been to the riding I can't even count how many times. It's such a welcome thing for our community to see these investments and the real attention that this government is putting in our community and throughout northern Ontario—unlike the previous Liberal government—because our government is optimistic and it does recognize that funding is very, very critical to contributing to building our local and regional economies.

Can the minister please explain how investments by our government will continue to help businesses in my riding to prosper?

Hon. Greg Rickford: I just had a chance to speak about SIS Manufacturing and what a busy business quarter we had at the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund, targeting investments in Sault St. Marie—because it flows from things like a new electric arc furnace, new capacities at Tenaris to build state-of-the-art pipeline networks for our country and parts beyond.

We also supported a company called Apex Cranes. Apex Cranes was able to leverage our investment to purchase an Alliance 38M concrete pumper truck. This will provide new vertical and horizontal reach for larger-scale construction projects. That's twice I've said that about Sault St. Marie—larger-scale construction projects.

As it repositions itself to be a world-class steel manufacturer and centre of mining processing, we're making sure Sault St. Marie is in the best position possible to realize its optimal value.

CHILD CARE

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: My question is to the Premier.

While families across the province are waiting for \$10-a-day child care, this government's low-wage policies threaten the program. Already, child care centres across Ontario are having to close rooms and limit enrolment due to staffing challenges. Families are on wait-lists that are growing.

Experts have said that Ontario needs another 65,000 ECEs and child care staff by 2026.

The Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario has urged this government to implement a province-wide salary scale for registered ECEs and child care staff to address staffing issues. Why is the government refusing to do so?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: We signed a deal with the federal government that is now delivering a 50% reduction in fees for families in this province—\$8,000 to \$12,000 per child for every child they have in a child care centre. That is a huge achievement and step forward. We also committed

to build 86,000 spaces in the province to meet the growing needs of child care. Mr. Speaker, 46,000 spaces have been created to date. We also agree that we need more staff as we grow demand and reduce fees and increase access to an affordable child care system for working parents in this province. It's why we increased wages each and every year of this agreement by \$1 per hour, with a floor now imposed in the sector.

We know there's more to do. It's why the government launched a workforce consultation with those stakeholders and many others.

I will note the irony of New Democrats, who advocate for affordability but who would have excluded 70,000 for-profit families who depend on access in this province. We'll stand up for all of them.

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

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: We are losing more child care educators than we can train, and this government has not done much beyond committing to expanding training opportunities.

The average ECE in Ontario spends just three years working in the sector. Ontario will not be able to offer \$10-a-day child care without child care workers.

The Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care says that none of the strategies the government has put on the table will work until we deal with the low wages.

Will the minister listen to the experts and take action to address the staffing shortage by paying child care workers fair wages?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: First of all, for all ECEs working within our schools, just in the CUPE deal alone, they're eligible for over 4% increases each and every year for the next four years. That's a huge advantage. Mr. Speaker, 31,000 spaces, under our government, were created within our publicly funded school system, so a significant amount of the ECEs the member opposite speaks about are benefiting from wage enhancements with the fair deal we signed with CUPE. For the rest of the sector, we launched a consultation with the aim of incentivizing those workers to stay. It's why, in the deal with the feds, we announced a \$1-per-hour increase each and every year. We created a minimum, a floor, that didn't exist in the sector, raising wages for those who were on the lower end of that scale.

We're going to continue to step up to support the workers, but most especially the families who now can afford child care—a 50% reduction, an \$8,000 to \$12,000 reduction per child. That's going to make a big difference as we save families money in this tough economy.

WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT

Ms. Patrice Barnes: My question is for the Associate Minister of Women's Social and Economic Opportunity.

Over the next six years, Ontario's construction sector will need to hire 72,000 additional workers due to retirements and expected job growth. However, the reality is that women remain under-represented in this growing sector. Unfortunately, as in so many areas, barriers are

preventing women from achieving their full potential in the skilled trades. Some of these obstacles include PPE and other equipment that is not tailored to women. For women to safely and effectively perform their jobs, they must be properly outfitted in uniforms, boots and safety harnesses.

Can the associate minister please explain how our government is making workplaces safer for women?

Hon. Charmaine A. Williams: Thank you to the PA of education, especially for their work on seeing high school students take courses in technological classes. It's such an important advancement, especially for the young girls who are going to be leaders in the trades.

Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to be a part of a government that believes that women become economically empowered when they have the resources they need to be successful.

Part of women's safety and productivity in the workforce is ensuring that they have proper personal protective equipment. Currently, the standard for PPE excludes women's body types, which can compromise the effectiveness of the protective equipment and have unsafe consequences.

Last week, the Minister of Labour and I announced systemic changes that will protect women in the trades. The Working for Workers legislation makes clear the requirement that PPE and clothing be properly fitted to workers with diverse body types. Workplaces that are safer and more equitable help increase women's participation in the workforce, and these changes are going to—

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

Ms. Patrice Barnes: Thank you to the associate minister for that response.

In Ontario, there are 500,000 construction workers; just a small percentage of those are women. Unfortunately, for women who work in the skilled trades, they're frequently exposed to a lack of or poorly maintained washroom facilities at their work sites. This is unacceptable, and it is a deterrent for women wanting to take up careers in the skilled trades. It's very important that women are provided with the supports they need to work safely and comfortably. In this instance, it's ensuring that washrooms for female workers on job sites are adhering to equitable workplace health and safety standards.

1120

Can the associate minister please elaborate on what measures our government is implementing that will ensure safety and equity for female workers?

Hon. Charmaine A. Williams: Thank you again to the member from Ajax for the question.

I've travelled across Ontario listening to women's stories, and I have learned of women's washrooms being inaccessible for female staff. This is unacceptable, especially because only one in 10 construction workers in Ontario are women. If we want to attract more women to these well-paying and rewarding careers, we need to make sure our job sites are safer and equipped with appropriate resources.

Ontario is proposing to require women-only washrooms on construction sites. We're also improving washrooms by requiring them to be completely enclosed, and to have adequate lighting, and to have hand sanitizer where running water is not accessible or possible. And we're doubling the number of toilets on job sites to reduce the distance between washroom facilities.

These proposed regulatory amendments will meet labour demands and bring better jobs and bigger paycheques for women on these job sites in Ontario.

When women succeed, Ontario succeeds.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

HOMELESSNESS

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

In the last year, 50,000 more people left Ontario than have arrived, which is out-migration at a level we have never seen before in this province. Most are young adults aged 25 to 35 who can't afford to save for a home on the salaries they are making—and that includes demoralized, disrespected London West nurses Nicole Forster and Lindsay Smale.

Instead of standing by as nurses like Nicole and Lindsay leave Ontario for good, will the Premier stop fighting nurses in court over the unconstitutional Bill 124 wage cap and start actually fixing the housing affordability crisis?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): To reply, the government House leader.

Hon. Paul Calandra: There's a lot in that question.

On the housing side, we have a housing supply action plan which we brought in, starting in 2018, and the opposition is, of course, not in favour of that. We've spent weeks talking about how we want to build more homes across the province of Ontario, and then the NDP asks one question at the beginning of question period to suggest we should stop building homes, and then towards the end of question period asks another one if we can build more homes. So I'm not sure what it is that they actually want at this point.

Here's the thing that we are doing: We are going to build more homes for all of the people of the province of Ontario.

The second part of the question was with respect to health care and health care resources. I can tell you that, because of the extraordinary work of the Minister of Colleges and Universities, we have more people entering the health care field than at any time in our province's history, and it's so needed because of the massive amount of investments that we're making in health care. In long-term care, I need 27,000 additional health care workers. And thanks to the Minister of Colleges and Universities, we're getting it done.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary question? The member for Niagara Centre.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Thank you, Speaker. Through you to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing: AMO,

representing Ontario's 444 municipalities, recently released an op-ed that stated: "The homelessness crisis in Ontario is not just an unfortunate situation. It is the outcome of decades of policy decisions and poor choices made by successive Ontario governments...."

"The homelessness crisis is a made-in-Ontario crisis that calls out for intelligent and coordinated action on the part of the province."

This Ontario government ranks dead last of all provinces in per capita spending on services.

Will this government change course, acknowledge Ontario's homelessness crisis, and accept AMO's offer to work with the province and municipal governments to end homelessness?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Associate Minister of Housing.

Hon. Michael Parsa: I thank my honourable colleague for the very important question.

What we did is, we brought three older legacy programs and combined them into a new program, the Homelessness Prevention Program, to streamline the process so that service managers spend less time on paperwork and more on helping the people of Ontario who need support. We also increased the funding of this program by \$25 million annually across the province.

Mr. Speaker, on our side, we've been very clear: We've said that we are in a housing supply crisis in our province and it hurts our most vulnerable. It hurts everyone across the board. We're working towards solutions to make sure that we increase the supply across the province.

It's only the opposition that continuously opposes housing in this province—well, it depends on what time at question period. They're for housing at some points during question period and—

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

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order. The minister will take his seat.

The next question.

MINING INDUSTRY

Mr. John Yakubuski: My question is to the Minister of Mines.

Ontario is incredibly fortunate to be home to tremendous mineral wealth. The mining industry in Ontario generates more than \$10 billion in annual mineral production and supports 75,000 direct and indirect jobs in our province. We know how vital this industry is and how much more important it will become as the world transitions to electric vehicles and other clean technologies.

However, in order to maintain and increase our competitive advantage in all phases of the mining processes, regulatory requirements must keep pace with industry needs in order to secure minerals safely and effectively.

Can the minister please explain what our government is doing to secure Ontario's position as a global leader of responsibly sourced critical minerals?

Hon. George Pirie: Thank you for the question from my colleague who works non-stop for his riding.

Mr. Speaker, we are building a supply chain from critical minerals to manufacturing electric vehicles that will create jobs and economic opportunities across the province, but it all starts with mining. We launched the Critical Minerals Strategy that attacks challenges in our sector through investing and cutting red tape. Our strategic investments in exploration and innovation help the brilliant people in our workforce find the mines of the future and solve mining challenges.

We won't stop there. That's why I introduced the Building More Mines Act that, if passed, would reduce regulatory burdens to save companies time and money. This would create business certainty and draw in more investment to the sector. We were happy to see the opposition support this bill at second reading, and we encourage them to continue to do so, to do what is right for this province by continuing—

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

Mr. John Yakubuski: I want to thank the minister for his response. It is great to know that our government is seeking to implement solutions that will lead to future growth and investment in the mining sector.

Under the leadership of our Premier and this minister, the mining sector is strong and innovative. In large part, this success is due to our government's ability to collaborate with industry and local partners to promote economic development opportunities.

During the second reading debate of this bill, we heard the opposition raise questions about the overall effectiveness of these amendments and how these would be received by the mining industry and its leaders.

Can the minister please provide information about how the mining industry is responding to the proposed amendments in our Building More Mines Act?

Hon. George Pirie: Thank you again for the question—and with pleasure.

I recently visited Glencore's world-class Kidd Creek Mine with my colleague the Associate Minister of Transportation. This critical minerals mine is a world-class operation. It is over 10,000 feet deep and is the closest you can get to the earth's core anywhere in the world, right in Timmins. I spoke to management at Glencore, and they told us how much they appreciated having a government that solves problems to keep this sector competitive.

Listen to what Peter Xavier, a vice-president at Glencore, had to say about our bill: "The improvement of processes within the Ministry of Mines will strengthen our Ontario operations and facilitate their expansion." That means more jobs in ridings across the north, including those being represented by the members opposite.

We encourage all members of this House to support our bill, because it cannot take 15 years to build a mine if we are going to secure the supply chain for critical minerals.

1130

TENANT PROTECTION

MPP Jill Andrew: This question is to the Premier.

Renters are spending 30%, 50% or more of their income on rent. Many of them, in St. Paul's, are juggling multiple jobs to scrape together \$2,500 a month or more for a one-bedroom. Some cannot work and are relying on ODSP—or ODS-Poverty I should say; that more accurately describes what this government has done to many folks on ODSP.

In my community, seniors, low-income and young family renters, like most at 55 Brownlow Avenue, in the Yonge and Eglinton area—a rent-controlled building targeted to be demolished—are terrified of being priced out of our St. Paul's neighbourhood, especially if or when Bill 23's threats to municipal rental-replacement bylaws come to light.

My question to the Premier: Will you commit today to protect tenants with real rent control and guaranteed rental replacement?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Associate Minister of Housing.

Hon. Michael Parsa: Thank you very much for the question.

Mr. Speaker, let me be clear once again: There has not been a government in this province for the past 70 years that has provided more protections for tenants than this government has. We protected tenants through Bill 184; we put in various measures to protect tenants. Unfortunately, the opposition voted against every single one of those measures. The rent increase guideline that's currently set at 2.5%—we maxed it at 2.5%, well below inflation; it would have been over 5% if we hadn't taken action. Last year, we capped it at 2.1%.

We have continuously said that we are in a housing supply crisis in this province and it affects everyone. The opposition doesn't seem to understand that. We need to increase supply so that everyone in Ontario has a home that meets their needs and their budgets. They may not care for it. We will, and we will—

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

MPP Jill Andrew: To the folks of St. Paul's watching: The Ford government has just denied us rent control once again.

Some \$2,500 a month for rent is unaffordable for vulnerable communities. They are one demoviction notice away from being unhoused. Just ask the folks, again, at 55 Brownlow—121 units—afraid that they'll be homeless in a matter of time. Ask the folks at 170 Roehampton Avenue, 1233 Yonge Street, 147 to 153 Vaughan Road—and at least a dozen more and counting. Hundreds of rental-purpose units are being lost, government, with no guarantee they will be replaced, thanks to the threats in Bill 23.

My question is back to the Premier: Will you guarantee that demovicted renters have the first right of return with

guaranteed rent control on all buildings, for goodness' sake?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Members will please take their seats.

The Associate Minister of Housing.

Hon. Michael Parsa: Again, I thank you for the question.

Mr. Speaker, last year, in 2022, we had a record number of purpose-built rentals in this province; the year before that, once again, a record number of housing starts—not only just overall, but also for purpose-built rentals.

When it comes to protection for tenants, let me be clear once again: Bill 184—that member was here when we introduced it. It was this member here that put in protection for tenants across the board in this province. What did the opposition do? Vote against it. That's the same thing for opposition—they'll continue to talk about one thing, but when it comes to voting, they will vote against it. They're for housing until we introduce it, and they will vote against it. They're for protection—they will talk about it—but when it comes to actually putting their name behind it, they will vote against it. That's not on this side of the House—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member will take his seat.

The next question.

GOVERNMENT SERVICES

Mr. Kevin Holland: My question is for the Minister of Public and Business Service Delivery.

In my great riding of Thunder Bay–Atikokan, as in many communities across the north, travelling to Service-Ontario centres can be challenging and inconvenient. Dealerships are negatively impacted by long wait times, travel and overly complicated vehicle registration forms. All of these problems lead to loss of productivity, delays and backlogs for users.

It is important that our government takes action to be proactive in finding innovative solutions that will cut red tape for businesses and make access to services faster and more efficient.

Can the minister please explain how our government is expanding vehicle registration transactions?

Hon. Kaleed Rasheed: Thank you to the good member for Thunder Bay–Atikokan for this question.

Speaker, it does not matter whether you live in downtown Timmins or downtown Toronto: Everyone has the right to expect the best service from this government.

That is why, under the leadership of our Premier, this government is leveraging emerging technology and modernizing our province's vehicle services with the automobile industry through their digital dealership registration. Since launching last March, the digitization of the registration process became a monumental shift for the industry. I'm happy to inform the member that in the

second phase of this program, 300 participating dealerships are already registering new passenger vehicles with new licence plates—including electric and used vehicles.

Ontarians can rest assured that this government will never stop working to make their lives easier and our services more accessible.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. That concludes our question period for this morning.

VISITORS

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

Ms. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta: Thank you so much, Speaker. I just wanted to take an opportunity to welcome students from General Haller's Polish school. We have Olivia, Martin, Krystian, Marcel, Amelia, Alexander, Patryk, Magdalena, Maksymilian, Joanna and Julia, and their wonderful teachers Pani Agata and Pani Irena. They are here today to witness our democracy. Welcome to Queen's Park.

DEFERRED VOTES

SENIORS MONTH ACT, 2023

LOI DE 2023 SUR LE MOIS DES PERSONNES ÂGÉES

Deferred vote on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 70, An Act to proclaim the month of June as Seniors Month / Projet de loi 70, Loi proclamant le mois de juin Mois des personnes âgées.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Next, we have a deferred vote on the motion for second reading of Bill 70, An Act to proclaim the month of June as Seniors Month.

Call in the members. This is a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1137 to 1142.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Members will please take their seats.

On March 21, 2023, Ms. Gallagher Murphy moved second reading of Bill 70, An Act to proclaim the month of June as Seniors Month.

All those in favour, please rise and remain standing until recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Anand, Deepak	Ghamari, Goldie	Rakocevic, Tom
Andrew, Jill	Gill, Parm	Rasheed, Kaleed
Armstrong, Teresa J.	Gretzky, Lisa	Rickford, Greg
Babikian, Aris	Grewal, Hardeep Singh	Riddell, Brian
Bailey, Robert	Hardeman, Ernie	Romano, Ross
Barnes, Patrice	Harden, Joel	Sabawy, Sheref
Begum, Doly	Holland, Kevin	Sandhu, Amarjot
Bell, Jessica	Jones, Sylvia	Sarrazin, Stéphane
Blais, Stephen	Jones, Trevor	Sattler, Peggy
Bouma, Will	Jordan, John	Saunderson, Brian
Bourgouin, Guy	Kanapathi, Logan	Schreiner, Mike
Bowman, Stephanie	Karpoche, Bhutia	Scott, Laurie

Breese, Ric	Kernaghan, Terence	Shamji, Adil
Burch, Jeff	Kerzner, Michael S.	Shaw, Sandy
Byers, Rick	Khanjin, Andrea	Skelly, Donna
Calandra, Paul	Kusendova-Bashta, Natalia	Smith, Dave
Cho, Raymond Sung Joon	Leardi, Anthony	Smith, David
Cho, Stan	Lecce, Stephen	Smith, Graydon
Clark, Steve	Lumsden, Neil	Smith, Laura
Coe, Lorne	MacLeod, Lisa	Stevens, Jennifer (Jennie)
Collard, Lucille	Mamakwa, Sol	Stiles, Marit
Cuzzetto, Rudy	Martin, Robin	Surma, Kinga
Dixon, Jess	McCarthy, Todd J.	Tabuns, Laura
Dowie, Andrew	McGregor, Graham	Tangri, Nina
Downey, Doug	McMahon, Mary-Margaret	Taylor, Monique
Dunlop, Jill	McNaughton, Monte	Thanigasalam, Vijay
Fife, Catherine	Mulroney, Caroline	Tibollo, Michael A.
Flack, Rob	Pang, Billy	Vanthof, John
Ford, Michael D.	Parsa, Michael	Vaugeois, Lise
Fraser, John	Pasma, Chandra	Wai, Daisy
French, Jennifer K.	Piccini, David	Williams, Charmaine A.
Fullerton, Merrilee	Pierre, Natalie	Wong-Tam, Kristyn
Gallagher Murphy, Dawn	Pirie, George	Yakubski, John
Gates, Wayne	Quinn, Nolan	
Gélinas, France	Rae, Matthew	

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): All those opposed to the motion will please rise and remain standing until recognized by the Clerk.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Todd Decker): The ayes are 103; the nays are 0.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I declare the motion carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Pursuant to standing order 100(h), the bill is referred to the Committee of the Whole House.

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: The Standing Committee on Social Policy, please.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Is the majority in favour of this bill being referred to the Standing Committee on Social Policy? Agreed? Agreed.

VISITORS

Miss Monique Taylor: Point of order, Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Point of order: the member for Hamilton Mountain.

Miss Monique Taylor: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We just realized that our page Keya's family is here, so we wanted to introduce them. We have her mom, Reena; her dad, Shashank; and sisters Arya and Ayaan Dudhwala. Welcome to Queen's Park.

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

The House recessed from 1147 to 1300.

PETITIONS

OPP DETACHMENT

M^{me} France Gélinas: I am really proud to present this petition that was signed by—we are at 1,500 names. The

last name we have is Colette Riess from Noëlville. It reads as follows:

“Keep the Noëlville OPP Detachment Open....

“Whereas insufficient communications and consultations have taken place with communities and relevant stakeholders concerning the OPP Noëlville detachment’s continuing operations; and

“Whereas the residents and visitors in the municipalities of French River, Markstay-Warren, St.-Charles, Killarney and Britt-Byng Inlet as well as the First Nations of Dokis and Henvey Inlet deserve equitable access to a reliable, timely and efficient police response;”

They “petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario” as follows: “to direct the Ministry of the Solicitor General and the Ontario Provincial Police to continue having Ontario Provincial Police officers reporting to an operational detachment location in Noëlville.”

I fully support this petition, Speaker, will affix my name to it and send it to the Clerk with a good page.

SOINS DE SANTÉ

M. Guy Bourgouin: Je remercie Bertrand Isabelle d’Opasatika pour une pétition intitulée « Soins de santé : pas à vendre.

« À l’Assemblée législative de l’Ontario :

« Alors que les Ontariennes et les Ontariens devraient obtenir des soins de santé en fonction de leurs besoins—et non de la taille de leur portefeuille;

« Alors que le premier ministre, Doug Ford, et la ministre de la Santé, Sylvia Jones, ont déclaré qu’ils prévoyaient privatiser certaines parties des soins de santé;

« Alors que la privatisation poussera les infirmières, les médecins et les PSSP hors de nos hôpitaux publics, aggravant ainsi la crise des soins de santé;

« Alors que la privatisation se termine toujours avec une facture pour les patients;

« Par conséquent, nous, soussignés, demandons à l’Assemblée législative de l’Ontario d’arrêter immédiatement tous les plans visant à privatiser davantage le système de soins de santé de l’Ontario et de résoudre la crise des soins de santé en :

« —abrogeant la loi 124 et recrutant, retenant et respectant les médecins, les infirmières et les PSSP avec de meilleurs salaires et conditions de travail;

« —certifiant les titres de compétences de dizaines de milliers d’infirmières et d’autres professionnels de la santé formés à l’étranger déjà en Ontario, qui attendent des années et paient des milliers de dollars pour être autorisés à travailler;

« —rendant l’éducation et la formation gratuites ou peu coûteuses pour les infirmières, les médecins et les autres professionnels de la santé;

« —incitant les médecins et les infirmières à choisir de vivre et travailler dans le nord de l’Ontario;

« —finançant les hôpitaux pour qu’ils aient suffisamment d’infirmières à chaque quart de travail, dans chaque département. »

Je supporte cette pétition. Je vais la signer et la remettre à Mikael pour l’amener au bureau des greffiers.

ADOPTION DISCLOSURE

Miss Monique Taylor: I would like to thank Monica Byrne on behalf of Parent Finders for the following petition:

“Extend Access to Post-Adoption Birth Information.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas current legislation does not provide access to post-adoption birth information (identifying information) to next of kin if an adult adopted person or a natural/birth parent is deceased;

“Whereas this barrier to accessing post-adoption birth information separates immediate family members and prohibits the children of deceased adopted people from gaining knowledge of their identity and possible Indigenous heritage;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to extend access to post-adoption birth information ... to next of kin, and/or extended next of kin, if an adult adopted person or a natural/birth parent is deceased.”

I support this petition, will affix my name to it and give it to page Mia to bring to the Clerk.

LAND USE PLANNING

Ms. Sandy Shaw: World Water Day is today so it gives me a great honour to present a petition entitled “Protect the Greenbelt.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Bill 23 is the Ford government’s latest attempt to remove protected land from the greenbelt, allowing developers to bulldoze and pave over 7,000 acres of farmland in the greenbelt;

“Whereas Ontario is already losing 319.6 acres of farmland and green space daily to development;

“Whereas the government’s Housing Affordability Task Force found there are plenty of places to build homes without destroying the greenbelt;

“Whereas Ford’s repeated moves to tear up farmland and bulldoze wetlands have never been about housing, but are about making the rich richer;

“Whereas green spaces and farmland are what we rely on to grow our food, support natural habitats and prevent flooding;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to immediately amend Bill 23, stop all plans to further remove protected land from the greenbelt and protect existing farmland in the province by passing the NDP’s Protecting Agricultural Land Act.”

I fully agree with this petition. I’m going to sign it and give it to Savannah to take to the table.

ARTS AND CULTURAL FUNDING

MPP Jill Andrew: This petition is called “Invest in Ontario’s Arts and Culture Sector.”

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the arts and culture sector contributes \$28.7 billion to Ontario’s GDP and creates over 300,000 jobs;

“Whereas the Ontario Arts Council budget has not been increased at Ontario’s rate of inflation, exacerbating the income precarity of artists and cultural workers, some of whom are earning less than \$25,000 per year, and still less for those from equity-deserving groups;

“Whereas the income precarity was worsened during the pandemic through issues of regulatory unfairness in the arts and culture sector, disproportionately impacting the performing arts sector and OAC-determined priority groups, including BIPOC, Indigenous, women, people with disabilities, and LGBTQIA2S+ artists and cultural workers;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to sustain the Ontario Arts Council budget of \$65 million” minimum “in the 2023 provincial budget and adequately invest in the arts and culture sector, including supports for equity-deserving groups, small, medium and grassroots collectives in our communities, and individual artists to ensure their personal and economic survival.”

I couldn’t agree more. I’ve affixed my signature and will hand this to Felicity for tabling.

VOLUNTEER SERVICE AWARDS

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas in the First and Second World Wars, over 7,000 First Nation members, as well as an unknown number of Métis, Inuit and other Indigenous recruits, voluntarily served in the Canadian Armed Forces; and

“Whereas countless Indigenous peoples bravely and selflessly served Canada at a time of great challenges for Canada; and

“Whereas this spirit of volunteerism and community marked the life of the late Murray Whetung, who volunteered to serve in the Second World War; and

“Whereas many First Nations individuals lost their status after serving in the wars off-reserve for a period of time; and

“Whereas despite this injustice, many continued to recognize the value in continuously giving back to their community; and

“Whereas the values of volunteerism and community are instilled in the army, air, and sea cadets across Ontario; and

“Whereas the Murray Whetung Community Service Award Act establishes an award for the cadets and tells the story of Indigenous veterans’ sacrifice and mistreatment;

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

“To urge all members of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to support the passage of the Murray Whetung Community Service Award Act, 2022.”

I proudly affix my signature, and I will give this to page Mia.

ARTS AND CULTURAL FUNDING

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: This petition is titled “Invest in Ontario’s Arts and Culture Sector.”

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the arts and culture sector contributes \$28.7 billion to Ontario’s GDP and creates over 300,000 jobs;

“Whereas the Ontario Arts Council budget has not been increased” not even “at Ontario’s rate of inflation, exacerbating the income precarity of artists and cultural workers, some of whom are earning less than \$25,000 per year, and still less for those from equity-deserving groups;

“Whereas the income precarity was worsened during the pandemic through issues of regulatory unfairness in the arts and culture sector, disproportionately impacting the performing arts sector and OAC-determined priority groups, including BIPOC, Indigenous, women, people with disabilities, and LGBTQIA2S+ artists and cultural workers;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to sustain the Ontario Arts Council budget of \$65 million in the 2023 provincial budget and adequately invest in the arts and culture sector, including supports for equity-deserving groups, small, medium and grassroots collectives in our communities, and individual artists to ensure their personal and economic survival.”

I couldn’t agree more with this. I will affix my signature to this petition.

ADOPTION DISCLOSURE

Mr. Joel Harden: I’m proud to present the following petition on behalf of Lynn Mayhew from families of incarcerated women and girls at the Andrew Mercer Reformatory, submitted by Denise Besic. It reads:

“Extend Access to Post-Adoption Birth Information.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas current legislation does not provide access to post-adoption birth information (identifying information) to next of kin if an adult adopted person or a natural/birth parent is deceased;

“Whereas this barrier to accessing post-adoption birth information separates immediate family members and prohibits the children of deceased adopted people from gaining knowledge of their identity and possible Indigenous heritage;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to extend access to post-adoption birth information (identifying information) to next of kin, and/or extended next of kin, if an adult adopted person or a natural/birth parent is deceased.”

I'm happy to sign this petition. I will be sending it with page Keya to the Clerks' table.

ARTS AND CULTURAL FUNDING

Mr. Chris Glover: This petition is entitled "Invest in Ontario's Arts and Culture Sector.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the arts and culture sector contributes \$28.7 billion to Ontario's GDP and creates over 300,000 jobs;

"Whereas the Ontario Arts Council budget has not been increased at Ontario's rate of inflation, exacerbating the income precarity of artists and cultural workers, some of whom are earning less than \$25,000 per year, and still less for those from equity-deserving groups;

"Whereas the income precarity was worsened during the pandemic through issues of regulatory unfairness in the arts and culture sector, disproportionately impacting the performing arts sector and OAC-determined priority groups, including BIPOC, Indigenous, women, people with disabilities, and LGBTQIA2S+ artists and cultural workers;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to sustain the Ontario Arts Council budget of \$65 million in the 2023 provincial budget and adequately invest in the arts and culture sector, including supports for equity-deserving groups, small, medium and grassroots collectives in our communities, and individual artists to ensure their personal and economic survival."

I completely support this petition. I'll affix my signature and pass it to page Elizabeth to take to the table.

HEALTH CARE

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank Claire and Ronald Ménard from Hanmer in my riding for this petition.

"Stop Privatization....

"Whereas Ontarians get health care based on their needs, not their ability to pay;

"Whereas the Ford government wants to privatize our health care system;

"Whereas privatization will bleed nurses, doctors and PSWs out of our public hospitals and will download costs to patients;

They "petition the Legislative Assembly" as follows: "to immediately stop all plans to privatize Ontario's health care system, and fix the crisis in health care by:

"—repealing Bill 124 to help recruit, retain, return and respect health care workers with better pay and better working conditions;

"—licensing tens of thousands of internationally educated nurses and other health care professionals already in Ontario;

"—incentivizing health care professionals to choose to live and work in northern Ontario."

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

ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: This petition is calling for an Ontario dementia strategy. It reads:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas it takes an average of 18 months for people in Ontario to get an official dementia diagnosis, with some patients often waiting years to complete diagnostic testing and more than half of those suspected of having dementia never get a full diagnosis;

"Whereas a PET scan test approved in Ontario in 2017, which can be key to detecting Alzheimer's early is still not covered under OHIP and research findings show that Ontario will spend \$27.8 billion between 2023 and 2043 on alternate-level-of-care (ALC) and long-term-care (LTC) costs associated with people living with dementia;

"Whereas the government must follow through with its commitment to ensure Ontario's health care system has the capacity to meet the current and future needs of people living with dementia and their care partners;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to develop, commit to, and fund a comprehensive Ontario dementia strategy."

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

VISITOR

Mr. Deepak Anand: Madam Speaker, point of order.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): I recognize the member from Mississauga–Malton.

Mr. Deepak Anand: It is my absolute pleasure to acknowledge the presence of Dr. Khalilur Rahman, the High Commissioner of Bangladesh in Canada. Dr. Rahman is here to raise the Bangladeshi flag for the first time at the Legislative Assembly. Welcome to Queen's Park.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Welcome.

Ms. Doly Begum: Point of order, Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): I recognize the member for Scarborough Southwest.

Ms. Doly Begum: I'd be remiss if I also, as a Bangladeshi Canadian, didn't take the opportunity to recognize the Honourable High Commissioner from Bangladesh. He's been an excellent advocate here for Bangladeshi Canadians in Ontario and across Canada, and he's here for the flag-raising. To all the community members who are here today: Thank you so much.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WORKING FOR WORKERS ACT, 2023

LOI DE 2023 VISANT À OEUVRER
POUR LES TRAVAILLEURS

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 22, 2023, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 79, An Act to amend various statutes with respect to employment and labour and other matters / Projet de loi 79, Loi modifiant diverses lois en ce qui concerne l'emploi, le travail et d'autres questions.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Further debate?

Ms. Doly Begum: Good afternoon, everyone. I think we're here for an hour, so I am very much excited to talk about Bill 79. The minister called it Working for Workers Act 3, and this is an opportunity for us to look at some of the regulations and some of the changes that will be changed throughout Ontario to help workers, especially migrant workers, and internationally trained professionals, as well.

As the critic for immigration, citizenship and international credential recognition, it's an honour for me to speak to this bill, Speaker, because any time I have the opportunity to talk about workers' rights, to talk about Ontarians and people who contribute so much, dedicate so much of their labour and hard work to put food on the table, but also to really make Ontario a better place and make this country a better place, it's incredible for us to have this opportunity to talk about them and to be able to make laws that help them. So I'm really hoping that I can highlight some of these things in this legislation, and as an official opposition member, I also believe that it is my duty. We have reminders across the House here that tell us that you have to listen to the opposition, so I will also take this opportunity to talk about some of the ways that we could have done better and some of the missing pieces of this legislation that have been proposed as well.

1320

Speaker, I also want to say before I begin that my colleague from Sudbury, our critic for labour, has also given me a lot of guidelines in terms of the conversations that he's had with a lot of workers across the province. As critic, he has the opportunity to meet with a lot of labour unions and a lot of workers' organizations and hear really incredible and, I would say, heartbreaking stories of so many workers, especially during the pandemic. I will take the opportunity here, if I can, to highlight some of those as well.

Over the last couple of weeks, we saw the Minister of Labour really—before this bill was actually introduced, Speaker—make a lot of headlines. We recently saw the headline about calling employers who take advantage of workers “scumbags,” and rightfully so. We also saw the minister make headlines about the bill and how he is going to provide washrooms for workers who don't have access to clean washrooms. There are people who actually called me up and said, “You know what? This is great. A minister who is making toilets accessible is excellent.” These headlines really gave me a lot of hope, because these are some of the things that we heard about during the pandemic.

I want to start first by sharing one of the stories I heard right at the beginning of the pandemic. It was from a taxi driver who talked about how as soon as washrooms in Tim Hortons and McDonald's were closed, they did not have

the ability to have any access to washrooms if they were to go to work. This is something that I have highlighted in the House in the past as well, so when I heard these announcements, I was filled with hope, because these are some of the things that we know people across Ontario need. We heard about truck drivers who have always talked about how we can make their lives easier and, talking about essential workers—how important truck drivers were to make sure that we have food in our grocery stores and therefore we have food on the table as well, and how important it was for them to have an accessible, clean washroom.

So I was really hopeful seeing these headlines, but then when I went through this bill—and I must say, Speaker, after all the headlines, which means that we knew that this bill was coming, we only had an opportunity of just one day, yesterday, to actually go through this legislation. We are actually missing out on a huge opportunity to meet with stakeholders who would have been able to give us a lot of feedback. Should we introduce it? Talk to the stakeholders, talk about the specific schedules and hear their feedback so that we can actually do justice to this. Unfortunately, I am a little disheartened to see that because I would have liked the opportunity to talk to more of the stakeholders, more of the workers, more of the migrant workers, who I'm sure have excellent feedback, who have done a tremendous amount of work highlighting the issues that workers across this province face, and we would have had the opportunity to do so.

My question that I want to start with: Is this a headline bill or is this a bill about taking real action? To answer that question, what I want to do is go through the different schedules, because people across this province—and I know my colleagues across the aisle will agree as well because many of them sat on this side for many, many years. I was talking to the Minister of Labour this morning, and I know he sat on this side as well as an opposition member. You hear government after government make promises and give really beautiful, big words, but they're hollow words, Speaker. They're empty promises, and people have yet to see real action that actually facilitates these necessary jobs, which people across the province are calling for.

So what we're debating in this bill—is it actually about empty promises, is it about some hollow words, or are we going to have some real action? And for that, I want to go through the different schedules, Speaker.

Let's go through the breakdown of schedules. Schedule 1 really looks at the control of foreign nationals' passports and work permit documents, and one of the things I started with, which was the minister's announcement about the fines and the penalties and the increasing fines and some of the stories we've heard about the way a lot of migrant workers have been treated. The fact that any employer in this province would confiscate someone's passport, someone's travel documents, someone's identification cards or any such documents, is just unbelievable, especially in a province like Ontario.

That has been happening for many, many years, and we've heard so many stories like that. We've heard about

it after it takes place as well. We've heard about the \$250 fine. We've heard about how people are forced to do work that they didn't even sign up for because they're afraid of losing their travel documents, their passports, and the fact that a lot of people are given this hope of a work permit and then they spend months and months working somewhere and then sometimes they don't even get the income that they deserve, the pay they earned or the fact that the employers don't live up to the promise of that work permit. Then this worker will be left without any hope, without any options, without any choice, really, to do anything.

Sometimes, many are forced to go back. Not only did they lose the money they earned, that they're supposed to receive, but they have also lost money in coming here, in the application process and the fact that their living accommodations and the fact that they—and I know there are colleagues on both sides of the House where we have family members who have immigrated here. My father immigrated here. A lot of us know the struggle you go through to actually get into Canada and the cost there is. Then, obviously, once you come here, the cost of that as well. I am really glad to see that the minister is at least recognizing that problem.

And, then, the individuals who we've found in violation will be fined up to \$500,000 and can face up to one year in jail, and for corporations it will be \$1 million. The face value of this looks great. However, one of the things I looked at last night was—I thought, “You know what? We have the migrant workers' alliance which is an organization that works for migrant workers that we are supposed to be helping through this legislation.” This is the response that the Migrant Workers Alliance for Change Canada wrote:

“Today's announcement about increased fines for migrant passport seizures is designed as a distraction from Ontario labour law exclusions that allow for migrant exploitation and abuse.

“The EPFNA—Employment Protection for Foreign Nationals Act—doesn't work. It is simply too difficult for migrants to prove exploitation under it. Increasing fines under this law will not ensure an iota more of justice. We call on Ontario to end employment standards exclusions, increase proactive inspections, implement the temporary help agency licensing regime to regulate employers and recruiters and hold employers financially liable for any exploitation throughout the recruitment process. The federal government must ensure permanent resident status for all as that is the only mechanism for migrants to assert their rights at work.”

The reason I wanted to read exactly the statement that the Migrant Workers Alliance for Change Canada wrote is because it really highlights the core of the issue here. It's great to say, “You know what? A \$250 fine is not enough.” But the new fine that is highlighted in schedule 1 is a scale. Going back to the idea of making headlines, on the headline it will say, “\$1-million fine;” it will say, “\$500,000 fine”—and that looks great, but it is a scale. The problem that the alliance pointed out is that if you don't know that

there is a problem, that there was something done wrong, then there will not be a fine, and this announcement actually distracts them from highlighting the main issue, because the actual system that we have doesn't work, and a lot of these workers don't even have the ability to assert their rights.

1330

Speaker, I want to highlight some of the issues that migrant workers face in Canada, specifically in Ontario, and the inhumanity of their working conditions. During the pandemic, we heard about some of those. I know some of the members visited farms, visited workplaces across the province. There were life-threatening living conditions for many workers who were the ones who were picking the fruits, for example, who were providing food on the table for us. There were migrant workers who actually died during the pandemic because they did not have the right protocols, the right safety measures put in place in the places that they were supposed to sleep in, in the places that they were supposed to stay in.

The fines against employers who mistreat workers, for example—the other part of this is, who reports it? When we talk about someone whose passport has been confiscated, when we talk about someone whose travel documents, whose identification documents have been confiscated, do we really think they're going to come out, call some hotline and say, “This is what's happening; this is my employer”? And, now, on top of that, add the fact that this is someone who is relying on that employer to make a living, and they're probably sending that money back home as well. That's why they're here, right? They're migrant workers. If something happened to their employer, they're also worried: “Am I going to be making an income?” If it happens to one of their colleagues and they witness it, are they going to be reporting it? What does that mean to them? Some of these pieces need to be highlighted.

The Ontario labour law exclusions continue to put migrants in exploitative and abusive work conditions. This is another part that a lot of migrant workers point out, because the current labour laws we have actually exclude these workers. So we can say that we're adding all these regulations, we're adding all these extra measures, but if you have a cut and you're not healing that cut but you're putting a Band-Aid on a different place, it doesn't work. You have to first make sure that you heal that cut, you take the right ointment that's necessary and then you do the other parts of it. So this schedule misses this significant part of it.

The other part is that when we have the enforcement mechanism, if someone does report it, let's say—and the legislation reads, as the minister has pointed out, that we are actually expecting the migrant workers to call in complaints. So once someone does make a complaint—let's say someone is able to come out and is finally able to make that complaint of that workplace violation and exploitation. We are really relying on these workers and their livelihoods and how precarious their working condition are to make these complaints and go through it.

The other problem that we have is the fact that we are actually relying on a whole claim method to be able to go through. If you look at international students, a lot of international students who work part-time, for example, face similar situations. They have to go through the Ontario website to file a complaint. Now you're relying on this worker to risk their income, risk their livelihood, risk the income of their family's livelihood to make that complaint.

This is important because it does bring us to a solution that we could have highlighted here as well. This goes back to some of the things that the minister talked about. One of the other headlines that was made was about the number of inspections that we've had. We saw the minister standing in front of a toilet or something—I don't know—in front of a washroom. He talked about the inspections and how we are finally able to find out what's happening in workplaces. What we need to do to actually solve the problem I just talked about is the number of inspections necessary in workplaces—I think we all agree that would have been a good method to find out what's happening within these workplaces. You're not putting the onus on the worker, but you're putting the onus on the inspector, who is working for the province to make sure workplaces are safe and that they're not exploiting workers. You have inspectors who go into these workplaces unannounced to find out what's going on. Wouldn't that be something? And we've tried this during the pandemic as well.

Unfortunately, Speaker, that is not something that's part of the legislation. And let me tell you, not only is this not part of something that should be here—I really hope maybe the regulations will cover it—but in 2017 there were 3,500 inspections. Trust me, Speaker, you and I both can agree we are not praising the Liberal government. We know they could have done a better job, right? We all agree on that. I notice there are some heads nodding on the other side.

But, Speaker, guess what happened in 2017? We actually saw a decrease. So in 2017 we have 3,500, and guess what happened last year when we had—guess which government was in place? Was it the Liberals? No, it was this Conservative government, Speaker. So in 2017, under the Liberals, we had 3,500 inspections, but under the Conservative government in 2022, we had 215 inspections. From 3,500 inspections to 215 inspections, and you're talking about making a headline? And this is actually online. This has been reported.

Now, the Ministry of Labour data shows that the number of inspections conducted to identify overall workplace violations such as wage theft has dropped significantly in recent years from 3,500 in 2017 to 215 last year. So I really hope that the minister will take this official opposition member's feedback and this highlight that's online, that's in the Ministry of Labour's report, and actually fix something that's necessary, which is the amount of inspections that we need to have in order to actually find out whether employees, especially vulnerable employees who are migrant workers, are being

exploited, and if they are, how can we help them? What is happening in that workplace, and how can we support them without putting their livelihood at risk?

Now let's talk about the number of prosecutions. The number of prosecutions for employment standards violations also dropped to 34 from 233 over the same period. So you know how I told you all about 3,500 to 215 from 2017 to 2022? Now, the number of prosecutions for employment standards violations also dropped to 34 from 233 over that period of time. Speaker, there is nothing to be proud of for that.

Mr. Dave Smith: COVID.

Ms. Doly Begum: Which means we could've done more inspections and more prosecutions—during COVID migrant workers died because they weren't protected. During COVID we needed more inspections done because a lot of our workplaces, even coffee shops for example, did not have proper safety measures, which meant a lot of gig workers, a lot of precarious workers were not protected—a lot of front-line workers, a lot of essential workers who were defined as essential, Speaker.

And this is one piece that I know many of you know—and I know the President of the Treasury Board knows this very well because back then he was the minister for this. I talked about essential workers. An issue that I just can't get over, Speaker: The fact that the Ministry of Labour could not define what was essential. And guess what happened? So many of these vulnerable workers went to work and caught COVID. Their family members were at risk. Some of them lost their family members. Some of them lost their lives, including health care workers like PSWs and nurses. In Scarborough as well, Speaker, they lost their lives because they were not protected, and this government could not even define what was essential.

I've talked about it many, many times, so I won't go into that detail right now, but it's in Hansard, and I've talked about it. I begged the ministry, I begged the Premier, I begged the House—just go back to look at what you have done, look at your policies, because you can save so many lives if you could just go back and define it—because guess what was happening? Some of these vulnerable workers, like migrant workers, a lot of women workers, Speaker—especially women workers—guess what they were doing during the pandemic? I know we talked about the pandemic, but guess what these people were doing? They were working at makeup factories. They were making foundation and lipstick. They were forced to go to work in order to protect their jobs, and they were risking their lives for that. How was that essential? That was not essential, and we asked the government to take action. They did not, and that's on this government. That is on this government.

1340

When we talk about foreign nationals and migrant workers and we want to come off as, you know, this incredible bill, Working for Workers Act 3, we need to also talk about the exploitation, the way it happens and the way we have to help them. We have to make sure that we understand who these individuals are. That includes

women. That includes international students. That includes vulnerable people who rely on these incomes for their livelihoods.

There have been dozens of instances of the “scumbag employers,” as the minister describes, withholding wages, physically intimidating and threatening the livelihoods of these students. We have organizations that talk about it. I want to actually take a moment to highlight one of the organizations that just does amazing work to help workers. I had the opportunity to meet with a group of young organizers, many of whom are international students, who face precarious work conditions themselves. This is the Naujawan Support Network, the NSN Peel group. They have fought to win back hundreds of thousands of dollars in wages from these employers. What they’re doing basically is they’re shaming the employers. They work closely with the employees. This is like detective work: You have to really be careful of saving the identity and working closely with the employees, helping them. And then once it doesn’t work through negotiations, you have to go out there and shame them, and sometimes that’s how it worked.

One of the examples that you will hear, Speaker, is in Brampton, where international students actually worked together, and they shamed some of the restaurants and contractors, because the conditions were just brutal. They made sure that the employees got paid. Satinder Kaur Grewal actually said that she was paid C\$100 per day for 12-hour workdays at Chat Hut. This was an example that was in the newspapers—\$100 per day for working 12-hour workdays. The Chat Hut place actually had promised to support her permanent residency application, a tactic that I talked about. Many employers use it on international students to keep these workers in line.

After protesting with the NSN group, Satinder actually received C\$16,495 in back pay from Chat Hut, in February. I want to thank this group for the work that they’re doing. There’s a lot that we can learn in terms of the actual problem that’s going on on the ground.

The other thing I want to point out is, when we talk about these conditions and how the whole information system will work, there’s a piece of awareness that needs to be put in place for this province as well, because a lot of workers are not watching this debate. They don’t see the highlights that take place. They don’t read the Toronto Star or find out. A lot of the people, for example, sometimes are removed from accessing some of this information as well. So we have to break that barrier and help them break that barrier so they are aware of some of their rights that are available to them. So that awareness piece and how they will get that information is also a big missing piece in this legislation as well.

When we talk about unannounced inspections for washrooms, I have to say, I’ve talked to some of my colleagues who go on the highways, and some of my colleagues, actually, who don’t live in Toronto or in Scarborough go further down. Sometimes they even have stories of how, when you go from Sudbury to Thunder Bay, for example, or Queen’s Park to back home in some

northern parts of the province, you don’t have public washrooms. Actually, just let me correct that: You do have public washrooms in certain locations, but they’re not all season. Sometimes, they’re closed during wintertime because they’re not maintained. And the times that they are maintained, it’s disgusting. Sometimes even women will say, “You know what? Leave it open because I can’t breathe.” That’s how dirty it is.

That’s a big piece that people who just travel from one part of the province to another will tell you. Imagine constructions workers, imagine taxi drivers, imagine truck drivers who have no option but to find facilities like that. I want to highlight that, and I appreciate those who are listening, because it is an important piece that you have to really take into consideration when you legislate, when you put this bill together, when you put the regulations together. That’s schedule 1, Speaker.

I hope to go into schedule 2, which is the Employment Standards Act. This actually adds a clause: “the employee is in treatment, recovery or rehabilitation in respect of a physical or mental health illness, injury or medical emergency that results from participation in an operation or activity referred to in this subsection”—it actually goes on, so I don’t want to read the specifics on the bill.

I want to highlight that this is a very important piece that I’m really glad to see happen, especially as it relates to the Canadian armed services reservists, because adding it to the ESA in 2007—the Ford government made some changes in the past, and now we’re seeing some more amendments to it. I think it’s very important that workers, especially those who risk their lives to protect us, anyone who’s contributing to this province should have the ability to access health supports, especially mental health supports. It’s very important that we have this provision in there as well. I want to say thank you to the government for adding that.

I also see there is a little bit of some technical changes made as well. I think probably my dad is watching, so for him, I’m going to explain this. This section also includes changes to some of the technical pieces in terms of definitions of certain words, which allows for things like mass layoffs and who gets what—if you work in a home, for example, what does “establishment” mean? If it’s not a workplace—before that home did not qualify as that workplace. Now, it will allow for that, and it means that there’s notice that needs to go out.

However, there are some limitations to that in terms of how that will take place, and I think there’s some tweaking that needs to be done in the regulations, because if someone is working in a home, for example—because it’s based on seniority, if someone is new or works part-time, they may not be aware of exactly what’s happening in that workplace, that establishment. So there is some clear guidance that’s needed for the ministry here as well.

The other piece that I want to say—which is in schedule 2—because this talks about mental health; it talks about the support that will be provided. I want to actually highlight what I was expecting to see in this piece as well, which is the piece that the minister actually made another

headline for. This is actually a piece that the former leader of the official opposition, Andrea Horwath, and many of our members, including our current leader as well, have highlighted in the past. Recently, we met with firefighters and we talked about this as well. Based on the recent announcement—and I call this “the headline bill” for a reason, because you made a headline for this. This is an excellent piece that could have been included in this legislation. What we were actually anticipating—but it was not included in this bill—was the addition of pancreatic and thyroid cancers as presumptive occupational illness for firefighters. I was really surprised this morning to actually see the Minister of Labour speak to this as well, as if it was in the bill. He spoke about it and how important it is, and I wholeheartedly agree: It is very important. When I met with firefighters who came for the lobby day, it was very simple. It was one of those things where I was just like, “I don’t understand why it’s not there already.”

1350

So having this change enshrined, ingrained in the legislation would have been beautiful. I think a lot of people were anticipating seeing that as well in this bill, but, unfortunately, it wasn’t there. I was actually expecting to see it in this schedule as well, Speaker. This would have been a meaningful change for so many firefighters who have suffered through this. I hope that it will be retroactive as well, so that people who have already suffered through this and deserve to get compensation and deserve to get the support receive that support as well.

Moving on to schedule 3: This adds a new subsection to the Fair Access to Regulated Professions and Compulsory Trades Act. You all know this is one of my favourite acts. I feel like I have spent so much time talking about fair access to regulated professions. This schedule adds the section “Duty re public interest.”

I want to say, one of the things that I think the team was trying to do with this was to figure out how we make sure that we have—and they did say, in consultations with the minister and the minister responsible, to identify specific things in terms of qualified skills. Let me just go back a little bit so that anyone who is listening outside—and I know, members of this House, when we talk about skilled labourers, skilled workers, who come here with years of skill, with years of education and experience, they have worked hard. Based on that skill, based on that education, through a point system, they immigrate to Canada; they come to Canada. Whether you’re a migrant worker or whether you’re a domestic worker, you come here and you’re able to come to a new place so that you can make a living. You have hopes and dreams to do that.

What happens is that a lot of people, when they come here, in order to get recognized for their skills, have to go through a whole new process again. They have to go through a system where they have to prove their education, they have to prove their skills, but we don’t have a system. We don’t have a bridging program that actually allows that.

I brought in legislation, in my previous term, for second reading, and the government did support it. And do you

know what? I’ll take it. I will take the fact that the government took pieces of that legislation and the feedback that I’ve given in my previous term and actually put some of that in their legislation. For health care workers they did put the PRA, the practice-ready assessment piece. The minister talked about it and they recognized it. I have yet to see the full result. I have yet to see the quota increased for internationally trained professionals—especially health care workers—to be recognized, to be able to find those opportunities. We are not there yet, but, unlike some of my colleagues, I think, I’m going to say I’m optimistic with this government that maybe they’ll get there. Let’s hope that they will get there. Let us really hope that they’ll get there.

What this section does is it looks at—where the regulated profession does not have a responsible minister, they actually allow for the Ministry of Labour to work together.

The other piece of it is the Canadian experience bit. When I talk about anyone who is internationally trained and comes here to work, it’s like when you pass grade 12 and you’re kind of dropped and you’re told, “Now go find a job.” If you want to go through any sort of regulated profession then you have to go through the whole system. In fact, it’s actually worse because they don’t have any networks. They don’t have the ability to go through a whole system. What happens is, people who come with, let’s say, five or 10 years of experience—I talked about a gynecologist who moved to Buffalo because she could not practise in Ontario. There are people who come here with an amazing, tremendous amount of skill and experience, but they are not able to practise, and one of the reasons is because they’re asked to provide Canadian experience. I’ve talked about this in the past, and I’m really happy to see that the government will be removing that requirement for Canadian experience.

I actually expected that in Working for Workers Act 1—and we kind of had a hint of it; it’s sort of like a drop in the bucket, but 1, 2, 3? We’re getting there; we’re slowly getting there.

The other loophole that some of the employers were trying to use which was an alternative to Canadian experience, which was injuring a lot of workers in order to be able to find work and be able to qualify—this loophole will be closed through this schedule, as well, I’m actually really excited to see.

However, one of the things that I have to point out is that this clause is very convoluted. What happens is that, in theory, this makes sense, but if you listened carefully in my past debates, I talked about what happens when you actually go to find a job. The discrimination you face, whether it’s an accent, whether it’s the country you’re from, the colour of your skin, the way you sound—all of those things actually make a huge difference. So coming from one country and having that skill all of a sudden puts you at the back of the line versus if you come from another country.

I have highlighted the fact that if you come from the UK or Australia, you get preferential treatment sometimes

than many other countries. And, then, for example, I've had constituents, I've had advocates, I've had internationally trained professionals who have joined me during press conferences in past years to talk about their experiences, to talk about what they went through, as well, and how important it is to address this discrimination and address the way that a workplace will treat them when they try to get a job and get an opportunity.

So this clause, although in theory it is an excellent idea, there will be a lot of work that needs to be done still—maybe in Working for Workers Act 4 or 5 where we're going to address the discrimination and we're going to look at what kind of barriers a lot of these internationally trained professionals face, as well.

The next schedule that we have is schedule 4—another topic that I've talked about in the past, as well—which amends the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities Act to add the subclause granting access to the ministry to collect personal data from post-secondary institutions relating to employment services programs. This is tied into the recent employment services and the changes the ministry is making, and I really hope that the ministry will work together in terms of how we can make education closely tied with the job opportunities that students across this province have or right now lack. I hope to see respect for personal data, as well, from this schedule. This is similar also to another schedule that we'll go into later on in terms of personal data.

Schedule 5 looks at the penalty contravention for the health and safety act, and I'm also glad to see the increase in penalty for anyone who's in contravention of that. But, again, I have to repeat the same thing I started with, which is: How are we making sure that we know what kind of contraventions are taking place, how employees are treated, what kind of health and safety measures are there or lack thereof, and how are we making sure that employees are able to report those in a safe way so that they're not risking their jobs? That's something that is not part of schedule 5, and we have to make sure that if someone is in violation or if someone wants to report a violation, that they're able to do that.

Now moving on to schedules 6 and 7. First, schedule 6 amends the ODSP Act to permit the Ministry of Labour to collect personal data of recipients relating to the expansion of the employment services program and the contracting out of these services, and then schedule 7 does the same thing for Ontario Works. My one piece of advice would be that I hope you do respect people's personal data, and you must, especially when we're talking about people with disabilities, people with personal histories, medical histories, and making sure that we are—and there is some ambiguity in this schedule, as well—we have to make sure that we're helping people, especially the way that the service is administered in the province. Anytime I hear agencies and contracting out, I become very curious, because that means there's third-party involvement and that means we're also looking into the private sector—how are we doing that and are we taking away jobs from the public sector, and the fact that we have to work

together to make sure that we are protecting our public services, we're protecting the public networks that we have that help people who are trying to get a job, who are on Ontario Works, especially those who are dealing with a disability.

1400

But when I looked at these two schedules, Speaker, and I saw ODSP and I saw Ontario Works, I thought that there must be something more. Because you have a chance to open up the Ontario Works Act and the Ontarians with disabilities act, and this is what you're amending? Like, after everything we went through for the past years and all the questions and all the stories, this is what you're amending?

It was just Monday when we had Feed Ontario here, and we had people here telling us how there was a 40% increase—a 40% increase—in food bank use, and so many of those people—guess what—are on ODSP and OW. Yes, there are results, and I know the government's probably going to ask me questions and talk about the previous record, but if you look at the last 10 years, which is when that 40% increase happened, within those 10 years, five are on the Liberals, but the last five here are on this Conservative government.

I frequently get people coming into my office who talk about when they start getting their CPP, for example, or if they qualify for anything else, guess what happens? There's clawbacks. Our government deducts money from people who are getting a benefit, who are getting another benefit from the federal government, for example, a benefit that's deserved. You have clawbacks on CPP, for example. I can't even fathom—it's heartbreaking. Someone will come in, and they're so happy. They'll tell us that maybe next month they'll have \$300 more, and guess what happens?

Interjection: Nope.

Ms. Doly Begum: Nope. You deduct that \$300 and you match it again. It's like we want them to stay in that system.

We have veterans who are on ODSP and Ontario Works. We have people who fought for our country, who deserve so much better, who are on OW. That's not the province we want to build, Speaker. That is not what we're here for. We need to do so much better. We had an opportunity here through these schedules. If you're going to touch these sections, these acts, there are so many things you could have been doing.

Just yesterday evening, actually, I got a call from a constituent who I know very well. I'm like her personal secretary at this moment, where she calls me up every time there's a new document that she has to fill out for her ODSP. I was filling it out, and because I was working on this bill, I actually paid attention and said, "You know what? Is it okay if I write down the exact amount that you're getting?" Because normally I don't share any of her information like that. Guess how much she gets? Last month, she got \$821. That's her total, \$821. This is after all the disqualification and the clawback, and this is a

senior citizen in my community who gets \$821. And it includes things like food, transportation, all those things.

Actually, I just remembered. On Monday, when we had the group here, I met Bee Lee—and I know Bee would be okay with me sharing her name, because she's an advocate for food security and those facing homelessness. Bee recently became homeless. She was actually in the Legislature. She was able to come in after a lot of struggle. She didn't have ID with her. Because she became homeless, her case worker has all her ID.

One of the things that we were talking about—suddenly, her hand. She has been out in the cold during the storm. I don't know if anyone had a chance, and, if you haven't, I hope you'll go out during the winter time and just talk to anyone who is on the street. In my riding near St. Clair and Warden, in previous years, you would never see anyone asking for money or help, but in the last two, three years, yes, someone always stands there. If you have a chance to talk to someone like that, talk to a fellow Ontarian, talk to them and take a look at their hand and their fingers. Do you know what happens? The frostbite? I can't even explain it. Something has got to ring inside to see that, to see the pain. They're at a point where that pain, you can't even feel it anymore. They've gone to a different level of pain. It's dark completely—their hands, the toenails. If they have something to wear, if they have shoes that are winter boots or anything—but it is painful. Because they don't feel anymore. Their fingertips are burnt from the cold.

I really thought that with schedules 6 and 7, we would have had an opportunity to fix some of those things in our province. I really thought that we would be able to help people like Bee, like my constituent who receives that \$821. I really thought that we would have been able to help migrant workers who face inhumane conditions in their workplaces and have worked hard but they do not get the wages that they deserve.

I must say, when I look at some of the things that the minister said, and I want to actually use the minister's words—he specifically highlighted employers who he called “scumbags.” He talked about the fact that they're being suppressed for their wages, people are not getting what they deserve, and I just want to ask this one question: Seeing the conditions that we have right now with our front-line workers, with our health care workers—we have legislation right now that is suppressing wages. We have legislation right now that is not giving workers—front-line workers, health care workers—what they deserve. Based on exactly what the minister has said, in that description of those employers, would the Conservative government of Ontario fit that role as an employer as well? Would the Conservative government of Ontario be on that list of those employers? I think so. I think a lot of you will agree as well, because a health care worker who is not getting what they deserve, who is not getting the wages they deserve, the fact that they have no hope to make a better living and they're living in this province, I don't know what kind of employer that is. Probably what the Minister of Labour calls some of the other employers as well.

I actually thought I would have a lot of time to go into some of the missing pieces. I did not realize that you can run out of time like this. I want to briefly talk about some of the missing pieces from this bill as well from these schedules in the Working for Workers Act. One of the main things that we tried to do over the past 24 hours, I would say, is talk to some of the stakeholders, talk to some of the advocates who fight for workers just to hear what they're sharing, just to hear what they feel about this bill. Some of them hadn't even had a chance to look at the legislation yet. When I look at this, I really hope that the minister will provide more than a 1-800 number, and that's one of the things that migrant workers told us, that if workers are exploited, should there be more than that?

1410

The other thing is that Bill 79, as I highlighted, continues this government's scale of announcements. If you're going to make meaningful change, if you're going to have something that's more than a sound bite, you really have to understand the problem, and I just highlighted one of them, which was Bill 124. You have to repeal Bill 124. The minister talked about wage suppression and the way we're treating workers—you have to know how to protect front-line workers. You have to protect health care workers.

And one of those pieces—the Ontario NDP, I don't even know at this moment how many times we've proposed the legislation—is paid sick days. You have to have paid sick days. And the fact that just the other day, in answering a question, the Minister of Labour actually said that it's status quo, which means that it will not be extended—and workers are terrified right now. They want something better from this government. They want something better for their families, and they want to be able to be protected. We have proposed paid sick days time and time again, and I'm asking again. You have an opportunity. If you're really working for workers, you have to have permanent, adequate paid sick days.

The other thing is we have to align with the stated federal changes for migrant workers. This is going back to schedule 1, which I talked about, having workers who come here to give their labour, who work hard but then they're forced to leave the country. There's an important piece that a lot of researchers and a lot of advocates talk about, which is when we talk about EI benefits or WSIB or the ESA, migrant workers actually pay their dues to WSIB, for example. So they contribute to a whole body, a whole system that they do not even benefit from, Speaker, and this bill completely overlooks that. Foreign workers who are required to pay EI premiums into the program, foreign workers who have closed work permits, for example—all of these workers, especially when you go back—you know, you're not here to be able to even take into those benefits. The fact that the federal government right now has made a commitment—I would say the provincial government should work together to allow for those workers to become permanent residents so they can actually benefit from WSIB and from the EI benefits that they truly deserve and they pay into.

The other piece of that is we need to make sure that we respect them and include them in the Employment Standards Act. We don't even include them. There's a whole body of workers that work hard for this province and they're not even included within the actual workers act. You can do sort of piecemeal solutions on the outside of it, on the peripherals of it, but if you're not including them, then you're missing a huge solution that you could have been providing for workers. So that system needs an overhaul.

The final piece that I will say, Speaker, is if you're going to bring workers from—and I know that the minister also made another headline talking about bringing in more workers from abroad, but one thing that happens a lot is we bring in people who are skilled workers, but then we want them to drive taxis or we want them to work in a coffee shop. So, for example, let's focus on what this province needs. If you need a farmer, bring in a farmer, protect them, allow them the opportunity. If you need an engineer, ask for an engineer, bring in an engineer, allow them to go through the process and become an engineer. If you need a doctor and someone is willing to come in and contribute their skills and labour, allow them to do that instead of having a system where you bring in the cream of the crop, the people who have these skills, and then you just abandon them. Let's make sure that we're able to support them the way that we should.

Speaker, I want to end with this one piece, which is that when I talk about workers, the reason why I get so passionate about it and ask if this bill is about making headlines or if it's about taking real action is because for years we have seen the government make empty promises.

I have one special constituent of mine who, almost every single day, reminds me of how important it is to have workers protected, to make sure we are supporting workers, to make sure they have a pension and they're unionized, and that's my father. My dad is one of those constituents who, after coming to Canada, worked very hard. He loved his job; he loved working. He wanted to make sure he had a good income so he could put food on the table for us. But, soon after, he got into a really horrible car accident, and guess what happened? A 12-year-old me then had to figure out how to translate for my mother and be able to understand what was going on.

So at a very young age I learned a lot about labour laws, I learned a lot about insurance claims, and I learned a lot about what was going on when you have a job where you don't have a pension, where you are not unionized. I understood what it means to go to a bank account and not have enough. I also understood what it means to be told by an employer how much you're going to get or what you actually deserve.

It's very tough, Speaker, and I don't wish any 12-year-old—anybody, any children or anyone—to ever live through a situation where not only do you not speak English very well, but have a moment where you have to tell your family, “I don't think we're going to get this,” or “We don't really have anyone fighting for us.”

So, if we're actually going to help workers, if we really want to know what workers, whether it's in Scarborough

or across Ontario, would have really wished for in a “working for workers” bill, Speaker, they would have wished for protected workplaces. They would have wished for living wages, so that they could put food on the table. They would have wished for a WSIB that actually works for workers and not the employers. They would have made sure they're a part of the ESA, and they're protected—including migrant workers. They would have asked to end deeming, something that my colleague talks about all the time. These workers would have wished to get paid sick days. They would have wished that they could earn more than the minimum wage. This government made a promise and they're still—they're still—making these workers wait, especially after a horrible pandemic that we're still living through.

You know what else these workers would have wished for, Speaker? They would have wished that women have real pay equity so that they actually can make an income that they truly deserve. They would have wished that it's easier to unionize. They would have wished that they had a plan from this government that helps them retire, that they can plan their life, they can plan for their family. They would have wished that they could have affordable housing, so that whether they're coming here from a different country, whether they're living here or whether they're growing up in this province, they have a place they can afford to live in. They would have wished that this government was providing affordable housing. They would have wished to have a happy and a beautiful province where workers are respected, and to do that you would have repealed Bill 124.

That's the huge list—and I have more I can add. But those are the things that workers would have wished for, Speaker, if you really wanted to work for workers.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes):
Questions?

Mr. Deepak Anand: Thank you to the member from Scarborough Southwest for her remarks.

Madam Speaker, we know that men and women who serve our country in the reserve forces are heroes, and I always say that you stay awake so that we can sleep well. So thank you for your incredible work.

Ontario is home to 1,100 reserve forces members. When they're abroad or serving domestically, keeping our country safe, the last thing they should be worried about is whether their job will be there when they get back or not.

I had the opportunity to meet Rick Hillier, the Canadian Forces head, and we were talking about it. He said that this is the move which will support our reservists and make them proud of being Canadian and working and helping the community.

My question is very simple to the member: What would you say to Mr. Hillier about this bill? Are you going to support it? And what else can we do to support our reservists?

1420

Ms. Doly Begum: I really wish that my colleague, who I had the chance to raise the flag of Bangladesh with, actually listened to the first part of my speech, because I

spent a significant portion going through each and every single schedule, highlighting it for anyone watching—and anyone in this House as well—because I felt it was necessary because many people may not have had a chance to understand what this legislation highlights. One of the things that I thanked the government for was making sure that we have health—physical health but especially mental health—supports accessible, especially to those who protect us, those who work hard and make sure that we are protected as well, and for them to be able to have that mental health support faster.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Question?

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: I want to thank my colleague, the member from Scarborough Southwest, for her presentation. One of the key pieces of this bill that the minister and this government is highlighting is—using the government’s own words—that “scumbag employers” will be fined more than before. I think the member will agree with me that we all support bad employers being fined more. But what the people, I’m sure, would like to know is, what is this government going to do with the fines? Is any of that money going to the workers who were employed by these “scumbag employers”? Will the workers who had to deal with these “scumbag employers,” who are now being fined more, be compensated in any way? Can the member please share with this House what the government’s plans are, if any?

Ms. Doly Begum: I want to thank my colleague for this question because that’s an excellent question. Right now, there are some very important missing pieces in this bill. One of them is, how are we going to make sure that we actually enforce this part of the schedule in this bill? The other part of it is, what happens to the fines that we have accumulated? Because as soon as there is a fine and as soon as a case like that takes place, we also know that those employees are out of work. We know that they have lost their income as well and they need to be supported. That piece is missing right now from this legislation.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Question?

Mr. Matthew Rae: I appreciate my colleague for her speech. I’m new in this House, but I am always impressed by my colleagues filling an hour, and I appreciated her remarks.

My question: Lots of my colleagues of the younger generation are used to working from home now, or remotely, and some of us haven’t even gone into the offices we may work at. In this piece of legislation, as the minister announced earlier—last week I believe—workers working from home—remotely—obviously deserve the same protections as an employee in an office. So when a company announces a mass termination, remote workers obviously deserve the same rights as those on site. Can the member explain whether they support this proposal to include remote workers in mass terminations and ensure they have the same rights as those who are on site on a work site?

Ms. Doly Begum: This is a section that I highlighted as well in my speech, because I think it’s very important that we define these workplaces that are not part of the usual

establishment of a workplace. It’s very important that we highlight that, and I’m really glad to see it included.

One of the pieces that I do have a question about—and maybe you can talk to the Minister of Labour about it and we can take it to committee and amend it—is how we are making sure that people who are part-time, who don’t have that seniority, are also included in there as well so that they have the ability to know exactly if there is a mass termination and what’s going on.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Thank you very much to my colleague from Scarborough Southwest for your very passionate defence of workers’ rights. It’s very, very moving to hear your many thoughts and comments and the way you speak from the heart in defending workers. Thank you.

I’m sure the member would agree with me that one method of standing up for workers is of course defending the right of workers to free, fair and collective bargaining. We have seen this government repeatedly trample on that right with Bill 124, suppressing the wages of workers; taking away right to bargain their wages and benefits, even while some of those workers had wages so low they were using food banks; imposing a collective agreement and taking away their right to collectively bargain and strike.

Does the member not agree that this is a missed opportunity from a government that does not itself respect the right of workers to collectively bargain to actually protect the rights of all workers by ensuring that employers can’t bring in scabs to break a strike, to actually allow workers to come to the table, to force employers to be there at the table and to negotiate in good faith?

Ms. Doly Begum: Thank you for that excellent question—it’s so important. One of the things that is so beautiful about the workers’ rights that we have in our province, in this country—and actually around the world, and I would say, in North America, specifically—the rights that we have were fought for by unions, by labour movements, through bargaining, through collective bargaining, through big movements. Some of them we have seen on our front lawn, for example. One of the pieces that is so beautiful about these kinds of movements is that we have seen governments walk back—like they did for Bill 28, for example, because people came together, workers came together and fought hard and fought back against this government’s push, this government’s dangerous violations of workers’ rights. I really hope that the government will do the same with Bill 124, and I really hope—what I’m hearing from the Minister of Education—that they will not do anything similar to other education workers in the future.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Mrs. Daisy Wai: Thank you to the member for your presentation. I hear you making a lot of comments about those who are immigrants. Me being an immigrant—I’m the first generation, and I also hear a lot of the members say, even if they are the fourth generation, they still recall

all the things that their grandparents or great-grandparents have gone through being immigrants. I can understand that being an immigrant is something that—when we choose to leave the place we have been for a new place, we're going to face challenges. I appreciate the long wish list you have, but I'm also very happy that our minister has presented a lot of things, really, for the first time, really supporting a lot of the foreign workers, especially, let's say, when we make sure that they can find a job the way that they can, and also especially on the ones that we say we're making fines for, those who are holding their passports. These are the things that are important—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Thank you.

A quick response.

Ms. Doly Begum: Speaker, I actually thought I would have more time in my speech to share, but we are immigrants as well—my parents came here with myself and my younger brother—and I know what it's like. I call myself a 1.5-generation immigrant, because I grew up here, but my roots are back home, and my roots are here as well. We know the struggles that immigrants go through and how difficult it is to be able to not have the rights.

You're absolutely right: We need to have the protections, we need to have penalties for any employer that's harming any employee, but we also have to make sure that we protect those workers to be able to do their jobs without facing hurdles in coming forward and actually reporting something like this, which does not exist—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Thank you.

Further debate? The member from Brantford–Brant.

Mr. Will Bouma: Thank you, Speaker. It's very good to see you in the chair today. It's always a pleasure to see you in the chair.

It is indeed my pleasure to rise in the House today to speak to Bill 79, the Working for Workers Act, 2023, which, in my opinion, is a landmark piece of legislation. This bill, if passed, will constitute a major step forward in our government's continuing mission to combat the labour shortage our province faces, and it will propel our workers, the backbone of this province, in the right direction. I'm so pleased to see that the Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development, under the leadership of our Premier, has once again introduced legislation that will be making a difference to so many people all across our province.

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Today, our province is in the midst of a labour shortage. Nearly 300,000 jobs go unfilled in the province of Ontario. This is something that I continually and constantly hear from employers in my riding of Brantford–Brant. In Ontario, we are so blessed to have incredible innovators, and all that we have to do as a government is listen to them, to let them use that power of innovation, unlike previous governments.

Workers are integral to a strong economy and a prosperous future. Speaker, think about what people are

talking about every single day. When I walk into a convenience store or a restaurant or a construction site, time and time again, I hear the same issue: There are not enough workers in the province of Ontario, or "I'm having a tough time filling this position." I'm sure that all of my colleagues all around this chamber hear the exact same in their communities as well. If we cannot secure a workforce today, it will cause even more pain tomorrow.

I want to focus on several aspects of the Working for Workers Act, 2023, that speak to me personally. If passed, this bill will help encourage people to join the workforce, protect those at high risk and give workers the skills that they need for high-paying, long-term careers.

With that, I want to begin with the bill's provision regarding firefighters. As you all know, firefighting is very personal to me. I have been an active duty volunteer firefighter with the County of Brant Fire Department, Station 7, St. George, since 2008. I've seen some of those very difficult things. I can remember when I was asked to join the fire service. What do I, as an optometrist, bring to that profession? What I realized is that it perfectly matches with what I did every day as an optometrist, that we tried to make people's lives better. When we're at your home, when we're at an accident scene, wherever you've experienced that trauma, we're there to make that very, very bad day a little bit better. To me, that's what it means to be a volunteer firefighter: to serve your community in an incredibly intimate way, to come through the doors to our friends, to our neighbours and to do the things that other people are running away from.

In fact, this morning, while I was on my way here, my colleagues at home were responding to a scene of an industrial fire in Paris, Ontario. What does that mean to the firefighters in the province of Ontario? That means that we carry the burden of trauma around with us. That means that there are times when we see faces in front of us that—as I'm saying these words, I see those faces in front of me of the people that I have seen. They don't go away. Those are the emotional scars that we carry around. But it's more than that: It can be also very, very physical, and that's why this legislation is adding more cancers.

This morning, my friends at home were exposed to more causes of cancer. We realize that's part of what we do. That's something that we are willing to do to serve our communities. That's why claims related to thyroid and pancreatic cancers will be added retroactively to January 1, 1960, in this legislation, so that we can stand with those who are there for us.

I've spent many years serving my community, and I will continue to do so. I can say first-hand that these changes will benefit my peers—who are my friends—their families and all of those who are at disproportionate risk for thyroid and pancreatic cancers.

I'm going to read the list right now. Currently, the following are included in the firefighters' regulation:

- primary-site brain cancer;
- colorectal cancer;
- bladder cancer;

—primary acute myeloid leukemia, primary chronic lymphocytic leukemia or primary acute lymphocytic leukemia;

- primary-site ureter cancer;
- kidney cancer;
- primary non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma;
- primary-site esophageal cancer;
- breast cancer;
- multiple myeloma
- primary-site testicular cancer;
- prostate cancer;
- lung cancer;
- skin cancer;
- ovarian cancer;
- cervical cancer; and
- penile cancer.

These diseases, like all cancers, are devastating, and, for those who run towards events and disasters instead of being the ones running away from them, we are going to make sure that our province’s firefighter heroes and their families get the support that they deserve.

Speaker, presumptive coverage for firefighters is far from a new idea—I think the first legislation in this place was in 2007, from the previous government—but I know that we are going to continue working for our front-line heroes each and every day. Our government is making it faster and easier for firefighters and their families to access the compensation that will support them and that they deserve.

Fire Chief Darren Watson from the county of Brant said the following, “We commend the province of Ontario for expanding cancer coverage for firefighters.

“Firefighters put their lives on the line in a variety of ways, including acquiring health conditions as a result of exposure on the job.

“The county of Brant is committed to supporting and protecting the volunteer firefighters, and strives to provide a safe and healthy workplace where every reasonable precaution will be taken for the protection of workers.

“As a result, county council approved an additional \$600,000 in the 2023 budget to provide additional personal protective equipment, including a second set of bunker gear, facilities to safely store bunker gear, and washing equipment to protect the firefighters and mitigate exposures.

“The phrase ‘all reasonable precautions’ to protect the firefighters is the foundation of the decontamination and firefighter hygiene program, which assists in the reduction of exposure to contaminants at fire scenes, and, where exposure occurs, measures are in place to limit the exposure.”

This is what our municipalities are doing. I want to commend Mayor David Bailey and his council on making these changes to keep firefighters safe.

If this is what our municipalities are doing, we owe it to our municipalities and our firefighters to expand these things, as we are in this legislation, for pancreatic and thyroid cancer. That’s why we’re expanding this coverage.

Speaker, our government stands with every single firefighter in the province of Ontario.

Moving on, we will always work for all workers in this province. Ontario skilled trades are vital to the health and growth of our province’s economy. The skilled trades offer careers that lead to secure jobs and a good quality of life, and that often come with benefits and pensions.

My son is becoming an electrician. It’s interesting, I’ve talked to other parents with the same thing—you couldn’t get him out of bed to finish high school, but when he had the opportunity for his final semester of high school to get into a trade, he would bounce out of bed at 6:30 every morning—he still does—to get out there. It’s amazing to hear the reports from his employers about how pleased they are with him, and it’s so encouraging to see one of your children so excited about getting out into the workforce.

The reality is that thousands of workers are needed in the skilled trades to help build more homes and complete important infrastructure projects all across Ontario. That is why, starting this fall, students in grade 11 can transition to a full-time skilled trades apprenticeship program and earn their Ontario secondary school diploma. This change means that students can enter the skilled trades faster than ever before.

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Additionally, the government is starting consultations this fall with employers, with unions, with educators, with trainers and with parents on how to make it easier for young people to enter the trades. The consultations will explore the potential of altering academic entry requirements for certain skilled trades in Ontario to allow students to enter the trades sooner.

Our government, under the leadership of this Premier, is on a mission to lift people up, no matter the industry, no matter the sector or where they work. As part of our government’s goal to build 1.5 million new homes over the next decade, we are going to need more people in construction. As I said, our province is currently going through a labour shortage. To address this, our government is taking concrete actions to address these shortages, especially in the construction sector. One of the ways that we are addressing this construction sector labour shortage is by making sure workplaces are welcoming more women into construction.

If you can believe it, Speaker, it’s 2023, but one of the biggest indignities on construction sites that has existed for a long time was the condition of washrooms. I am told that our health and safety inspectors have visited over 1,800 job sites and have found over 240 violations. The common issues ministry inspectors found were no toilets provided, lack of privacy and lack of cleaning. Some cases included job sites where portable washrooms had missing doors, missing walls and no place to wash your hands. For far too long, unhygienic washrooms have been considered acceptable by constructors—but, Speaker, not anymore.

Everyone deserves a safe, clean and private washroom at work, and that’s why we are taking unprecedented action to improve washrooms on construction projects.

Our new rules will, if passed, require toilets to be completely enclosed, facilities to be adequately lit and facilities to have hand sanitizer available where running water is not reasonably possible. Ontario's construction workers that build and maintain our province deserve the basic dignity of access to a safe and clean washroom. No one should have to leave their workplace and search for a washroom. To attract more women into the trades, we need to do better, and that is exactly what we're doing.

Speaker, in addition to protecting our heroes who fight fires and help build our province for the next generation, we need to attract new investments into our province. Why? To get our best and brightest into exciting new jobs so they can better support their families, and that takes an all-of-government approach.

Just one week ago, our government announced a historic investment from Volkswagen in St. Thomas and Central Elgin. Europe's largest automaker is building its first overseas EV battery plant right here in Ontario. Their decision to build in our great province is a testament to Canada's strong and growing battery ecosystem and Ontario's competitive business environment. With a highly skilled workforce, clean energy and abundance of critical minerals, access to markets and a flourishing automotive and battery sector, we are making real progress towards making Ontario into a global leader for investments in the battery and automotive sectors. Again, Speaker, this is one of the many examples of where our government is delivering for the people of Ontario.

Not only are we delivering for the people of Ontario, we are taking concrete strides to bring more jobs for them too. Speaker, we need to use our precious minerals wisely. We need to attract more mega-sites, and we must continue prioritizing our labour force, which is the best and brightest in the world. Ontario has everything from an unmatched education system, jobs, manufacturing and natural resources—a competitive landscape and unique positioning guided by a government that values its citizens above all else. I am proud to be a part of this team on a unified mission working together for you, the great people of Ontario.

This bill is an example of how we're delivering for workers, for job seekers and newcomers to Ontario. We're making sure that everyone has the resources that they need to succeed and to help them secure better jobs and bigger paycheques.

I'll conclude, Speaker, by just going back to where I started with our firefighters. I've stood for a 24-hour vigil at the home of one of my colleagues from another hall who passed away, leaving a wife and two young children. It was at the height of the pandemic, and myself and a colleague stood there for an hour holding vigil, guarding that house. What struck me so much was that, in that time and traditionally, friends and family would gather and surround the family with compassion, with food and all those things. We stood there alone. That family grieved in that house alone. They were completely inaccessible.

I know this morning my friends were out fighting a fire and there were toxins that got under their clothing and that

will get into their systems. Those are the risks that we are willing to take to take care of our communities. Those are traumas that we are willing to take, physically and emotionally, into our systems in order to serve our communities. It's the most gratifying thing in the world to see our municipality taking these incredible steps to keep our firefighters safe, and I feel so proud to be of a government that is willing to add cancers to the presumptive legislation in order to take care of our firefighters the way that they should be.

At the end of the day, Speaker, we are no better than how well we take care of those who are most vulnerable among us. When people are willing to stand and serve our communities like that, I'm so proud to be part of a government that is willing to stand with them. It's so good to hear the opposition provide so many excellent ideas in their comments on what we could put into our next Working for Workers legislation. It gives me great pleasure to hear their suggestions, and I'm sure that the Minister of Labour is taking those suggestions to heart on what we could do improve.

I love the fact that we continue to put out pieces of legislation, taking incremental steps to make Ontario better. We don't do one-and-done legislation. That's not how you take an all-of-government approach. You work through these things. We continue to put forward housing bills. We continue to put forward bills for workers. That's why we're seeing our third piece of legislation to protect workers. I can't wait to see this actually bearing fruit.

I asked my colleagues on our WhatsApp group this morning how many of our colleagues in the fire service and the volunteer service in St. George, of less than 200 firefighters, have had cancer in the last five years. And the answer someone posted back was, "10 to 15." Those are the kinds of numbers that we're dealing with.

Speaker, we owe it to our first responders to take care of them. I am so pleased to be part of a government that is making that happen. I look forward to seeing everyone in this House support this legislation. Thank you for your time today.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes):
Questions?

Mr. Chris Glover: I want to thank the member from Brantford—Brant for your comments today. I share your concern about firefighters in this province. I've got both an uncle and a cousin who are on the Toronto Fire Services here, and you know, the expansion to include pancreatic and thyroid cancers to provide protections for firefighters across the province is actually a step in the right direction.

But when I talk to firefighters, they're also concerned about their colleagues, their fellow workers, who are impacted by Bill 124. Bill 124 removes the right to collective bargaining for public sector workers across this province, except for firefighters and police. The courts have already decided that this is a violation of the charter rights of those workers. Your government is actually appealing that bill.

Would you support a repealing of Bill 124 as part of this legislation in order to support workers across this province?

1450

Mr. Will Bouma: I appreciate that question, and it's interesting. I also met with firefighters when they came here and had their legislative day. What they said to me was exactly what we are doing, that they needed these protections for their members.

Again, I've never seen a government work so quickly that the ask comes in when I had my last meeting with them after the election, and we're announcing that change to legislation today to include those types of cancers in presumptive legislation.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Question?

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: I want to thank the member opposite for his strong words and all his work that he's done both on firefighting and as an avid public servant and MPP for his area.

I know that previously he introduced a very important private member's bill on PTSD for first responders specifically to address what firefighters go through. I wanted to ask him to elaborate a little bit about how that private member's bill and this bill complement each other, how they really show respect and honour to those who put themselves on the front line.

Mr. Will Bouma: Thank you for that great question. I really appreciate that. It's interesting, actually, that we're talking about post-traumatic stress injury right now, because that bill that I received was actually written by the current Minister of Labour, but as a minister he couldn't introduce it, and because I was first on the ballot back in 2018, I was able to get that legislation introduced and passed in the budget.

It's interesting how those things are all tied together, emotional trauma and physical trauma. It's amazing how an awareness day—you can think, "Oh, what's an awareness day?" But the conversations I've had with first responders about the experience they have had through their trauma—it's absolutely amazing how having that awareness day has led to that.

It's the same thing here. We need to acknowledge and we need to do something about it. Providing the supports for firefighters in adding these two types of cancers to presumptive legislation just speaks to how much our government cares for first responders.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Mr. Joel Harden: I appreciated the comments about first responders from the member, but I want to invite him, in the answer to my question, to reflect on the fact that there are many first responders in this province. Firefighters do fantastic work, taking great risks, but so did Christine Mandegarian, a member of SEIU who went into the equivalent of a burning building, a long-term-care home infected with COVID, and lost her life. Do you know who was there for Christine, Speaker? Her union, the SEIU. Do you know what so many other care workers need in this province? A union.

I want to know from the member, who I believe does care about first responders, what his government will do to help workers like Christine—who, sadly, left us—form

a union and get the respect they deserve? That's really working for workers.

Mr. Will Bouma: As I said during my comments, I really appreciate all the ideas that the opposition is bringing to the table, that the Minister of Labour can hear and that he could perhaps put into further legislation. That's why, knowing that, we continue to take ideas and put those into further pieces of legislation.

I'm looking forward to Working for Workers 4 and to see what else we can do to support workers in the province of Ontario. I appreciate those, and I very much look forward to his support when we pass this legislation.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): The member from Whitby.

Mr. Lorne Coe: One of the threads that became apparent in the presentation from the member from Brantford—Brant was that this government is working for all workers in Ontario. That was apparent, wasn't it, in all of what he had to say? I think that's one of the reasons we have unions here in the province of Ontario supporting this government as well.

I'd like the member for Brantford—Brant to speak a little bit more expansively on the proposed changes, in particular—Speaker, through you—to mass termination entitlements and job descriptions and how that benefits the hard-working families and workers in our great province.

Mr. Will Bouma: I appreciate the question from the member from Whitby. I really appreciate his grey suit today, also. I think we called each other this morning, Speaker.

As far as mass termination goes, the reality is that we've seen the largest shift of work to remote work in history. In the fourth quarter of 2022, about 2.2 million people in Ontario worked from home; about 1.4 million are doing so on an exclusive basis and another 800,000 were doing so on a hybrid basis. To respond to this increase in remote work and a changing economy, we are introducing legislation that puts workers first. We are updating how a workplace is defined in Ontario's labour laws to extend these protections to those who work from home. Furthermore, our government is also proposing changes that would require employers to provide new hires with basic information in writing about their job, such as pay, work locations and hours of work, even before their first shift.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: My thanks to the member for his presentation earlier. Just following on the question from my colleague from Ottawa Centre: The number one predictor of higher wages and better working conditions for working people is membership in a union. I'd like to know why this legislation doesn't make it easier for workers to unionize. Why is there no card-based certification? Why is there no first-contract legislation?

Mr. Will Bouma: As I've been saying repeatedly to the members of the opposition, we appreciate all their wonderful ideas, and they may become part of further legislation.

But what's really fascinating to me is that I haven't really heard any negative parts about this legislation at all yet from the opposition. I guess my question back to them will be: We appreciate your ideas. We look forward to having another piece of legislation in Working for Workers 4. And will you be voting in favour of this legislation and supporting workers in the province of Ontario?

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Questions?

Mrs. Robin Martin: Thank you to the member from Brantford–Brant for his great presentation, which I really enjoyed listening to. I'm very excited about how we're building the skilled trades in the province and making those jobs that are great alternatives for young people of all kinds. We're getting women and men into the skilled trades which is so exciting. They're exciting careers with six-figure incomes. They're jobs for life. They're purpose-driven and in demand.

The member from Brantford–Brant mentioned his son who is becoming an electrician. I've met a lot of young people who maybe aren't really excited by what they can learn at university, but they are excited by being able to make things, to fix things, to do things, and they have a special gift. I just wondered if you could share a little bit about how the skilled trades option is being developed and how we're reaching a whole bunch of young people to give them meaning and purpose in their lives through those skilled trades.

Mr. Will Bouma: Thank you to the member from Eglinton–Lawrence for that excellent question. I remember how shocked I was when I learned that the average age of a young person going into the trades in Germany is 17, and the average age of a young person going into the trades in Ontario is 27. So many of them are doing so having been to university, having acquired \$10,000 or \$20,000 or \$30,000 in student loans, and then they go into the trades. Obviously, we've been putting the cart before the horse—not to discourage anyone from going to university, but we need to do that younger.

That's why it's so exciting to see that, starting this fall, students in grade 11 can transition to a full-time skilled trades apprenticeship program and earn their Ontario secondary school diploma at the same time. They don't need to give up on their OSSD in order to pursue the dream of a trade. In fact, in the new high school that we announced in St. George, I know, working with the school boards, we hope to be graduating students who can challenge their first exam in the trade of their choice. I'm very excited about that.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further debate?

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Before I begin this afternoon, I want to send out to my good friend Jim Lamontagne a very, very happy birthday greeting here from the Ontario Legislature. Have a good one, Jim.

This is a very important bill. We understand that. I think it's also a time when we can really reflect on the true risk, the true tragedies that happen in our workplaces. We can

reflect on this bill that I feel comes so short when it comes to truly protecting workers who put their lives at risk in the workplace.

We heard from the member from Thunder Bay–Superior North this week who talked about two snowplow drivers who were killed just this week doing their job keeping our roads safe for us to drive. A transport driver was also killed just doing their job; inadequate training was cited as the cause. I'd also have to say that we now have other workers who suffer fatal injuries. Very, very recently, two workers were killed. One was killed in Bowmanville, and another was just recently killed at work in Aylmer. There are not enough words to express what a tragic occurrence this is for families, for children, for mothers and fathers to have a loved one go to work, and you expect them to come home safe at the end of the day, and they die on the job. We cannot do enough to protect these workers. That's why, really, I feel this bill comes up so short when we look at how many Ontarians are losing their lives or are being injured in the workplace. Why aren't we doing more? Why is this bill really just tinkering around the edges when we could be doing so much more to make workplaces truly safe for workers?

1500

There are some schedules in here and there's some talk, but there really isn't a clear, ambitious plan that's here that will prevent workers from dying. We know that there are laws on the books, but what we also hear is that these are rarely enforced and that inspections have gone down. These are the kinds of things that we need when there's existing legislation and existing regulation that—even that is not being adequately enforced to protect workers. We know, without that kind of enforcement, workers, sadly, will continue to die in the workplace.

For me and for so many families, the families that I've just discussed, Bill 79 could actually be called too little, too late, because for workers who are injured, for families that have lost loved ones, these measures here will do nothing to compensate for their loss and will do very, very little for future workers who are being injured in the workplace.

The labour movement, as we all know, has such a long and strong history of pushing for regulations and pushing for laws to keep workers safe in their workplace, and unions have been at the forefront of that, the labour movement has been at the forefront of that. One of the things that we say in the labour movement is, "Mourn the dead, and fight for the living." That's what we should be doing with a piece of legislation like this. We need to make sure. We never want to have these tragedies happen in the workplace, and we need laws that really seem to take this seriously, that are really there, with ambitious, proactive legislation to protect workers.

April 28 in Ontario and across Canada, and actually, in countries across the world, is the National Day of Mourning. This is the day that is celebrated—if it can be called "celebrated"—in recognition of workers who were killed or have been injured on the job and workers not just who have been injured on the job but who suffer long-

standing health consequences of the kinds of exposures that they have in the workplace.

I just really very briefly want to talk about the history of the Workers' Day of Mourning. It was started by two labour activists—not surprising—who were driving in April 1983 and they saw a funeral procession for a firefighter who had been killed in the line of duty. They thought that that was exceptionally wonderful, but they also worried that workers also needed to have similar acknowledgement and recognition of the losses that they suffered. So members of the United Steelworkers in Elliot Lake started to move towards creating a workers' remembrance day, particularly for uranium miners who had succumbed to exposures in the mine. We heard a lot of this from our member from Sudbury, who talked about the kinds of exposures that mining workers have experienced, particularly in his riding.

The history goes back to acknowledging that workers, when they go to work, really are risking their lives. So this day was dedicated by the Canadian Labour Congress in 1983, and then in 1990, this became a national day of observance with the passing of the Workers Mourning Day Act. It was officially the National Day of Mourning for workers killed or injured in the workplace, an official Workers' Day of Mourning.

It's interesting to note that this acknowledgement has spread around the world. There is a gentleman, an activist in my riding—or in Hamilton—named Ed Thomas. He was a member of Local 5167 and he wrote a book cataloguing all of the Day of Mourning injured workers monuments around the world. While this started in Canada, this is a phenomenon that has spread around the world and it's something that we need to make sure all of us, on October 28, are acknowledging.

Interjection.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Pardon me; April 28, National Day of Mourning. Each year in Hamilton, the Hamilton and District Labour Council, along with many other unions and community groups in Hamilton, gathers at a statue right in front of city hall. It's the corner of Bay and Main Streets in Hamilton. There's a really remarkable statue there that is actually called Day of Mourning. If you google it it's such a stark and impressive sculpture. We gather there every year to lay wreaths and honour the people who are injured or have died in the workplace.

The very first day that statue was dedicated, which was in 1990, I was there, and just that morning, before we were there, an electrician had been killed on the job at Dofasco that very morning. The family was actually there crying—grieving—because they had just got this tragic news that very morning. I was standing beside an older gentleman in front of the city hall and he said, “Yes, my brother-in-law was killed building city hall,” so killed in the 1950s. When you lose someone you always remember and you always need to recognize and acknowledge that. That's why the Day of Mourning is really so very important.

Also I would just like to acknowledge Paul Cvetich, who is the sculptor who created that beautiful piece of work. If you're ever in Hamilton, go and look at it. I'm telling you, you will be impressed.

I think it's kind of ironic—or I don't know what it is—that May 28 was picked as the day—

Miss Monique Taylor: April.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Oh, my goodness. What month is it? It's April. I've said October, I've said May, but it is April—April 28 is the National Day of Mourning. That day was picked because in 1914 that was the day the Workers' Compensation Act passed at third reading. We have a day that was selected for that day because it's connected to workers and their injuries in the workplace, but the irony is that that day was picked because of WSIB. What we are seeing and what we are learning here from our members in the House and from our constituents and from people from across our ridings is that the WSIB is not a system that is working for workers, not at all. It was intended to make sure that workers had justice, dignity and security if they were injured on the job.

I think what many people don't know or don't realize is that when WSIB was first brought in, workers in the workplace forfeited their right to sue for injury or damages if they were injured on the job. They forfeited that right in exchange for an insurance compensation program that was expected to make them whole.

We have seen since that time that this is a program that has not worked for workers and, in fact, is continuing to actually make things more difficult for injured workers. Injured workers are having to advocate to us, to you, as MPPs, to say that this system is failing them. This system is failing them when they need it most.

I have to, again, acknowledge Hamiltonians who have done a lot of work to advocate on behalf of injured workers. Karl Crevar is a gentleman who helped establish in Hamilton the Hamilton and District Injured Workers' Group. They come to my office quite regularly to tell the stories. He comes and quite clearly tells the stories and the plight and the injustices that workers in Hamilton—which represent workers across the province—are facing.

1510

I think we've said it here before, but the methods by which WSIB is changing their benefit programs, making it so difficult for injured workers to access these benefits, it's essentially a way of slowly diminishing benefits and cutting benefits, essentially, that people should be entitled to. Not only is this injustice, plain and simple, but it is driving people into poverty.

I would like to just talk a little bit about one of these individuals who also is a huge advocate and comes to all of our offices and I have nothing but admiration for, Marvin Mulder, who himself is an injured worker. Marvin's story is that he was injured on the job, and he underwent six spinal injections and two failed back surgeries in an effort to recover. In that time, he was asked by WSIB to participate in its work transition program right after his accident, and they gave him an option to retrain as a millwright or an office assistant even though his injuries prevented him from walking, from sitting or standing for long periods of time. It's unbelievable.

Marvin's persistent health problems prevented him from completing the retraining program. Because of that,

the WSIB deemed him as non-co-operative and drastically reduced his benefits each year. The issue of “deeming”—this is just an unfair, punitive practice that is used to prevent workers from accessing the insurance benefits that they pay into, that they have a right to, and so I want to salute Marvin and I want to salute Karl and all the injured worker alliances and folks that fight on behalf of injured workers across the province. We hear you and we support your fight and we are doing what we can to support that, but as you can see, with this legislation there’s an opportunity to address this injustice in this bill that is supposed to be about workers, but the workers that most need help have been excluded when it comes to WSIB.

A couple of the members on the Conservative side have talked about the presumptive legislation, and I would just like to make sure that I acknowledge that we here feel that any opportunity, any time that benefits can be extended to workers in the workplace, that is a wonderful thing. We’re fully supportive of that.

In fact, the first presumptive legislation that was introduced in the province of Ontario was spearheaded by our former leader Andrea Horwath. She did that because of a firefighter in our community named Bob Shaw. I knew Bob Shaw and his son, Nathan Shaw—not related, but I did know them. He was one of many firefighters that fought the Plastimet fire, which was a devastating tire fire right in the centre of Hamilton. It caused a lot of damage, and a lot of firefighters breathed in those toxic fumes and were working in that toxic water, and a lot of the injuries that they suffered were because of that. So the first presumptive legislation was in honour of Bob Shaw, and we are happy to see this extended.

I would also like to say that a good friend of mine who was a firefighter—his name was Dave Begley. Actually, we called him Buggy; it was his nickname. He also fought at Plastimet day and night for many days if not for a week or so, and he died shortly thereafter as well. So this legislation is near and dear to all of our hearts, mine as well.

But I have to say, what you’re talking about—the extension of presumptive legislation to include pancreatic and thyroid cancer—is not in the bill. You can talk about it, and it’s important to talk about it, but if it’s that important, why is it not in the bill? I find it is actually a bit of a sleight of hand, if you will, that the government gets up and talks about something that’s in the legislation that actually isn’t in there. So I think people need to read the bill and see that it’s not there. Don’t judge a book by the cover, or don’t just take the government’s word for it. The “trust us; we’ll take care of it” hasn’t worked for many people in this province with this government.

And when it comes to presumptive legislation, extending this to firefighters, this also is the case. My guess is firefighters expected this to be in the legislation, and they’re probably dearly disappointed that it’s not. I am hoping that the government will be true to its word and make sure that they pass it at legislation, but it would have been a proud moment to see it right here in the bill.

I also just would like to acknowledge the many things that are missing from this bill. While we think, in schedule

2, it is absolutely wonderful that members of our armed forces will be extended the kind of mental health benefits that they deserve and that we all deserve, I would just like to acknowledge that in the city of Hamilton, access to mental health services is abysmal. It’s absolutely abysmal, particularly if you’re a youth in the city. We’ve had two, now three mental health service providers closing due to lack of funding from this government and due to the inability to retain workers because of your wage-cap, punitive Bill 124. It’s great that you’re extending these benefits, but it will be very difficult for anybody to access mental health services, because they’re drying up and they’re closing in cities all across the province.

We’ve put forward legislation. Our opposition day motion called for emergency funding for the Canadian Mental Health Association, emergency funding that would have kept the doors open at some of these services all across our ridings, and this government voted no. You turned down funding for mental health service providers in the middle of a mental health crisis, and that is just really mind-boggling as to why you would do that.

Further to Bill 124, I just want to talk about PSWs and the injury and the risk that they faced when they went to work during COVID. I want to talk about a PSW in my riding whose daughter wrote to me to say that due to Bill 124 her mom struggled to pay the bills, struggled to keep her job. What happened was, at one point, she was in a client’s home and she was exposed to bedbugs in the workplace. She brought those home and then she had to incur the cost of making sure that her home was cleared of that—very expensive, hired an exterminator. Then she was told, basically, that if she did not go back to work that she would be fired, essentially. In her distraught state, she spoke to the Ministry of Labour, and was told that there was nothing that they could do to protect her in this instance. This is a PSW working in people’s homes, home care, making sure we can keep our loved ones at home, who faced an exposure in the workplace where she needed protection, and was told by the ministry that there was nothing that they could do to help her.

There’s so much missing from this bill. I would say that we have been advocating for workers on this side of the House for five years now with this government. We have been saying that we want to make sure workers are protected in the workplace—true protections that include enforcement and true fines. We’ve been calling for a minimum wage for workers so that they can actually go to work and put food on their table. We’ve been saying that you need to repeal Bill 124. It’s unconstitutional and it’s harming people all across the province. I don’t understand your stubbornness not to repeal this bill. I think that women, who are the majority of health care workers, really need real pay equity in this province.

There are many, many things that you could have put into this bill to really work for workers. It falls short in many aspects, and I hope that the government will take some of our consideration and put it into their next bill that apparently we’ve been hearing is coming along.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes):
Questions?

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: I want to commend the member for the time she spent talking about the bill. Certainly, it is a lengthy bill. There's quite a bit in it, and I know the member opposite had since Monday to review it.

Of course, I speak to many individuals about it, and something that came up time and time again in my community of Barrie—Innisfil—and I'm just curious to see if it's resonating in other parts of the province, like the member opposite's riding—is newcomers who come to Canada not being able to necessarily always get into their profession. Something we've done all along in this government is make many different changes in order to help that next generation and, of course, the current immigrants coming to Ontario to be able to hit the ground running, being able to work in their profession. Of course, many measures in this particular bill build on those efforts. I just wanted to ask her if she has been hearing about similar situations in her riding when it comes to newcomers.

1520

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Thank you to the member for the question. It was very difficult, actually, to hear from across the way, but I think she was talking about newcomers coming to this province and what we need to do to support them. Absolutely, I think that's very, very important.

In my past career, I worked in Peel on integrating and making sure newcomers to the region had all the supports that they need, and the supports that they need are many. They need access to good health care in the province, and we know, with the privatization efforts and bills of this government, health care is going to get more and more out of reach for newcomers.

We know that newcomers, when they are in a job, are often, in some instances, at entry level. Minimum wage standards need to be raised in this province to allow newcomers to be able to afford to feed their families. So there are many, many things that we need to do in this province to support newcomers, and I think that that's an important thing, but this bill is really just a tiny piece and only touches a little bit on the experience of newcomers in this province.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Questions?

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Thank you to the member from Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas for the presentation. I know that you spoke about some of the issues with regard to the firefighters, and that we need to add pancreatic and thyroid cancers as part of the presumptive occupational illnesses for firefighters.

Perhaps if you can elaborate on the importance of the work that firefighters do in this role—I say that because I know that last month we had a very tragic house fire in Pikangikum First Nation, where we lost three people. So again, can you elaborate on the presumptive list and the addition of these cancers?

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Thank you to the member for that question. I want to add my condolences to the families that have suffered an unimaginable fire in your riding. This was entirely preventable, if there actually were the fire prevention trucks that you're looking for to keep families

safe. So yes, we need to make sure that we protect firefighters—they do look after us, and we need to look after them—but I think we need to understand that we need to protect everyone in this province.

I would just like to say again that this should have been in the bill. It's not in the bill. There's talk about it, but it's not here in the bill. It's important that we extend presumptive legislation to firefighters. It's important that we acknowledge illnesses by exposure for all Ontarians, including people in your riding in the Far North that are exposed to mould, that are exposed to unsafe drinking water conditions. Those are health impacts that this government should come forward with a bill to address.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Ms. Natalie Pierre: Thank you to the member opposite for her remarks. Recently, in my riding of Burlington, I met with a women-in-industry committee, who shared with me that a large number of women leave the skilled trades after three years because of a lack of bathroom facilities. We know that having sanitary washroom sites on construction sites is the right thing to do and it promotes workers' dignity. Will the member across agree that our proposal to include women-only washrooms and increase standards for bathroom hygiene on construction sites for workers is a step in the right direction?

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Thank you to the member from Burlington. Again, you can talk about it, and it's important. I agree it's important. Is it in the bill? No, it's not in the bill. So all of the talking points and all of the posturing to this, while it's important—if it's that important, put it in the legislation. I've got the bill right here, and I can tell you honestly that I have read it. We have looked at it, Bill 79; what you're talking about is not in any of the schedules. So yes, it's important, but it's also important to be clear with people that what you're talking about is important but is not in the bill that's before us.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

M^{me} France Gélinas: I was quite pleased to hear the member talk about the Day of Mourning. The Day of Mourning started in my community. It is very meaningful to many, many families who have lost loved ones because of a workplace accident or injury or sickness.

I would like to ask the member, in her community, who attends the Day of Mourning? Why do they come to the Day of Mourning? What do they get out of attending this gathering focused on workers killed or injured at work? And why is it so important for each and every one of us to take the time to attend those ceremonies that take place throughout our province to honour workers who died at work? If she could share her own experience with the House as to why each and every one of us should attend the Day of Mourning.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Thank you for the question from the member from Nickel Belt. Every one of us should attend April 28 Day of Mourning events because every one of us goes to work—most of us go to work—and we all expect

to come home safe at the end of the day. Unfortunately, that is not the case for so many Ontarians.

Last year on April 28, I was there at the Workers Day of Mourning with my colleague from Hamilton Mountain, and on the day of that acknowledgement, we had just had a 36-year-old man who was hit by a forklift, and then we also had a 37-year-old Ancaster construction worker who was killed on the actual morning of the day. So this is something that happens every day, sadly, in our communities. People are killed or injured on the job, so it is important that we acknowledge this day and that we continue to make sure that we put workers at the forefront of our bills and our thoughts.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: I just want to ask the member opposite: I've heard her speak about a few things she supports in the bill, including our reservists and members of our Armed Forces. I want to ask her, if she's supportive of our Canadian Armed Forces personnel, will she advocate that everyone in her caucus not only wear a poppy but stand up against anti-Semitism and those Canadian Armed Forces members who fought in World War II against the Nazi-Fascist regime?

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Response?

Ms. Sandy Shaw: No, I'm good.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I very much appreciated the remarks from my colleague the member for Hamilton West–Ancaster–Dundas. She pointed to all of the missed opportunities in this bill to actually address the issues that workers in this province are facing. I wondered if she was as struck as I was by the absence of any mention of permanent paid sick days for Ontario workers, especially as we know that program is set to expire on March 31. Workers who are ill with COVID or any other disease or illness in this province will no longer have access to any support to enable them to stay home if they are sick. Would the member like to comment on that?

Ms. Sandy Shaw: My comment would be to congratulate you as the member who's put that bill forward. How many times did you put that bill forward? Yes, a lot—I think it's 20 or 30 times, and every single time the government denied just the simple benefit of being able to stay home when you're sick, particularly in the middle of COVID. And we know that workers went to work and died working with COVID—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Thank you very much.

ROYAL ASSENT

SANCTION ROYALE

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): I beg to inform the House that in the name of His Majesty the King,

Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor has been pleased to assent to certain bills in her office.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Valerie Quioc Lim): The following are the titles of the bills to which Her Honour did assent:

An Act to authorize the expenditure of certain amounts for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2023 / Loi autorisant l'utilisation de certaines sommes pour l'exercice se terminant le 31 mars 2023.

An Act to enact one Act and amend various other Acts / Loi visant à édicter une loi et à modifier diverses autres lois.

1530

WORKING FOR WORKERS ACT, 2023

LOI DE 2023 VISANT À OEUVRER
POUR LES TRAVAILLEURS

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further debate?

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: It's an honour to rise this afternoon and to speak in support of Bill 79, the third Working for Workers Act, introduced by the Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development. I'd like to thank him and his team, including his parliamentary assistants from Mississauga–Malton and Scarborough Centre, for their great work on this bill and on the first two Working for Workers Acts.

I was proud to speak about these historic reforms in the House. If passed, Bill 79 would expand on other reforms which are already helping millions of people across Ontario.

Yesterday, the President of the Treasury Board and I had an opportunity to visit the Medical Innovation Xchange in Kitchener with the member for Kitchener–Conestoga. This facility, which is supported by grants from the Ministry of Labour's Skills Development Fund, is developing made-in-Ontario medical technology that's being used now in our hospitals and in long-term care. I want to thank the executive director, Elliot Fung, and the CEO of Intellijoint Surgical, Armen, for the meeting and the tour. Their director of corporate affairs, Tim Dutton, said—and I agree—that Bill 79 as well the previous two Working for Workers bills show that the Ministry of Labour is one of the most forward-thinking policy-makers in the country.

Speaker, before I begin my remarks today, I also want to take the opportunity to thank the Premier and the Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade for their leadership on Bill 63 and all the other changes we made that led to this historic announcement last week that Volkswagen has chosen St. Thomas, Ontario, to build the first electric-vehicle battery gigafactory outside of Europe. This will be the single largest investment in the auto sector in the history of Canada, and Volkswagen is the first auto manufacturer to set up major operations in Ontario since 1980. As the minister said, this is a major vote of confidence in all the work that we're

doing across government to position Ontario as a global leader in the supply chain for electric vehicles.

A very important part of this is our work to close the skills gap and to build a stronger, more competitive labour market. As the minister said, we're in the middle of the largest labour shortage in a generation. The Conference Board of Canada reports that Ontario's skills gap costs our economy over \$24 billion each year, or about 4% of Ontario's provincial GDP. We know there are about 300,000 jobs left vacant across the province, including many in the skilled trades. In fact, we expect that over one in five job openings in Ontario will be in the skilled trades by 2026.

The government is working to increase Ontario's supply of skilled labour through training, through bringing new skilled workers into Ontario and through making it easier for them to work in the field that matches their skills and experiences. I'll speak briefly about each of these.

Just yesterday, Speaker, the Premier and the minister announced an investment of \$224 million in a new capital stream of the Skills Development Fund to allow businesses, unions and industrial associations to build new training centres or to upgrade their current facilities with state-of-the-art design and technology. This will build on the previous investment of \$700 million through the Skills Development Fund since 2020, including an investment of \$1 million that the minister and I announced in Mississauga–Lakeshore to help the Christian Labour Association of Canada offer free, online and flexible training for construction workers. It was great to meet them again earlier this month during their lobby day at Queen's Park.

Speaker, the mayor of Vaughan, Steven Del Duca, said "I want to thank" the Premier "and Minister Monte McNaughton for their continued efforts on this critical province-building priority.... Our highly educated, multilingual population already ensures businesses from all industries have a qualified and ready labour pool, and the government's new investment in the" skilled trades development fund "means that pool will grow even larger."

As the minister announced Saturday, we're also doubling the number of economic immigrants that Ontario can nominate each year through the Ontario immigration nominee program from 9,000 to 18,000 by 2025 to help fill the skills gap.

The two previous Working for Workers Acts removed barriers for internationally trained professionals to allow them to match their skills with jobs they need to fill here in Ontario. Speaker, this was critical because up to three quarters of internationally trained immigrants were working in jobs that didn't match their skills or experience. As I said before, members of our caucus experienced this when they first came to Canada. The members from Mississauga–Malton and Mississauga–Erin Mills came to Canada with degrees and experience in chemical engineering and information technology, but they weren't able to work in jobs matching their skills. As we continue to recover from COVID-19, this is a problem Ontario simply cannot afford.

If passed, schedule 3 of Bill 79 would amend the Fair Access to Regulated Professions and Compulsory Trades Act to continue to remove barriers for internationally trained professionals looking to register here in Ontario. This includes a new section to clarify that Canadian experience can only be accepted if there are international alternatives as long as they meet certain criteria. Speaker, this will make it easier for engineers, plumbers, mechanics and many other internationally trained professionals to register here in Ontario and to fill in-demand jobs, to help drive economic growth and our recovery from the pandemic.

As my friend Tonie Chaltas, the CEO of Achēv, said, "We need to make it as easy as possible for newcomers to Ontario to find jobs, settle into their communities and build a life here. Streamlining the credentialing process for skilled immigrants is a great step in supporting that journey."

Speaker, recently I had the opportunity to visit Mike Yorke and the Toronto's Carpenters Union Local 27 in Woodbridge. They were looking forward to another change. Starting this fall, students in grade 11 will be able to enter a full-time, skilled trades apprenticeship program and still earn their secondary school diploma. These changes mean that high school students will be able to enter the skilled trades faster than ever before. And I know the minister and his team will be consulting with our partners later this year about other options to make it even easier for young people to enter the skilled trades.

Speaker, if passed, Bill 79 would also update the Employment Standards Act and various other laws to reflect the changing nature of our workforce after COVID-19. In the last quarter of 2022, about 2.2 million Ontarians worked from home, including 1.4 million people who worked from home full-time and 800,000 people who worked from home part-time. If passed, schedule 2 of Bill 79 would update how workplaces are defined in Ontario's labour laws to extend fundamental protections to people who work from home. For example, employees who work from home would become eligible for the same eight-week notice as in-office employees in mass terminations.

Speaker, the minister is also proposing changes to the regulations that would require employers to give new employees information about their jobs in writing, including pay and hours of work but also work location before their first shift. These changes would help to provide certainty for both employers and new employees.

1540

Yesterday, I joined the President of the Treasury Board and Jamie Wallace, the CEO of Supply Ontario, for an event at Communtech in Kitchener, which supports a community of over a thousand high-tech companies, from new start-ups to rapidly-growing companies. Many of these depend on employees who work from home or from other locations around the world. The CEO and president of Communtech, Chris Albinson, said, "We applaud Minister McNaughton for taking steps to ensure that all workers in Ontario are afforded the same rights and protections, regardless of their workplace setting."

It's also worth mentioning schedule 2 of Bill 79 would make Ontario's job-protected leave for members of the Canadian Army Reserve the most flexible and most comprehensive in the country. If passed, schedule 2 would ensure that their jobs are protected when they're sent into emergency operations, even when it is their first day on the job. And for any other reason, they would qualify for a job-protected leave after only two months so they can take the time they need to recover from physical or mental injuries. Major-General Charles Sullivan said that this "will allow our proud and dedicated reservists to serve their country at home and abroad knowing they will be able to return to their places of employment and be entitled to care after they return home."

Bill 79 would also strengthen the protection of vulnerable and migrant workers. If passed, schedule 1 would introduce the highest maximum fines in Canada for employers convicted of taking or withholding a foreign national's passport or work permit: up to \$500,000, plus up to \$200,000 for every worker whose rights are violated. This will be another important tool to help our police fight human trafficking, which is a growing problem in Peel Region and across the province. My friend the Mexican consul general in Toronto, Porfirio Ledo, offered his support, as Mexican workers have been victims in the past.

If passed, schedule 5 would also introduce the highest fines in Canada for companies that don't follow our workplace health and safety laws. If convicted, officers and directors of businesses that don't provide safe work environments that lead to a worker being severely injured on the job could face fines of up to \$2 million under the Occupational Health and Safety Act, up from the current \$1.5 million.

Unfortunately, we know that some businesses treat fines as just another business expense, and they continue to put their workers at risk. But injuries or death should never be just another cost of doing business. This new penalty will help send a strong message about the importance of worker health and safety and compliance with workplace laws and regulations.

Earlier this year, members of the Mississauga Fire Fighters Association visited my community office in Port Credit. Their top request was that we support an addition of thyroid and pancreatic cancer to Ontario's presumptive coverage for firefighters. Firefighters die of cancer at a rate four times higher than the general population. On average, 50 to 60 firefighters die of cancer each year here in Canada and about half of them right here in Ontario.

The changes the minister is providing would assume thyroid and pancreatic cancers are work related and streamline workplace injury claims for firefighters. This would make it faster and easier for them to access the compensation and the support they deserve. These changes would be retroactive for claims back to 1960, and it would follow similar changes in other provinces like British Columbia, Manitoba, Nova Scotia and Newfoundland and Labrador.

The minister is also proposing changes to the regulations to ensure that construction sites are safe and

welcoming for everyone. For example, it would ensure women have access to properly fitting safety gear and clean, women-only washroom facilities with proper lighting and hand sanitizer.

Victoria Mancinelli of LIUNA said—and we agree: "Ensuring women have access to the tools to reach their full potential in the construction industry will strengthen retention, eliminate barriers, attract talent, and" ensure that they will stay on the job.

Lastly, Speaker, the minister has proposed to expand employer services to five new communities—London, Windsor-Sarnia, Kitchener-Waterloo-Barrie, Durham and Ottawa—to make it easier for job seekers across the province, especially those on social assistance, to find better jobs.

Speaker, in closing, I want to thank the minister and his team for all the work they're doing on Bill 79 and for everything else they do.

Meghan Nicholls, the CEO of the Mississauga Food Bank, was here on Monday for the Feed Ontario breakfast. She is working to support over 600 new refugees who are coming to Mississauga from Ukraine per week, every week. The minister and his staff are working to connect them with resources, jobs and a safe place to live here in Ontario. So again, I just want to thank the minister and his team for doing everything they can to help.

Speaker, Bill 79 will help prepare Ontarians for the jobs of the future. It will help protect some of our most vulnerable workers, and it will help ensure that our labour laws can keep pace with new technologies and with the new reality of working from home. It would continue to position Ontario as a top destination for global talent and innovation and as the best place in the world to live, work and raise a family. I look forward to voting for Bill 79, and I urge all members to support this important bill.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Questions? The member for Thunder Bay—Superior North.

MPP Lise Vaugeois: Thank you for your presentation. I want to ask about—I'm very glad to see that some cancers are now being recognized as affecting firefighters. That's terrific; it's an important change. But I worry very much about the workers I know—I've been involved with the Thunder Bay injured workers support group for many years. There are workers who worked at the mill in Dryden. For many, many years, they've been waiting to have the neurological damage and lung damage recognized, but WSIB is still refusing to do that.

I'm wondering if you anticipate changing the direction of WSIB so that it's really there for workers when they need it.

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: I want to thank the member from London from that question. The member doesn't know that on December 12, 1985, my father died of asbestosis from being a welder at the Texaco refinery in Port Credit. It was difficult at the time, and I agree that workers' compensation at the time was not how it is today. It is getting better, and we're going to continue making it better.

We fought WSIB for 12 years, because my father was a smoker as well, but we were able to prove at the time that it was asbestosis that caused his death, and my mother—not me; I was young at the time—was able to get a settlement from WSIB at the time. But, like I said, it took us 12 years at that time, and I know today it's much easier and much better how we're doing things here in the province of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Question?

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: Thank you to the member for his speech. It was greatly appreciated. As we all know, the changes to Employment Ontario are long overdue. This being said, we also know that we are going through a historic labour shortage right now. My question to the member is if you could please explain when this new Employment Ontario approach will be fully implemented and start helping people on social assistance across this province.

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: I want to thank the member for that question. As you know, foreign credentials are very important, and we need to get people here into the country and get them to work, because we have a shortage. We have 300,000 available jobs in the province that we have to fill, because it does affect our GDP in this province. So the quicker we can move it forward, it will be better for the people of Ontario, because we need to have these jobs filled so that people can contribute to our society. As well, it would in the housing industry—we have to have houses built for these people too. So Bill 23 removing DC charges from affordable homes would be a great thing to help these people get into these affordable homes as well.

1550

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I'd like to thank the member for his comments. I just want to express my condolences on the loss of your father due to occupational disease. It's terrible.

We've noticed on the official opposition side that nowhere in the bill is it included that firefighters will be protected with presumptive coverage for pancreatic and thyroid cancer, but we welcome that. It's unfortunate that it's not codified within this legislation.

I did want to also mirror the words of the Occupational Disease Reform Alliance. They noted a fellow who unfortunately passed away. His name was Bud Simpson. He worked at Fibreglass Sarnia for 36 years. Sarnia is the occupational disease capital and the heart of the petrochemical industry. In 2011, the World Health Organization said that it had the most polluted air in the country. Despite that, multiple exposures are not covered under WSIB, as I'm sure you know. Would you like to see that included in reforms to WSIB covering multiple exposures?

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: Just a month ago, I met with the firefighters here in Mississauga, and their recommendations were the two items that we put, the thyroid cancer and the pancreatic cancer, on this bill. We were able to deliver it for them right away, in not even three months.

So our government is continuing to work with the workers in this province, and we're going to continue to work with workers in the province of Ontario.

Not only that, we're going back to 1960. Think about 1960: I wasn't even born in 1960. Pretty well a lot of us in the House weren't born in 1960. We're going back that far, and I think our government will continue working with workers in this province very closely.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: I would like to put a question to my friend the honourable member from Mississauga–Lakeshore. He has a proud history of Italian heritage, and so do I. We all know that newcomers to this country and this province have helped build this province into the great province it is today. Newcomers bring with them skills and talents, and these need to be recognized by the province of Ontario. I'm inviting the member to comment on that and how this bill addresses that.

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: I want to thank the member from Essex for that question. I'll be honest: When my father first immigrated to Canada, he went to Windsor and worked at the Campbell Soup factory there. I'm not even sure if it's still there today—no.

From there, he came over to Port Credit, and he started working at the Texaco refinery because after the Second World War, he was in the Middle East working in a refinery there. His skills at the time were not recognized. That was difficult, because he wanted to bring my mother over from Italy, and he couldn't afford to do it until he was able to get his skills up to par to bring her over and raise a family here. So it's very important that we recognize the skills of immigrants who come to this province and even the discrimination against immigrants who come to this province, because still today—I was born here, my kids were born here, and we're still discriminated against for being Italians. That should stop here in the province.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Question?

Ms. Catherine Fife: And migrant workers are also discriminated against in this province.

Yesterday, for the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, migrant injured farm workers called on the president of WSIB to end the discriminatory practices and called out specifically the racism around the physical, mental and emotional state of workers who have suffered a workplace injury but who are not receiving those supports.

“Following a workplace injury, many migrant injured workers are repatriated and forced to recover from their injuries back in the home country.... WSIB's discriminatory practices make injured workers feel powerless by isolating them and breaking up injured worker communities....

“Their horrific experiences of improper health care support and the racist reality of the practice of ‘deeming’” still continues.

My question to the member from Mississauga–Lakeshore: Why do you think the Minister of Labour left

this important and key issue out of Bill 79 when obviously it will impact worker shortages?

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: I want to thank the member for that question. What we're doing right now is that temporary workers have the same rights as other workers. Ontario is leading the way with the most comprehensive plan in Canada to register temporary help agencies. Our restrictions will have the highest fines, including jail time for those that break the rules. Tactical labour trafficking and other restrictions will help—rules. We're the only province other than BC to protect workers at every step in this province of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): One more question? A quick question.

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: Thank you to my good friend the member from Mississauga–Lakeshore for a wonderful speech. I want to thank the Minister of Labour and the parliamentary assistants, Deepak Anand and David Smith, for the wonderful work they have done on this bill.

I came to this country as an international student. I definitely understand the importance of this bill, especially for newcomers who want to make Ontario a better place to live for themselves and for their families. Can the member please explain to the House what we are doing through this legislation to recognize the credentials of foreign workers?

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: I'm going to respond really quickly on this one. Our government is ensuring workers from other provinces and other countries that their credentials will be recognized in 30 business days.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further debate?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I am pleased to be able to stand in this House on behalf of the constituents in Oshawa and broadly across Durham region that I hear from regularly. Here we are today talking about Bill 79, which the government has presented as the Working for Workers Act. We're the ones—

Ms. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Point of order.

Ms. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta: I'm so sorry to interrupt this very important debate. I just wanted to welcome a very special guest to the gallery today. We have the Minister of Health from the Republic of Poland visiting and I just wanted to welcome him to Queen's Park.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Resume the debate.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Thank you, Speaker. I am, again, pleased to take my place on behalf of the people of Oshawa and speak to the Working for Workers Act. This is a bill that has a few pieces. It has a lot of announcements that have gone with it and, as I will get into, a lot of those announcements sound awfully good, but they're not within the pages of this bill. They're not actually in statute in this legislation. We'll get to that.

The meat and potatoes in this bill—unfortunately, there are lots of opportunities that are missed. This is Working for Workers, but if they were actually working with workers, year-round, there would be a lot more in this bill.

There's a bit of disappointment there because we're all hearing from constituents, from workers across communities, about improvements to their workplaces in terms of safety. They're hearing about the need for paid sick days. They're hearing from community members about the improvements needed in training. Again, we're missing things from this bill.

The Ontario Federation of Labour has been a wonderful voice for workers across this province, and they have a new campaign that says, "Enough is Enough." This government is hearing that a lot from folks, that they've had it up to here, that they are fed up. This campaign has five demands that we're hoping the government will really listen to and understand, and that we might see in the budget some of their needs addressed: real wage increases; investing in schools and health care and keeping them public; and affordable groceries, gas and basic goods. I mean, the cost of living is just going up and up and up. Workers are part of that group that have to pay and they're not supported. We want to see rent control and affordable housing, making banks and corporations pay their fair share. There's a whole bunch that goes into creating that kind of ecosystem where workers can thrive.

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And so I would encourage the government to spend more time working with workers as they're developing their legislation, because there are some missed opportunities.

Speaker, I want to take this opportunity to speak about the need for anti-scab legislation, so talking about replacement workers. We have, for a long time—since the original Mike Harris years, when they got rid of anti-scab legislation real quick—been fighting for it to come back in this province. When both parties are bargaining in good faith, agreements are reached without further job action. So this government and previous Conservative governments who have allowed the use of replacement workers—that doesn't serve anyone. It can be quite unsafe. But it's not in good faith and it really does extend these strikes. And strikes are one of the only options that workers have to balance the scales when it comes to that power dynamic with them and the employer, and it applies economic pressure. I think the government can appreciate that there is an imbalance when it comes to workers and employers.

When an employer brings in replacement workers, that is in bad faith and we saw that not too long ago. In north Oshawa, there was a strike outside of the campus; it was a privately contracted company that brought in replacement workers. So the custodial staff and janitorial staff were out on the lines, and as they explained to me, they were having to use Google Translate with the replacement workers who were being dropped off in vans and running in between the townhouses to get to work. They were using Google Translate to try and warn them about some of the chemicals in the level-2 labs; they were trying to talk to them about training; they were trying to keep these replacement workers safe and also telling them, "Stop getting in there. This is our job." It was ugly and it was not right, and this government allows that to happen.

I raise these issues because this is a bill in front of us that says, “working for workers.” Well, the government has an opportunity to undo the harm that was done by the Harris government that came in and did away with the anti-scab legislation and could bring it back in, could be responsible to workers who could make that change. And, Speaker, because it’s not in this bill, I know that my colleagues and I are looking forward to making sure that that gets done. We’re going to continue to raise that issue in this House through legislation until this government steps up and is a better version of itself.

Something else I want to talk about, about this bill: There is a need for paid sick days in the province of Ontario. We have champions on this side, none other than the illustrious member from London West, who time after time after time has introduced legislation and has fought tirelessly for paid sick days in the province of Ontario. And this government hears it, and they know it, and they’re hearing it from people in their community. We’re still getting emails from folks. People all over the place are saying that they and their families are getting sick more often and it’s taking longer to get better. If these people can’t stay home when they are sick, they’re going to spread that sickness to people in their community, in their community of work, in their families. That is not how we keep this province well.

Often when we talk about the medically vulnerable or folks with disabilities, it’s usually within the context of health care settings, if we’re talking about the need for paid sick days. But many of these people who are medically vulnerable are also workers and they are even more impacted when their co-workers come in sick. This is a government that keeps talking about folks with disabilities getting into the workplace, but the very least they could do is to take steps to ensure that workplaces are actually accessible and places where people who may already be medically compromised can stay well.

Earlier in this pandemic, we were also calling for indoor air quality standards and upgrades to HVAC systems to make safer workplaces, and guess what? That never materialized. Improved air quality will go a long way to stopping the spread of airborne illness, resulting in fewer people needing to take time off for being sick. So what better way to work for workers than by keeping their working conditions safe?

Here’s an email from Corwin in Oshawa, who has said that they support the Stay Home If You Are Sick Act, and they had written:

“We need 10 permanent paid sick days plus 14 days during public health emergencies. The Worker Income Protection Benefit ... is inadequate in that it provides a meagre three days over a 700-plus day period.

“Health workers and public health experts have been clear that paid sick days curb infection, increase vaccination rates and reduce visits to the emergency room.... Ten permanent paid sick days would ensure workers and their families have access to preventative care instead of relying on emergency departments.”

They go on to say, “Denying workers permanent and adequate paid sick days goes against public health advice to stay home if sick. The reality is that most workers can’t afford to stay home without pay. Especially now, with inflation at an all-time high, losing a day’s wage to recover from the flu could mean not being able to pay grocery bills.” That’s from Corwin in Oshawa.

This is a bill that says that it is working for workers, but it is, again, not taking the opportunity to keep workers safe in their workplaces in a way that has been brought to their attention multiple times with experts and health care folks making the case. So I don’t understand why the government, again, has missed this opportunity to keep people well.

Speaker, Bill 124 is something that we talk about a lot in this space. And probably, if we were to go to the average convenience store and talk to our community members, they might not know what Bill 124 is. But they all, outside of this space, know that nurses are not being treated fairly. They may not understand the ins and outs of it or be familiar with the legislation or this government’s stubborn refusal to back down on Bill 124—even though it has been ruled unconstitutional, they’re appealing it and fighting nurses in court—but it’s nurses and health care workers whose wages are being suppressed by this bill.

There is not a competitive wage that a hospital can offer its own employees. Instead, the hospital is being forced to go to private agencies, who will charge the hospital exorbitant amounts and pay the nurses more than they would make at the hospital. I mean, the agencies are still keeping a lot of that money for themselves. The hospitals are essentially held hostage. They need staffing; they need nurses. And when they don’t have enough of their own—because nurses are leaving in droves and they’re going to these agencies and they’re going to Alberta—this is a government that says, “You’re not allowed to pay them any more. We’re going to keep our foot on your neck, and you’re not allowed to. We’re going to keep those wages suppressed, but we’re going to allow agencies to charge whatever the heck they want because”—I don’t know why; competition?

That is unbelievable, but it’s creating this crisis. It’s creating a circumstance where, I think, ultimately it’s union-busting at its finest. At its core, this is union-busting, because as these nurses and folks who are unable to earn a fair wage because of Bill 124 are going to these private agencies, they are leaving unionized workplaces with benefits and pensions. They may be early in their career, so pension benefits may not be at the forefront of their planning right now, but they are leaving unionized work environments to go somewhere where they might make more money now and have different flexibility for scheduling, as we’re hearing, but they’re ultimately not protected. So this Bill 124 is, I think at its heart, a union-busting initiative.

1610

Anyone who is listening over there is kind of looking at me like, “Come on. It seems a bit far-fetched.” Does it? I don’t think it does, because we are seeing this happening

in hospitals, and hospitals are losing the staff that they need.

Here's an email from Wendy, and part of her email is, "Ontario desperately needs more nurses and health professionals to provide high-quality and timely care in our public hospitals. But, every day, they face impossible working conditions that have only worsened during the pandemic. And their wages and basic rights have repeatedly been attacked with legislation like Bill 124. This is leading more nurses to leave their jobs, and even the profession."

She goes on to say, "I support" the nurses' "demands for:

"—safe staffing;

"—better pay;

"—better working conditions.

"Investing in nurses and health professionals is the best way to improve access to timely, safe and quality hospital care. Unless you act now, we will continue seeing nurses leaving the profession, leading to worse nurse-to-patient ratios and a lower quality of care. This is unacceptable." That's from Wendy.

People understand what is happening, that this is a created crisis of this government's making. And they could reverse course, but they won't.

Speaker, Bill 124 is not only about nurses. It's about many folks in the public sector. As the transportation critic for the NDP, it has been my privilege to hear from many folks doing important work across the province. One such group is the OPSEU Local 428 members who work on the Glenora and Wolfe Island ferries for the Ministry of Transportation. I met with these folks a while back. I know that our labour critic is talking with them. They are facing a serious understaffing issue, which has caused reductions and cancellations of services on both of the ferries, and again, this is because of Bill 124. Because of Bill 124, which artificially suppresses their wages—well, not artificially; it's forcing them to be stuck at this level and not able to bargain increased wages. But because of that, they can't recruit and retain ferry operators. They can't bring in ferry workers, because the broader world pays something that is fair.

The Ministry of Transportation knows this. They have actually been bringing in agency workers from out of province. They're not willing to pay them more than this 1% increase. This government will not allow them to be paid more, but they are willing to write a cheque to agencies in other provinces where we're paying the transportation cost to bring them in, a daily stipend and accommodation, in addition to their wages. At some point, that's going to become more expensive than just paying them what they are worth—but, again, stubbornly refuses to change course.

This has been an issue, certainly, that the ferry workers have raised, the conservation officers have raised, nurses have raised—just about everywhere you look in the public sector has raised the fact that they are not paid what they are worth and they're not able to fairly and collectively bargain fair wages. And here we are debating a bill that

says "working for workers." I have to think, what are they doing that is benefiting workers?

Speaker, all of us had the opportunity recently to meet with corrections officers, to meet with probation and parole officers. They came to Queen's Park, as they have been doing for years, and had their morning breakfast to go over a host of issues. They are having significant recruitment and retention issues across all of their front-line positions. When you don't have adequate staffing in jails, when you don't have adequate staffing in probation and parole offices, you have dangerous circumstances for the workers, for the inmates, for everybody involved. That is not what anybody wants. It is not good for recidivism. It is not good for anyone who is doing the job.

The corrections folks came and asked for support for mental health. They asked for improved training. They asked for more permanent full-time staff. More officers mean fewer lockdowns and less violence. More probation and parole officers and staff mean better supervision and support, less recidivism, safer communities. They came and talked about the canine unit, which is very important when it comes to keeping the workplaces safe in terms of managing or dealing with drugs in institutions. Speaker, correct me if I'm wrong, but it's their understanding and my understanding that the canine unit pilot project is the longest-running pilot project in the history of Ontario. When it has been, I think, nine years, at what point does it become permanent? At what point does the government say, "Yes, this is worth continuing. We will invest in that." That could have been in this bill. Maybe next year, right?

This is about working for workers, and one of the things that this government does is announce new hires, and corrections is no exception. But new hires that are not full-time permanent and are backfill, so that if a corrections officer is away that person may or may not be called, are not adding to the complement on the floor. It's not adding to the support in the facility, in the jail. It's spinning numbers about, "Look at all the new hires," but those new hires are not more people in the workplace. They're more part-time folks waiting by the phone wondering if they are going to get called. They're more part-time people who are afraid to rock the boat because they are glad to have some kind of employment, but they don't have the benefits; they're not full-time, permanent. So, again, this is a chance where the government could improve the legislation and make safer workplaces—this is in terms of corrections, but broadly across the province.

Speaker, I have been very proud of the work that I have done as the community safety and correctional services critic years ago, and some of the work that I had done was on behalf of firefighters to keep them safe out in the community, to do right by them when they are hurt, when they are sick. The government has made a commitment about adding thyroid and pancreatic cancers to the list. We were hoping we would see that in this bill. I would ask the government to clarify that, and hopefully we'll see it added.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes):
Questions?

Ms. Laura Smith: To your point—and thank you for the opposition’s statement—like many of us in the House, I’m privileged to have some very hard-working and dedicated firefighters in my riding. Firefighters die of cancer at a rate four times higher than the general population. On average, 50 to 60 firefighters die of cancer yearly in Canada, and half of those are from Ontario.

Will the member please support our proposal to expand WSIB to expand presumptive coverage?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: During my time as the critic for community safety and correctional services, I worked alongside firefighters to make a number of changes, like changes that ensured survivor benefits would be protected when their partners died from occupational disease. That was originally called Bill 98, and the government of the day took that, put it into government legislation and fixed that problem. I’ve been working with them since the beginning—since I was first elected.

Right now, we recognize 17 cancers connected to the work of being a firefighter. Pancreatic and thyroid have yet to be added formally. We were hoping to see it in this bill. The government announcements and whatnot—that’s good. We hope they will follow through with that. Of course, we support that, but, again, it’s reassuring when we see it in writing, and until that happens, I will not only support it, I will continue to chase it.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Question?

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Meegwetch to the member from Oshawa. In Sioux Lookout, prior to 1997, we had two hospitals for 5,000 people: We had the federal hospital for Indians, and we had a provincial hospital for—I don’t know—white people. Then we amalgamated, and now we have a provincial hospital.

I share that because the member spoke about Bill 124. It seems the health care system has not improved. I remember being involved in the health care sector. We were paying agency nurses at a rate of \$1,200 to \$1,500 per day, and when we hire agency nurses, it has an impact on the wellness of the people who are being served. What would—including removing Bill 124, how will it improve the health and the lives of people?

1620

Ms. Jennifer K. French: As my colleagues have shared from their time on finance committee, where they were hearing over and over from those who are fighting against Bill 124 because they are doing important work in health care or in our public sector, they feel demoralized. They feel disrespected—“humiliated” I think is what they have said.

If the government were to relent, if the government were to acknowledge that this has been ruled unconstitutional and stop fighting nurses in court, I think morale would also improve among those who are fleeing the province to work in health care elsewhere, but also we need to be able recruit and retain. We need to be able to keep staffing—not keep. We need to be able to get staffing levels to the place where health care can be best provided—safe levels. We’re not there right now.

I think that is a huge thing. Anyone in health care has told us that. Everyone in health care has told us that. They’ve told this government as well. I’m sorry, they’re not listening.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Next question.

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: Thank you to the member for Oshawa for her speech this afternoon. Bill 79 does propose changes to support the rollout of our employment services transformation. Ontario is expanding its new employment services to five more regions, being London, Windsor-Sarnia, Kitchener-Waterloo, Barrie, Durham and Ottawa, and this is helping more people move towards meaningful and purpose-driven careers close to home.

I’d like to ask the member, because I believe Oshawa is in Durham, don’t you agree that we should be doing everything we can to help those on social assistance, including in your area of Durham, find meaningful work?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Yes. Yes, that sounds great. What page is that on?

I am glad to have investment in Oshawa and in Durham region to help people find meaningful work. I am glad to know that we’re on the government’s radar, frankly. But I don’t know where it is in this legislation.

Again, to what I had said earlier, this government has been making announcements about positive things that we support, that would make a difference in communities, but we’re not seeing it in the statute. We are not seeing it physically in Bill 79, the Working for Workers Act.

I would be very glad to meet with that member and have a better understanding of the specifics because I’m happy to get outside with workers in my community. I just don’t know what that looks like because I haven’t seen it.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I’d like to thank the member from Oshawa for her comments. I know that she’s a member who stands with workers in thought, word and deed, but I wondered if the member could take us back in time to a time when Oshawa GM was under threat, a time when the Premier actually said, after meeting with GM executives, “They told me straight-up there’s nothing we can do”—as if taking his orders from somebody else—“the ship has already left the dock.”

But at that time, speaking of the title of this bill, Working for Workers, I would like the member to describe how Oshawa workers stood up for workers when this government rolled over and turned their back on workers.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: That was a really tough time, and it is still pretty raw for folks in our community. The government in that moment abandoned us as General Motors appeared to have been abandoning us. The fact that we are able to stand here years later and be in a very different position moving forward—we were all extremely grateful. The fact that the government maybe realized there was hope after all and was a partner in that—we are glad. But the government still has never acknowledged that the reason that General Motors has turned their

attention back to Oshawa and that plant is because they build awesome product and they always have, that the collective bargaining teams, that the Local 222 Unifor auto workers and all the parts suppliers do good work and they deserve to be respected. At the time, they were just kind of discounted. I think what we really see is that, when you have fantastic workers and pride in what they do, you can build excellent products. That is to the workers' credit.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Mr. Deepak Anand: Thank you to the member from Oshawa for your remarks. The member from Oshawa was talking about the announcements. She talked, I'm guessing, about what our government is doing for job-protected leave for military reservists, expanding cancer coverage for firefighters, enhancing fines to protect workers, cleaner washrooms on construction sites, remote work protection and making sure we are preparing students for skilled trade jobs and helping newcomers.

My question to the member opposite is very simple: Do you support these initiatives taken by the government to support our workers?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: He gave us a list of promises. We've seen what this government does with promises. I'm hopeful that some of that will happen. The fact that it isn't in the bill is what concerns us.

We heard the minister's question and response earlier this morning about the gendered washrooms being clean. It's not in the bill. So this "just trust us; it will be in regulation"—a lot has to happen from that announcement to it actually happening. Is that in regulation? It's not in statute. If things mattered to this government, I would imagine that they would put it in the bill. I guess my answer to the member across is, I will cross my fingers, we'll see, and I'll support good ideas if and when they happen.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further debate?

Mr. Stephen Blais: It's an honour to rise this afternoon and speak to Bill 79, Working for Workers Act, 2023. I think this is the third Working for Workers Act, so I suppose my first criticism would be the lack of creativity in the name, Madam Speaker. But, overall, having just had a day or so to read it, there are some promising changes that will be beneficial to Ontario workers, so I'd like to start on some of those high notes maybe before getting into some of the areas where there are some gaps.

I'd like to talk about the more flexible job protections that are proposed by the government for military reservists. Military reservists in Canada are very special, because they offer their service to help defend our country, to help protect our communities, while also maintaining their other full-time employment. These individuals can be deployed at very short notice right across our country to help keep us and our neighbours and our families safe. They typically serve one or more evenings a week and during the weekends and spend several weeks a year training for these jobs. Reserve units are located in hundreds of communities right across our country and, of

course, our province, and they're always there when we need them the most.

No matter your role in the reserve, I want to take a moment to thank the brave women and men in Canada's reserve army for their dedication to our country and to their community.

I had the opportunity, Madam Speaker, to work with reservists very directly in the spring of 2019, when Ottawa was suffering enormous flooding in the west end of the city, in Carp, in Constance Bay and in the east end of Ottawa, in the community I represent along the Ottawa River in Cumberland Village. Between Ottawa and Gatineau, more than 6,000 homes were flooded or at imminent risk. Roads and bridges were flooded out and forced to close. At least two people died in this flooding. Thousands were without power, were without water. Some were left stranded without food as a result. Many, of course, had to evacuate their homes out of threat of being flooded out altogether.

1630

Anyone who witnessed the devastation of this flooding in Ottawa—whether in person, on the ground, or in photographs or in video afterwards—knows just how bad it got in our nation's capital. The reason I bring this up is because, in Cumberland, we had the honour and the benefit of working with the Canadian Armed Forces reserve from the 33 Domestic Response Company, who came to the rescue during the flooding to help residents of Cumberland, in east Ottawa.

Many of these reservists, as I said, if not all of them, are employed full-time in other lines of work and had literally almost no notice to pack up their entire life, tell their boss, "Sorry, I'm not coming in tomorrow" and head out to Ottawa to help. In fact, one young woman who was interviewed at the time of the floods mentioned that she had less than 24 hours' notice to give to her employer so that she could come to Ottawa and help save these homes. They carried sandbags along the river, shoring up homes that were at risk of flooding. They helped evacuate people to safer areas. They worked to protect the Lemieux Island Water Purification Plant. Many of them described it as some of the proudest moments of their lives, helping protect these families in Cumberland and across Ottawa.

So I want to thank the reservists who were involved in that operation in 2019. I understand that it's very difficult to call your boss and say, "I'm not coming in tomorrow," on short notice, "and I might not come in for days and days and maybe weeks on end." Obviously, we want to ensure that they have the protection of being able to return to their job, not only when their service is over, but when some of the other issues that might arise from their service might need to be dealt with as well. We want to make sure that they have that protection. I know those reservists who participated in 2019 and all those who benefited from that great work will understand the importance of the measures that are being proposed by the government.

The other area that I wanted to speak to, Madam Speaker, was the increased fines and protections relating to the treatment of migrant workers. From what I understand—again, it's only been a few hours since we've had

the bill and had an opportunity to review it, but from what I understand, the proposed changes would establish increased fines for employers and people who are convicted of taking possession of or retaining a foreign national's passport or work permit.

In eastern Ontario, as many know—I know the member from Renfrew knows—we have a vibrant agricultural sector. Ottawa is one of the largest farming communities in Ontario, certainly in all of Canada, and many of our farmers and our farm operations rely heavily on migrant workers to fulfill the needs on the farm, to help ensure that we all have food to eat and that our farming system remains as vibrant and as sustainable as it is. So we need to ensure that the protections are in place for these migrant workers. We should all agree that treating these workers with respect, treating these workers with compassion and treating these workers as the vitally important workforce they are for our agricultural community is of the utmost importance.

While I agree certainly with the proposals the government is making in terms of fines and jail time for withholding passports etc., we also need to be talking about the working conditions that many of these migrant workers face. There are many farmers who do an absolutely amazing job treating their migrant workers with respect and dignity—proper housing, proper pay etc.—but there are always bad apples. In any line of work there are bad apples, and we need to ensure that those bad apples are filtered out, treated and punished appropriately—not just on the passport side of things though, too; on the housing side, on the pay side, on the treatment as workers on the farms. I'd like to see the government pay a little bit closer attention to those elements of migrant work as well as we move forward.

Certainly I would agree—I know the NDP spent some time hammering away on this during their debate—that some of the most vulnerable workers may not have the confidence or the position to come forward to speak up about some of the treatment they might be facing, but I'm not sure that that's a reason to vote against this legislation. Yes, there will be people who don't come forward because of those reasons—that's almost certain, to be sure—but not proposing stricter fines or not proposing stricter requirements simply because some people might be afraid or unable to come forward isn't really a reason not to do that. If anything, those measures need to be in place and we need to figure out how to give these workers the confidence and give these workers the avenue, the platform etc. to be able to come forward without risks—not vote against it simply because those don't exist yet.

I'm also very encouraged, Madam Speaker, to see the removal of barriers for women in the construction industry. We know that there is an enormous gap in construction and the trades from a labour perspective. This is obviously traditionally a male-dominated sector or sectors—lots of reasons around that, to be sure. Anything that can be done to encourage women to participate in the skilled trades, in construction etc., will obviously give those women another opportunity for employment, but

will help the industry get to the numbers of workers that it needs to fulfill the obligations that we have in terms of our goals for housing construction and infrastructure etc. Making the working environment for women in these trades—offering them more protections; offering them the same ability to use washroom facilities that men, at least, take for granted; having proper equipment that suits the needs that women have that are unique to them—is obviously a step in the right direction.

But if the government really wanted to remove barriers that women are facing in the workforce, they would repeal Bill 124, which targets sectors of the economy that are predominantly women in the workforce in those sectors of the economy. They would also do things like support my private member's bill, Bill 5, to help stop harassment and abuse by local leaders in municipalities. We know that there have been any number of cases where women in cities have been psychologically, physically, sexually harassed and abused in recent years. It's happened in Ottawa; it's happened in Barrie; it's happened in Brampton; it's happened in Mississauga. It's likely happened in almost every community across the province, Madam Speaker. And while anyone who does these things who works at a construction site, who works at a farm, who works at Walmart or any other employer in the province would almost certainly lose their job pretty quickly for this type of behaviour, of course, for municipally elected officials, there is no ability to remove them from office. So I do hope that the government will support Bill 5 when it comes up for second reading at the end of May, as they did in the last legislative session, so that we can offer protections to women in our municipalities who suffer this kind of harassment and abuse all too often.

Perhaps the biggest absence from the bill that we've been able to see so far, Madam Speaker, is the lack of attention towards paid sick leave. We all know that people get sick from time to time. Your kids get sick. And no one should have to make a decision between going to work sick or staying home and not getting paid, putting the health of their children or their own health at risk in order to be able to continue to pay the bills, to buy groceries, to put a roof over their family's head. And so we would hope that, as we move forward through the fourth and fifth and, I'm sure, sixth iteration that this government might come up with with the Working for Workers Act, that attention is paid to the need for paid sick leave so that all Ontarians can have that security of when you're sick and need to stay home, that you don't go to work, that you don't spread whatever that sickness is, but you also don't have to put your family's security on the line because you fear being fired or losing out on a paycheque.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} France Gélinas):
Questions?

Mr. John Yakabuski: I want to thank the member for Orléans for what I would say was a pretty balanced approach to what is and isn't in Bill 79, contrary to what I heard from the New Democrats earlier, where they wanted to go back for 20 years and a litany of things that they don't like. Because, you see, they have abandoned workers

in this province, but we're supporting workers in this province. And I appreciate what the member for Orléans had to say about the positive aspects of this bill, because no bill can address everything, otherwise they'd be that thick. But this bill is about supporting workers and also making sure that Ontario has the workforce to see that we can advance and progress over the next several years and the next number of decades.

1640

So you did talk about the flooding in 2019 and your support for reservists, and I couldn't agree with you more. Can you elaborate a little more on some of the aspects of that part of the bill that you find really positive and will be really good for families that have someone serving in the reserves?

Mr. Stephen Blais: Well, certainly what we saw in 2019, or what I saw personally in 2019 during the flooding in Cumberland were men and women who had, on 24 hours' notice or less, put their entire lives on hold. We had students, we had people who worked in office and retail, and we had a lawyer who had to go and tell the partners, "Look, I can't show up for work tomorrow because I'm going to head up to Ottawa and help save people's homes." That is noble work that our reserve army does for us, and I think we owe them the security of being able to say, "Yes, when you go home, your job will be protected. If, because of what you've done and what you've seen you need to take some time off to recover psychologically or from a health perspective, your job will be protected for that period of time as well."

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} France Gélinas): Member from Waterloo.

Ms. Catherine Fife: The member from Orléans had some interesting points, I guess. I mean, we come here every single day to try to make legislation stronger and to make it better, and this particular piece of legislation misses the mark on WSIB and deeming drastically. The migrant injured farm workers have called on WSIB to address the racism in the dealing of health care supplies and care when they are injured here in Ontario. They've gone on to say that "their horrific experiences of improper health care support and the racist reality of the practice of 'deeming' workers" is impacting labour retention and the labour shortage issue.

So if the Minister of Labour really truly cares and understands what's happening on these farms when workers are injured and the negative impact it has on the labour shortage, why do you think he left this part out of Bill 79?

Mr. Stephen Blais: As I said when I was talking about migrant workers, there are areas that aren't in the bill. Whether it's the health care issue that the member from Waterloo mentioned or housing on the farm site etc., those are gaps that aren't in the bill. As the member from Renfrew mentioned a couple of minutes ago, no bill can solve all problems, otherwise, frankly, it would be that big, and you'd never pass anything.

The government is certainly taking a step-by-step approach as opposed to going big. I know the NDP would prefer to go big, but they'd also prefer to get nothing done.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} France Gélinas): Member for Mississauga–Malton.

Mr. Deepak Anand: It is surprising many times when I see two people on one thing thinking differently—some people like sugar, some people like salt. But, here, when the member from Orléans started the conversation, he started with saying, "Oh, this is Working for Workers Act 3," and he talked about this lack of creativity on deciding the name of the bill. But, Madam Speaker, I think it's exactly the opposite. I think it is the commitment for the worker, that is why we kept Working for Workers Act 3. So I just wanted to share this.

But my question again to the member is the same. This bill protects leave for military reservists, it's expanding cancer coverage for firefighters, it's enhancing the fines to protect workers, it is making sure there are clean washrooms on construction sites, and it is providing work protection. So this bill is actually working for workers. To the member opposite: Do you not support this?

Mr. Stephen Blais: I don't know if maybe the member opposite was in the washroom for the 12 minutes or so that I spoke, but I did mention quite clearly that there are many elements to the bill that I think are moving in the right direction, and there are gaps that need to be addressed as well. Certainly, some of the issues that he just mentioned are positive points forward. There are gaps that I highlighted and others have highlighted. I would say, Madam Speaker, as we all know, the sequel is never as good as the original, and so maybe the government should focus some attention on continuing with some work.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} France Gélinas): The member from London North Centre.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I would like to thank the member from Orléans for his presentation. We've heard from government members claiming there will be presumptive coverage for pancreatic and thyroid cancers for firefighters, yet it does not exist within the bill. Earlier, I'd spoken to the government members about Bud Simpson, a Sarnia native who passed away from nasopharyngeal and gastrointestinal cancer which metastasized to his brain.

But I also wanted to share, from the Occupational Disease Reform Alliance, somebody from Peterborough who worked at General Electric—his widow's name is Sara Sharpe. He worked there for 42 years and, unfortunately, he passed away just after he was nicely retired, with esophageal cancer. He passed away within two weeks.

My question to the member: Would you like to see multiple exposures covered in presumptive coverage, such as we've discussed?

Mr. Stephen Blais: I think certainly that the exposure to the carcinogens and other exposures that firefighters face in the line of work need to be recognized. They need to have the protections and the security from the illnesses and the outcomes that happen as a result of their service to our communities. So everything that we can do to ensure that firefighters, particularly their families, are given a sense of security in the event that they suffer cancer as a result of their line of work—it's something that the government should be looking at.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} France G elinas): The member from Peterborough–Kawartha.

Mr. Dave Smith: We typically take a whole-of-government approach to bills when we're putting them forward. I want to give a shout-out in particular to the Associate Minister of Women's Social and Economic Opportunity. She did a number of round tables in my riding. One of the things that came up in the round table for women in business, especially in the trades, was some of the challenges around simple things like the washroom. Here we have in this bill some changes to that, to make it more accessible for women, to effectively double the number of washrooms, the number of porta-potties at worksites. There were a number of other things that came up from those round tables, and I'm expecting to see some of those come in future bills.

But my question to the member is—I know there are things that are missing in it. I'm hoping that you will agree that this is actually a positive move forward on something as simple as having appropriate washrooms for both males and females. Would you agree with that?

Mr. Stephen Blais: Yes, of course. I think that's a bare necessity if you're going to attract women to the workforce and the industry. You need to make sure they have a place to use the facilities that is safe, secure, clean and designed appropriately.

The important element that needs to come next, though, is the inspection regime, the enforcement regime and the penalty regime for organizations, companies etc. that may not end up providing the level of access or the level of facilities that the legislation and the regulations might call for. That's act 2 to act 1. Act 1 is pretty good.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} France G elinas): A quick question.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: Thank you to the member from Orl ans for his comments tonight. I thought they were very balanced, as has already been observed, especially comments regarding employers of international agricultural workers, and I'll simply invite the member to offer further comments on schedule 3, which will increase fairness to regulated professions and make it easier for internationally trained people to get access to Ontario employment. I invite him to comment.

Mr. Stephen Blais: I don't have the bill right in front of me, so I can't perhaps comment specifically on the details of schedule 3. But certainly if we're going to invite people to immigrate to Canada, if we're going to give them bonus points on application forms because of their education or their professional expertise, we need to do everything we can to ensure that their education and professional expertise is recognized once they get here so that they can do the work they've chosen to pursue and presumably that they love.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} France G elinas): Further debate? I recognize the member from Essex.

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Mr. John Yakabuski: You will speak to the bill, right, because the NDP don't speak to it.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: I'll speak to the bill.

We are talking tonight, this evening, and I've listened to a day-long debate about Bill 79, An Act to amend various statutes with respect to employment and labour and other matters. The short title of this act is the Working for Workers Act, 2023.

In my riding of Essex, we have a big demand for skilled workers—huge demand. They're in demand in the construction industry. They're in demand in the automotive industry. They're in demand in the agricultural sector. We need skilled workers in just about every sector in every industry in the riding of Essex, and so I need to thank the Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development for bringing forward this bill and its related announcements. This is excellent. It's something that people in my riding want, and I'm going to be very happy if this bill passes into law, because I'm going to be able to go back to my riding in Essex and announce to the people of Essex that these things are going to happen. It's going to be very welcomed.

Now, my first introduction to skilled trades came when I was a young person growing up on the second concession of Anderdon township. I got my introduction at Anderdon Public School, which was just down the road from us and around the corner on the middle sideroad about two miles away. I went there, and so did all my siblings.

Anderdon Public School, when I went there, was a very multicultural place. There were lots of kids there from all sorts of different backgrounds. There were Italians; there were Germans, Dutch people, Hungarians, French Canadians, English Canadians and people from other backgrounds, and we were very respectful of one another. We liked being at a multicultural school. We liked sharing our traditions. We liked sharing our cultures. We liked teasing each other about our different traditions and cultures.

We would even share and swap our food at lunchtime. We Italians, we'd bring big sandwiches, big sandwiches on ciabatta buns with meatballs inside, or maybe we would have calabrese bread with some leftover veal from last night's dinner. And the English kids, they'd tell us they were jealous of us, because their parents would give them sandwiches with two slices of white bread and a square piece of processed cheese in the middle. So we'd joke and laugh back and forth with each other, and it was all in good humour. And just every once in a while, but very rarely, we'd give them one meatball—but that's all.

In order to get to know each other better, we'd ask each other questions. The most common question we asked each other was, "What are you?" For example, one kid in my class might ask me, "What are you?" And I would say, "I'm Italian. What are you?" They would say what they were, and we'd always be respectful, and we appreciated each other.

And we loved our school. We loved our school, and we loved our teachers, and we respected our teachers, because our parents expected it. And we had great teachers, because we thought we went to the best school in the world. We had Mr. Hernandez, who taught us grade 8. He was of Mexican background. We had Miss Bond, who taught us how to sing. We had Mr. Parrot, who I adored, because he taught politics with me in grade 5.

And we had something called industrial arts; that was the more technical word for shop class. When we went to shop class, we lined up in lines. The girls lined up in one line, and the boys lined up in a separate line. The girls walked to home economics class, and the boys walked to shop class, because back then we had division of labour based on gender. Our shop teacher was Mr. Grodzinski, and Mr. Grodzinski—

Mrs. Robin Martin: Was not Italian.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: —was not Italian, even though his name ended with a vowel. He was stern and strict, and he had a big black moustache.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I feel like I'm getting a bedtime story here.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: Close to it.

When we went to shop class, it was sometimes dangerous because we had machines and moving machines in shop class. For example, we had a lathe. A lathe is a machine that holds an object, usually a piece of wood, and turns the object at great speed. Then you use another object to shape that wood. We had, for example, a band saw, which is a saw that turns a blade on a wheel, and you have to use a tool to push the wood to cut the wood. You have to be very careful because you don't want to get a piece of clothing caught in the band saw and hurt yourself.

So Mr. Grodzinski was stern and strict, and he had to be because we were in an environment which was dangerous, or could be dangerous, if you weren't careful. In shop class, we learned how to be very safe, because we had to be. We did things, and we all felt proud of what we were doing. There was nobody in shop class who felt bored. We all felt proud. We loved shop class because we were working on machines and we were doing things that our fathers did, and it made us feel like we were growing up into adults and becoming responsible.

Now, that was a very simple introduction to the skilled trades. And even though it was simple, it was important. Many of us graduated from Anderdon Public School and we went on to do skilled trades at high school. Many of us went to a specialized high school—it was called Western Secondary School—where it concentrated on skilled trades. That school was strictly committed to skilled trades.

Some kids from Anderdon Public School became very successful at the skilled trades. For example, one of those kids was Norbert Bolger. Norbert graduated out of Anderdon Public School. He started building homes because he was a skilled tradesperson. His business got bigger and bigger. He started building more and more homes. Now, across Essex county, there are hundreds of homes that have been built or are being built by Norbert's company, called Nor-Built Construction. Norbert and his company Nor-Built Construction are a success story that got their start—

Mr. John Yakabuski: At Anderdon?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: —at Anderdon Public School.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Well, I tell you, that is something.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: Terry Jones was another student at Anderdon Public School. Terry graduated and he went to Western Secondary School. After graduating from there, he started a demolition company. He had the best slogan in the business: "Demolition is progress." He was so successful, he branched into construction, and he is also a very successful entrepreneur. He started in the skilled trades, and now hundreds of projects across Essex county bear the stamp of his successful work. Again, he got his start at Anderdon Public School.

So, Madam Speaker, let's talk about how this government is going to get young people into the skilled trades, to join the fabulously successful people like Norbert Bolger and Terry Jones. Madame la Présidente, parlons de la façon dont ce gouvernement va redonner aux jeunes les métiers spécialisés pour qu'ils se joignent à des gens de métier prospères comme M. Bolger et M. Jones.

Les métiers spécialisés offrent des carrières qui mènent à des emplois sûrs et à une bonne qualité de vie qui s'accompagne souvent d'avantages sociaux et d'une pension. Il y a près de 300 000 emplois vacants en Ontario. Ce sont des chèques de paie qui attendent d'être encaissés.

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Bon nombre de ces emplois sont dans les métiers spécialisés. Nous avons besoin de milliers de travailleurs dans les métiers spécialisés pour aider à construire plus de maisons et à réaliser d'importants projets d'infrastructure partout dans notre province.

Nous devons construire des maisons pour faire face au manque de maisons. Nous devons augmenter l'offre pour faire baisser le prix des maisons. Nous devons construire des maisons pour les quelque deux millions de nouveaux Canadiens qui arriveront en Ontario au cours des 15 prochaines années.

Au sujet des nouveaux arrivants, notre gouvernement est fier que l'Ontario soit une destination pour de nombreux nouveaux arrivants qui sont venus au Canada à la recherche de meilleures possibilités économiques pour eux-mêmes et leurs familles.

Afin de créer une voie claire leur permettant d'appliquer pleinement leurs compétences, le gouvernement de l'Ontario a l'intention de proposer des changements qui vont aider à éliminer des obstacles empêchant les nouveaux arrivants d'obtenir un permis et de trouver des emplois correspondant à leurs qualifications et compétences. Il faut d'habitude de deux à cinq années pour obtenir un certificat de métier.

It usually takes two to five years to complete your apprenticeship and get a certificate in the skilled trades. On average, a person entering an apprenticeship program in Ontario is 29 years old. Do you know what that means? What it means is they started doing something else, and then they had to change. We can't let people do that if we want to fulfill the needs that we have today. We can't let people lose years of valuable earning potential. We can't let people lose years of applying their skills to build the needed houses and infrastructure here in the province of Ontario. We need those skills, and that's why we need to

get people started earlier—earlier than 29 years old. We need to start them in high school.

As the minister has announced, starting this fall, students in grade 11 can start a full-time apprenticeship program and also, when they complete their program, earn their Ontario secondary school diploma, their OSSD, as an adult student. That means we're going to get people into the skilled trades faster than ever. That also means that the same young person who graduates with their certificate of apprenticeship will have a job waiting for them the day they have their certificate. They will walk into a full-time career the day they graduate. They will be debt-free, looking forward to a great career of earning potential right from day one, because, as we say, when you have a skilled trade, you have a job for life. Then, after finishing their training, they receive a certificate and they'll have their OSSD as an adult. This is how we're going to get young people into the skilled trades and get them in there faster. This is how we're going to deal with the province's historic demand for skilled trades workers. This is how we're going to get it done.

And that brings me back to Anderdon Public School and Mr. Grodzinski.

One day we were finishing shop class and the boys lined up and started filing out of shop class, and I happened to be the last boy in line. I kind of hung behind and as I was passing Mr. Grodzinski, I remembered that his name ended with a vowel, but it wasn't Italian. So I screwed up my courage and I asked Mr. Grodzinski, "Mr. Grodzinski, what are you?" And Mr. Grodzinski looked at me with his stern face and his big black moustache, and he said to me that his family had originally come from Ireland and that his family name was originally O'Grodzinski, and that when they arrived here in Canada, they had dropped the "O" and changed their name simply to Grodzinski. And I thought about that, and I knew Italian families who had come here and changed the spelling of their name to make it easier or they had Anglicized their name to make it sound perhaps less Italian. The story that Mr. Grodzinski told me seemed perfectly reasonable, rational and believable, and I believed it.

I believed it until one day I talked to my friend Alex Augustyniak. Alex knew I was Italian. We were in the same grade, and we went to Anderdon Public School. I knew Alex was Polish, and I knew there were lots of Italians at Anderdon Public School, but I didn't know any other Polish kids. So I asked Alex, "Alex, are there any other Polish people here at Anderdon Public School?" Alex said, "Yes, Mr. Grodzinski," and I thought about that.

Madam Speaker, I learned three important things that day. First of all, I learned that, in fact, Grodzinski is not an Irish name; it is actually a Polish name. The second thing I learned was that although Mr. Grodzinski had a very stern exterior with a big black moustache, underneath that, he had a very good sense of humour. And the third thing I learned was an even increased respect for people in the skilled trades.

As I was saying, in my riding of Essex there is a huge demand for skilled trades. We have a demand in my riding for skilled trades in just about every sector. We have a demand for skilled trades in the agricultural sector, in the construction sector, in the automotive sector—there is no sector where we don't need more skilled tradespeople. We need them in every industry in Essex county.

So Madam Speaker, I'm going to thank the Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development again for this excellent bill, which I believe is going to help fulfill the need for skilled tradespeople in Essex county and put young people in grade 11 on the path to a great career—a meaningful career where they're going to have a great standard of living. With this legislation, we're going to start filling not only the needs of Essex county but also the needs of all the province of Ontario, and it will be my pleasure to vote in favour of it and hope that it will pass.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Questions?

MPP Lise Vaugeois: I want to return to something that the member from Mississauga–Lakeshore said. He gave a very poignant story about his family's experience with waiting for 12 years to actually get something from WSIB that they deserved to get. But he suggested that things are better, and in fact, things are quite a bit worse than they were at that time and people wait for years with no income supports whatsoever.

So there are a couple of things I want to raise. I worry a lot about the number of young people who are going to move into the skilled trades. I think it's a great idea, but what's going to be there when they are injured? The WSIB is not there for people.

I also want to point out that WSIB—speaking of getting worse and worse—really stole money from injured workers by refusing to give the correct amount for the cost-of-living allowance. The result is that the Ontario Network of Injured Workers Groups has had to take them to court to try and get money that is owed to them.

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But I want to ask the member—thank you for your journey down memory lane. I've wondered if I need to say, "Oh, I'm Italian too." But I'm wondering if you have read the Platform for Change, which is put together by the Thunder Bay and District Injured Workers' Support Group. It's a brilliant document.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: I thank the member for that question, and I thank the member for recognizing the awesome career development that will take place as a result of the progress made by the Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development towards getting young people into the skilled trades at an early age. Getting them into the trades at an early age is going to benefit them, because it's going to increase their earning potential massively, and it's going to get those people into the skilled trades so that we can use their talents to build this province into a greater and better province. And of course, we have a robust WSIB system that's already in

place, and people who are injured can have access to that system. That's what it's there for.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): The member from Peterborough–Kawartha.

Mr. Dave Smith: I listened intently to the speech from the member opposite. As he was talking about some of the stuff in the skilled trades, it made me think back to just last week. I had a presentation from some university students who actually said that we should stop investing in skilled trades and invest more money in the humanities, because we are going to see all of those skilled trades replaced by artificial intelligence. I was a little bit confused by their comments at first, but I understand that usually university students think in terms of what they're taking for courses.

I'd like the member from Essex to expand a little bit on how the skilled trades are actually integral to our Critical Minerals Strategy and how as we develop more of these mines we're actually going to need those construction workers, those skilled trades workers to build those mines and build the roads to it.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: I thank the member from Peterborough–Kawartha for that question. I also thank him for the good advice that I've received since I've been elected, in June of 2022. He's been very helpful to me.

With respect to his question, skilled trades—I talked about Essex county, but it could apply to the mining industry. We have a mine in my area. It's called the Windsor Salt mine, and just about everybody in that salt mine has a skilled trade. Think about it: You would need maintenance workers, heavy equipment operators, people who know how to operate a drill, people who know how to read the instruments. So I thank the member for that question, and it was right on point.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Question?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: The member hails from a beautiful part of Ontario, but there's a lot of need to focus on safer workplaces and supports for migrant workers in his neck of the woods. So when we look at some of the changes made in schedule 1 to this bill, the minister has made some announcements, but beyond the 1-800 number promoted by the minister, I'd like to ask, is the Minister of Labour expecting exploited migrant workers to call in a complaint? How is this information going to be made available to them? Is it going to be in multiple languages? Are these exploited workers going to be further penalized by losing their right to remain? Will many be deported? We have questions about the announcement, and of course, there's not any substance in this bill that we can draw from.

So I guess there's a missed opportunity of committing to more workplace inspections, where they live on site, ensuring that migrant workers are paid at the same rates as other workers, protections from reporting conditions or accessing WSIB without prejudice. I have lots of questions; I'm excited to hear the member's answer.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: With regard to international agricultural workers, the member from Orléans correctly observed that the vast number of employers in that

sector—I'll just call it the agricultural greenhouse sector, but it's greater than that—are good employers. Migrant workers, or international agricultural workers, come back to Ontario, not only year after year, but decade after decade, generation after generation. Their children will come back because the vast majority of people employing in that field treat their workers well, and that's why the workers come back year after year, decade after decade, generation after generation. Also, as the member from Orléans correctly observed, there are a few bad apples in that industry, as there are in every barrel. But just a few.

Those people have access to proper language services not only in Ontario but also through the consulate situated in Leamington.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): The member from Eglinton–Lawrence.

Mrs. Robin Martin: I want to say thank you to the member for Essex for that great presentation. I always enjoy the presentations from the member for Essex. He takes me right to Anderdon county and right to the Anderdon school and it's really interesting to hear his representation of those experiences he had. It was very nice today to actually meet Mr. Grodzinski. We have a Grodzinski's Bakery in our riding, which is very popular, and maybe your former teacher is there.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: Could be related.

Mrs. Robin Martin: I don't know; we could check that out together.

You talked about how Ontario is facing historical labour shortages and how important that is in your area. Can you talk to us a little bit about how this bill is going to help us fill some of those historic labour shortages?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: Awesome. I thank the member for that awesome question because it is also right on point, and I can draw from history on that one, as well.

Back in the 1950s and 1960s, we had a huge wave of migrants entering Canada and they went into the construction industries—many of them were Italian—and those skills were needed desperately. The way this bill assists in our era is it will recognize skills training that people from outside of Canada have received. They've brought those skills here, and now those skills are going to be properly recognized or given credit here in Ontario so they can get right into the industry and do the skilled jobs that they're supposed to do so that we can use those skills to build Ontario, just like they did in the 1950s and 1960s with infrastructure and highways and schools and other great things.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Question?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thanks to the member from Essex. I'm the proud parent of a skilled trade worker, an electrician. It is a long, long journey, and there are barriers for those apprenticeships and in the educational system.

The member from Essex talked with a very romantic flair, I would say, about the shop classroom and the industrial program and his teacher. I'm encouraged to hear Conservatives talk about these classrooms and these educational settings that are needed to encourage folks to

get into the skilled trades. However, two obstacles remain: Premier Harris ripped out some of those classrooms, so we need the infrastructure, and there aren't many Mr. Grodzinskis or Mrs. Grodzinskis as qualified teachers in the province of Ontario. So perhaps the member could address how the government is going to tackle those barriers.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: One of the great ways this government is addressing that is by actually building new schools with shop classes in them, like North Star High School in Amherstburg, Ontario—my hometown, with an awesome high school and an awesome shop class. We're getting it done.

Report continues in volume B.

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Fedeli, Hon. / L'hon. Victor (PC)	Nipissing	Chair of Cabinet / Président du Conseil des ministres Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade / Ministre du Développement économique, de la Création d'emplois et du Commerce
Fife, Catherine (NDP)	Waterloo	
Flack, Rob (PC)	Elgin—Middlesex—London	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Ford, Hon. / L'hon. Doug (PC)	Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord	Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / Ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales Premier / Premier ministre Leader, Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti progressiste-conservateur de l'Ontario
Ford, Hon. / L'hon. Michael D. (PC)	York South—Weston / York-Sud—Weston	Minister of Citizenship and Multiculturalism / Ministre des Affaires civiques et du Multiculturalisme
Fraser, John (LIB)	Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	
French, Jennifer K. (NDP)	Oshawa	
Fullerton, Hon. / L'hon. Merrilee (PC)	Kanata—Carleton	Minister of Children, Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et des Services sociaux et communautaires
Gallagher Murphy, Dawn (PC)	Newmarket—Aurora	
Gates, Wayne (NDP)	Niagara Falls	
Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	
Ghamari, Goldie (PC)	Carleton	
Gill, Hon. / L'hon. Parm (PC)	Milton	Minister of Red Tape Reduction / Ministre de la Réduction des formalités administratives
Glover, Chris (NDP)	Spadina—Fort York	
Gretzky, Lisa (NDP)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjointe de l'opposition officielle
Grewal, Hardeep Singh (PC)	Brampton East / Brampton-Est	
Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Oxford	
Harden, Joel (NDP)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	
Harris, Mike (PC)	Kitchener—Conestoga	
Hogarth, Christine (PC)	Etobicoke—Lakeshore	
Holland, Kevin (PC)	Thunder Bay—Atikokan	
Hsu, Ted (LIB)	Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les Îles	
Hunter, Mitzie (LIB)	Scarborough—Guildwood	
Jones, Hon. / L'hon. Sylvia (PC)	Dufferin—Caledon	Deputy Premier / Vice-première ministre Minister of Health / Ministre de la Santé
Jones, Trevor (PC)	Chatham-Kent—Leamington	
Jordan, John (PC)	Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston	
Kanapathi, Logan (PC)	Markham—Thornhill	
Karpoche, Bhutla (NDP)	Parkdale—High Park	First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Première vice-présidente du comité plénier de l'Assemblée
Ke, Vincent (IND)	Don Valley North / Don Valley-Nord	
Kernaghan, Terence (NDP)	London North Centre / London-Centre-Nord	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Kerzner, Hon. / L'hon. Michael S. (PC)	York Centre / York-Centre	Solicitor General / Solliciteur général
Khanjin, Andrea (PC)	Barrie—Innisfil	Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjointe du gouvernement
Kusendova-Bashta, Natalia (PC)	Mississauga Centre / Mississauga-Centre	
Leardi, Anthony (PC)	Essex	
Lecce, Hon. / L'hon. Stephen (PC)	King—Vaughan	Minister of Education / Ministre de l'Éducation
Lindo, Laura Mae (NDP)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	
Lumsden, Hon. / L'hon. Neil (PC)	Hamilton East—Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est—Stoney Creek	Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport / Ministre du Tourisme, de la Culture et du Sport
MacLeod, Lisa (PC)	Nepean	
Mamakwa, Sol (NDP)	Kiiwetinoong	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Mantha, Michael (NDP)	Algoma—Manitoulin	
Martin, Robin (PC)	Eglinton—Lawrence	
McCarthy, Todd J. (PC)	Durham	
McGregor, Graham (PC)	Brampton North / Brampton-Nord	
McMahon, Mary-Margaret (LIB)	Beaches—East York / Beaches—East York	
McNaughton, Hon. / L'hon. Monte (PC)	Lambton—Kent—Middlesex	Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development / Ministre du Travail, de l'Immigration, de la Formation et du Développement des compétences
Mulroney, Hon. / L'hon. Caroline (PC)	York—Simcoe	Minister of Francophone Affairs / Ministre des Affaires francophones Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Oosterhoff, Sam (PC)	Niagara West / Niagara-Ouest	
Pang, Billy (PC)	Markham—Unionville	
Parsa, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (PC)	Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill	Associate Minister of Housing / Ministre associé du Logement
Pasma, Chandra (NDP)	Ottawa West—Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest—Nepean	
Piccini, Hon. / L'hon. David (PC)	Northumberland—Peterborough South / Northumberland—Peterborough-Sud	Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks / Ministre de l'Environnement, de la Protection de la nature et des Parcs
Pierre, Natalie (PC)	Burlington	
Pirie, Hon. / L'hon. George (PC)	Timmins	Minister of Mines / Ministre des Mines
Quinn, Nolan (PC)	Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry	
Rae, Matthew (PC)	Perth—Wellington	
Rakocevic, Tom (NDP)	Humber River—Black Creek	
Rasheed, Hon. / L'hon. Kaleed (PC)	Mississauga East—Cooksville / Mississauga-Est—Cooksville	Minister of Public and Business Service Delivery / Ministre des Services au public et aux entreprises
Rickford, Hon. / L'hon. Greg (PC)	Kenora—Rainy River	Minister of Indigenous Affairs / Ministre des Affaires autochtones Minister of Northern Development / Ministre du Développement du Nord
Riddell, Brian (PC)	Cambridge	
Romano, Ross (PC)	Sault Ste. Marie	
Sabawy, Sheref (PC)	Mississauga—Erin Mills	
Sandhu, Amarjot (PC)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Sarkaria, Hon. / L'hon. Prabmeet Singh (PC)	Brampton South / Brampton-Sud	President of the Treasury Board / Président du Conseil du Trésor
Sarrazin, Stéphane (PC)	Glengarry—Prescott—Russell	
Sattler, Peggy (NDP)	London West / London-Ouest	
Saunderson, Brian (PC)	Simcoe—Grey	
Schreiner, Mike (GRN)	Guelph	
Scott, Laurie (PC)	Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock	
Shamji, Adil (LIB)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	
Shaw, Sandy (NDP)	Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas / Hamilton-Ouest—Ancaster—Dundas	
Skelly, Donna (PC)	Flamborough—Glanbrook	Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Vice-présidente et présidente du comité plénier de l'Assemblée Deputy Speaker / Vice-présidente
Smith, Dave (PC)	Peterborough—Kawartha	
Smith, David (PC)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	
Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Graydon (PC)	Parry Sound—Muskoka	Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry / Ministre des Richesses naturelles et des Forêts
Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Todd (PC)	Bay of Quinte / Baie de Quinte	Minister of Energy / Ministre de l'Énergie
Smith, Laura (PC)	Thornhill	
Stevens, Jennifer (Jennie) (NDP)	St. Catharines	
Stiles, Marit (NDP)	Davenport	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau parti démocratique de l'Ontario
Surma, Hon. / L'hon. Kinga (PC)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	Minister of Infrastructure / Ministre de l'Infrastructure
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto—Danforth	
Tangri, Nina (PC)	Mississauga—Streetsville	
Taylor, Monique (NDP)	Hamilton Mountain / Hamilton-Mountain	
Thanigasalam, Vijay (PC)	Scarborough—Rouge Park	
Thompson, Hon. / L'hon. Lisa M. (PC)	Huron—Bruce	Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / Ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales
Tibollo, Hon. / L'hon. Michael A. (PC)	Vaughan—Woodbridge	Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions / Ministre associé délégué au dossier de la Santé mentale et de la Lutte contre les dépendances
Triantafilopoulos, Effie J. (PC)	Oakville North—Burlington / Oakville-Nord—Burlington	
Vanthof, John (NDP)	Timiskaming—Cochrane	Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle
Vaugeois, Lise (NDP)	Thunder Bay—Superior North / Thunder Bay—Supérieur-Nord	
Wai, Daisy (PC)	Richmond Hill	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
West, Jamie (NDP)	Sudbury	
Williams, Hon. / L'hon. Charmaine A. (PC)	Brampton Centre / Brampton-Centre	Associate Minister of Women's Social and Economic Opportunity / Ministre associée des Perspectives sociales et économiques pour les femmes
Wong-Tam, Kristyn (NDP)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	
Yakabuski, John (PC)	Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke	
Vacant	Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	